



Fatherhood and Family from a Greek perspective (Greek Fathers: Gender, Culture and Sexuality)

Most Greek men live in families with a mother and a father and children. Many of them claim their journey into fatherhood has been a pleasant experience.

Even when fatherhood experience is pleasant, ancient Greek men have always been proud of their families and city-state! Many have always been proud of their status as heads of families. Despite family responsibilities, ancient Greek men are great thinkers too. They love beauty, music, literature, art, philosophy, politics, sports and drama. Greek men are great builders and military strategies. They love to talk about their families and their achievement to others. They share a strong heritage among family members (Lin & Donn, 2008).

Men in Ancient Greek families ran the government and family. Even when they run the family, Greek men love to honor their gods with members of their families. Unlike other cultures, Greek men usually get married when they are twenty-five or thirty years old. They usually receive dowry from the women's parents (Encyclo central, 2008). Studies on gender and sexuality of men in ancient civilizations have remained less accessible to modern scholars and researchers. This is why comparative assessment dealing with Greek men's participation in parenthood and especially with their responsibilities for child-rearing has remained limited for contemporary analysis. The vast majority of classical studies and ancient history describes Greek fathers as primary enforcers of human family. As primary enforcer, Greek men make great contribution to family life and activity, especially when it comes to the care of wives and their young. On one hand, Greek culture is fond of children. They consider children to be "youths" until they reached the age of 30. For some Western cultures, the prime of youthfulness is considered at the age of 18. Some cultures places consideration at 20 or 25 depending on traditional agreement or policy affirmation. Like other conservative cultures, the sex of a child is significant to Greek men. The birth of a child is accompanied by some ritual significance. The father carries his child in a ritual dance around the household where friends and relatives sent significant gifts. When family decorates the doorway of the home with a wreath of olives it signifies that a baby boy is born. And when a wreath of wool is placed on the door way, it signifies a baby girl is born. This cultural phenomenon is practiced in Hebrew tradition as a form of demonstrating the gender of the newborn. But in the last few years, studies have moved beyond the model of men as active creator and enforcers of patriarchy to the topic of "homosexuality" in an attempt to decipher what being a father meant in Greek or Roman society (Eckhart, 2002).



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Today, being a father in Greek society includes running the government and spending a great deal of time at home and away from home. Greek men love drinking. They love to have fun and merry all night. They love to go to parties. When they are not involved with politics, they are drinking or watching drama in the theatre or the capitol. At leisure time, Greek men enjoy wrestling, horseback riding, and the famous Olympic Games. When they are not at home, they are spending time in the fields, overseeing or working the crops, sailing, and hunting, in manufacturing or trading. Being a father in ancient Greek culture was both similar to and different from being a man of today. This comparison makes euphemism dominate work on culture, gender and sexuality within primitive and classical world. Fatherhood in classical Greek culture were not held to the same economic standards as men of today. Men of today are into lots of business transactions and financial engagement that takes them out from home. Failure to make this comparison is inexcusable ignorance in family matters. The reason is because Greek fathers are seen as center of history. When we say that men are subject of Greek family and history, we ignore a good number of men and women and children who are part of the Greek society whose history I intend to contemplate in this reflection. In Greek culture, men are called the figure head at home. Eckhart writes that the traditional history of Greek culture has been primarily written by men about the social institutions and interactions in which men are primary actors. Having a father is part of what defines and maintains Greek families and tradition.

This definition is in relation to other categories of people such as women, children and slaves. Besides emotional cutoff or the dysfunction surrounding family interaction, majority of Greek men value fatherhood as a pleasant experience. Majority of them perceive fatherhood as a period when they show feelings of love, tenderness, and care for children. Fatherhood is a period when men receive affection in return from family members. Summarily, becoming a father is identical to being able to confirm to one's masculine nature and roles in his own family formed by marriage or family of origin. Becoming a Greek husband is about becoming a "real man" or an adult. The primary task of becoming an adult, as Fulmer (1999) puts it, is to leave home but stay connected to one's family of origin. Despite incipient signs of stability and family union common to most Greek families, divorce was pretty common. Divorce in Greek culture is nasty. Stupor and drunkenness make divorce nasty for Greek women. Infidelity arises when Greek men entertains themselves at parties while they exclude their wives and daughters. This act subjects women to experience the worst form of humiliation and suffering. And when women are divorced men had to return dowry, so that they could have some money to live upon. During



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such transition period, children stays with their father, learning to run the farm or business they would inherit (see, Ancient Greek family, 2008). Female children may decide to stay with their mother, a tradition common to African and American cultures.

The impact of divorce in Greek society usually affects female children and causes them to “break ties” and become autonomous and sometimes rely on families for tangible and emotional support as they prepare for work and attachments outside the family (Goldenberg et al, 2004). Greek and Jewish cultures are celebrative societies. Families in these two cultures celebrate life, relationship and wedding (My Greek fat Wedding) in an elaborate manner. For the Greek American families, the period of socialization from the bar or bat mitzvah signifies an adolescent’s transition into adulthood, reflecting the high value placed on continued intellectual development (Hines, Garcia-Preto, McGoldrick, Almeida, & Weltman, 1999). This period too is conventionally called the period of adolescence alcoholic abuse. Nowinski (1990) discusses factors contributing to adolescent substance abuse, including: the adolescent personality (taking risks, living in the present, rebelliousness); peer pressure (difficulty deviating from the adolescent substance-using subculture). Most Greek household had slaves. Female slaves worked, cleared and cultivated in the fields. Male slaves watched the door, to make sure no one come in when the man of the house is out. They serve as security forces as was evident with soldiers in termite colony. Greek families lack the characteristics of a genuine kinship foster care in which a child is placed with relatives.

Kinship care is especially prevalent in communities of color and in most instances; kinship foster parents are grandparents or great aunt, or uncles (Hollingsworth, 1998). Greek men do not love their children to be placed in foster homes for adoption even when they are incapable of parental care as a result of stupor. Family scholars have raised considerable concern about the lack of attention to the role the father plays in kingship care. Lack of attention results in burden of caring for young and often disturbed grandchildren have placed many grandparents under considerable stress, especially given their advanced age; some have developed stress-related health problems (Beaucar, 1999; Whitley et al 1999). The overall consequences on Greek family are that children would be deeply affected by family life. They would be impacted emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, cognitively, socially and developmentally. When this happens most Greek men experience mental health problems including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, behavioral disorders, attention deficit disorder as well as developmental disabilities. All these disorders would affect any Greek man in becoming a good father to his wife and children.



Despite these familial values, the three significant heritages the Greeks have offered family and modern society is politics, democracy and Olympic Games. These three values have brought different cultures together. It has united families and nations in one global village.

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