

## Reflection Paper #1

My Big Fat Greek Wedding is a comedic love story that showcases the challenges and learning opportunities an intercultural couple face when love binds them. The two main characters, Toula and Ian, grew up within the frame of two opposite family structures.



Toula's family migrated to the United States to give their family a better life. With them, they brought their Greek heritage, which includes a concept of family structure called extended family. For Toula, her family included her parents, siblings, grandmother, aunts, uncles and her 27 first cousins. It was evident the respect her family had for the elderly. Her grandmother is loved and respected regardless of her hallucinations and awkward behavior.

Ian, an only child, grew up within the framework of a nuclear family. Family to him only included his parents. His father is a lawyer.

While Ian lives alone in his own apartment, Toula lived in her parent's house with her younger brother.

Gender roles are part of a culture's understanding of how things should work. Toula summarized hers on her opening monologue: "Nice Greek Girls are supposed

to do three things in life: marry Greek boys, make Greek babies, and feed everyone, until the day we die."

She was expected to marry at an early age, "here I am at thirty and way passed my expiration date," she said. She was not married; therefore, she had to work for her father at the family business. Since she was a little girl she felt different and wanted to fit in with the other girls. Somehow she felt that her family's strong Greek customs were preventing her from belonging. Due to the Greek's cultural definition of the woman's role, her father didn't approve of her getting higher education. In his mind a woman didn't need higher education to raise a family.

Helped by her mother's intervention, Toula gets his father's authorization to go to college. That step unraveled a series of changes in Toula, not only her appearance improved, but also her mood and attitude toward life changed. She blossomed into a beautiful happy woman.

When Toula met Ian and started dating him, she had to lie at home about her activities because she knew he was not going to be accepted in his family; he was not a Greek boy. Since her family was always in each other's business, they found out about Toula's boyfriend and she was confronted by her cousin Nikki and scolded by her parents. When Ian went to talk to her father, Ian could not understand why he had to ask permission to

date Toula; in his individualistic upbringing, adults don't need their parents blessing to date.

When preparing the wedding, Toula and Ian, had little to say. From the invitations to the wedding dress, Toula's family took over and made decisions without consulting with them. The opposite happened with Ian's family, when they tried to collaborate with the reception ball, they were told that it was already decided and they did not offer any other input. They gave Ian his space and respected his decisions; they didn't even object his conversion to Greek Orthodox.



I think the individualistic upbringing of Ian gave him freedom to act and make decisions. He was a successful individual contempt with his life. Even though, he describes his life as boring before meeting Toula.

In the other hand, because of her collectivist upbringing, Toula felt that she had to please

everybody, and felt guilty of her happiness because it was causing grief to her father.

An individualistic society promotes the freedom of an individual to make his or her own choices along with facing their consequences. In a collectivist society, everybody has input, but at the same time everybody supports each other when things go wrong.

I was born and raised in Guatemala and moved to Miami, Florida when I was 25 years old. My concept of family is definitely extended. I consider my cousins my brothers and sisters. Like Toula, I have 35 cousins, only from my father's. We all used to go every Sunday to my grandmother's house and have lunch there. She had 9 children and 39 grandchildren and was the core of our family. We didn't invite friends to any of our celebrations: birthdays, weddings, Christmas. The family was more than enough to fill out the place.

When I was 6 years old, my father had a motorcycle accident and was in comma for 33 days and we had to move-in to my aunt's house. My uncle and my aunt had 4 children. In a two-bedroom house, 4 adults and 6 children survived for more than 2 years. Unfortunately, last year my brother lost his house. I received my brother, sister-in-law, niece and three nephews in my one-bedroom apartment for a couple of weeks until they were able to rent a house. That was a lesson I learned from my family: we have to be there for each other. It is very comforting to know that in good times and in bad times I have them there for me.

The one thing that bothers me about a collectivist family is that everybody is in everybody's business and offer unsolicited advise. I am 43 years old and never married, I hate when my aunts and uncles asked me, "When are you going to get married?" the only thing they hadn't say is "you look so old!"