

CARE, CONFLICT AND FALLIAL PITEY: UNPACKING GREIF AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN MOVIE “HOW TO MAKE MILLIONS BEFORE GRANDMA DIES”

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Abstract: *In the era where contemporary cinema often prioritizes spectacle, instant gratification and fragmented gratification, “How to make million before grandma dies (2024)” offers a rare, emotionally grounded delineation of intergenerational relationship, cultural responsibility and filial piety. This paper explores the various psychological experiences of the characters through various psychological theories that unpack the movies exploration of grief, greed, attachment, family trauma within a Southeast Asian collectivist context. The film treatise the emotionally distant familial structures and repositions the caregiving as a path for bandaging the bonds and relational healing and moral growth. Through its subtle narrative and culturally embedded values in the story, it made it more relevant to the generation often caught between the individualism and the inherited expectations’ the analysis shows the emotional shifts, the depth of the bonds and the emotional awakening through anticipatory grief.*

Key Words: *Greif, Loss, filial piety, intergenerational family psychology.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

In recent years, psychological narratives in cinema have shifted toward introspective storytelling that interrogates the complexities of human emotion, family dynamics, and moral development. *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies* (2024) is one such film that moves beyond material ambition to examine the emotional undercurrents of caregiving, cultural obligation, and the silent transmission of psychological wounds across generations. It explores these themes through three core psychological constructs—care, filial piety, and intergenerational family trauma—framed within the broader context of grief and attachment theory. Interpersonal care and familial responsibility continue to serve as foundational aspects of psychological development within collectivist societies, particularly in the context of elder caregiving.

While care has traditionally been examined as a physical or economic act, emerging psychological frameworks emphasize its emotional and relational dimensions—namely, empathy, attentiveness, and the willingness to remain present with a dependent other [1]. Care as devised by Noddings (1984), is not only solely offering physical support, it also entails relational presence, emotional accountability, and moral attention to others' needs [2]. The psychological relevance of caring leads to emotional engagement, as prosocial moral development and attachment relationships can be strengthened by such care dynamics [1].

Filial piety, as in many Asian cultures, it refers to virtue of respect to ones parents and ancestors, an embedded sense of moral obligation towards elders. From a psychological standpoint, it represents both internalized relationship ideals and normative societal expectations that impact caregiving behaviour and emotional expression. A transition from Kohlberg's (1958) pre-conventional moral reasoning to a more post-conventional, empathy-based framework highlighted, shows how the cultural weight of filial responsibility meets with the emotional growth [3] [4].

Rooted in the family system, **intergenerational trauma**, emphasize how unresolved emotional pain can be transmitted through implicit behaviours, emotional cut-offs, or dysfunctional roles [5] [6]. It happens when traumatizing events, including violence, oppression, or severe loss, affect not just the immediate victims but also their offspring [7]

[8]. This idea emphasises how family experiences are interrelated and shows how unresolved trauma may have long-lasting effects on both individual and family dynamics [9].

As these themes are deeply intertwined in family, especially in collectivist culture, Act of care when offered voluntarily with empathy can foster secure attachment and can lead to bonds healing [2] [10]. However when care is dominated by cultural norms like filial piety, the expectations can lead to internal conflicts, especially among younger generations juggling responsibility and autonomy [3] [4]. This conflict can often reveal intergenerational trauma, where the unresolved emotional wounds, parental authoritarianism, emotional disengagement and negligence are unconsciously passed on to the next generations. This dynamic interaction can make grounds for emotional distancing contributing to the guilt and, affecting the psychological wellbeing of the individual [5] [6] [9].

How to make millions before grandma dies movie review

Cinema has been serving as a mirror since long reflecting complex human emotions, cultural narrative and relationships and experiences. *How to Make Million Before Grandma Dies* (2024), directed by Pat Boonitipat, provides an intricately compelling depiction of loss, kinship responsibilities, and the generational transfer of pain within Thai society.

This heartfelt film takes a simple yet profound approach to storytelling, avoiding excessive melodrama and instead drawing emotional weight from the smallest, most intimate details—buttons, kettles, and pomegranates wrapped in plastic bags—each carrying deep symbolic meaning. At its core movie explores the themes of caring, ageing, familial bonds and gender dynamics through the life of central characters, Grandma (Usha Seamkhum) — warmly called Amah, who is diagnosed with last-stage colon cancer. Her grandson M (Putthipong Assaratanakul), who sees this as a financial opportunity initially, ready to leave his career as gaming streamer to take care of grandma to secure the family inheritance and M's mother (Sarinrat Thomas), who carries the weight of intergenerational trauma and dwells in the emotional gap between her mother and her son.

M character begins as a self-cantered, lazy and college dropout young adult, who was driven primarily by the possibility of financial gain. He was initially interested in gaming and streaming but starts taking care of his grandma as he learned about her illness in order take the assets and wealth as inheritance and not out of love as he sees his cousin Mui got her grandfather's entire estate overnight just by being a primary caregiver. Spending time with grandma doing small, intimate tasks—preparing meals, helping her walk, attending doctor visits, he begins to witness her physical decline and emotional solitude. Her suffering slowly transforms him. Over time, M's motives shift from monetary gain to emotional presence as he starts to grieve. He experience emotional awareness that manifest in the moments of empathy, frustration and eventual affection. Earlier, he was attentive, learning how to take care for her- bathing her, cooking, helping her walk- these small acts grew from obligations of filial piety into genuine affection. A key moment occurred when Amah gives M a necklace she had kept since his childhood- a gesture that bring him to his lineage and affirm his belonging. The bond they developed and the quite wisdom reformed his values, leading to emotional awakening seen in the final moment.

Grandma, portrayed as stoic, dignified, reserved and values discipline. Despite her illness, she lives alone. Except from her daughter, all are too occupied in their life to attend to their mother's medical needs. Initially when M regards and care her, she became suspicious of his ultimate motive. Her interaction with him by the time like offering food, accepting help and gradually opening her private space to him illustrate her unsaid longing for connection and care and indicates growing trust. Her presence carries the emotional weight of unhealed familial bonds, particularly with her daughter (M's mother), with whom she shares a tense and unspoken history. Forming a deep, unspoken bond with M, she becomes the emotional anchor of the family allowing others to reconcile the unresolved tensions and regret. She has one lifelong dream- to be buried on a big plot when she dies.

M's mothers is emotionally distant from both her son and her mother, she implies duty over affection. She represents the “in-between” generation—caught between the emotional stoicism of her mother and the modern individualism of her son. This distance becomes understandable as her upbringing was strict and emotionally reserved parents likely contributed to unresolved resentment and emotional suppression. Initially she was frustrated with M's decision of taking care of her mother, reflecting tension between her generational duties and emotional burden. As she sees the growing attachment of M to Amah, her emotional response remains subtle, but she was present. Her story reveals how intergenerational trauma reflects as emotional cut-off and limited affection. She supports her son materially but lacks emotional attunement. She was distant yet affected by her mother's death and observing the possibility of emotional healing through her son's transformation in the final scene.

As amah's health decline, M begins to experience anticipatory grief, his caregiving transform into emotional repair not just for him but for the fractured family relations. After her death, his tears not only depict the pain of loss,

but also the guilt and the depth of the connection he felt. Importantly, Amah leaves no material inheritance—only memories, humility, and emotional closure, challenging the assumption that familial value is measured in wealth.

This film subtly critiques how cultural expectations around filial piety and success can obscure emotional truth. It illustrates how healing possible when caregiving becomes a relational, rather than transactional, act. Through its restrained storytelling, it emphasizes that care and vulnerability, though rarely spoken in such families, can serve as powerful tools for healing and transformation.

2. METHOD

Aim: To examine how the movie ‘How to make million before grandma dies’ represents the psychological struggles of grief, guilt and familial duty in the context of cultural expectation and filial piety.

Procedure: To conduct this review, the researcher engaged completely with the movie ‘How to make million before grandma dies’. Gained the comprehensive understanding of its narrative, character trajectories, and psychological themes underlying the movie by watching it multiple times. Individual stories of the character and their behavior and salient scenes were analysed through various psychological theories.

3. DISCUSSION

How to make million before grandma dies offers more than a narrative familial caregiving; it presents a poignant psychological exploration of grief, familial obligation, emotional growth, and transgenerational impact of trauma. It presents a profound reflection on identity formation and emotional reconciliation within in the structure of Asian family life. The film explores how deeply embedded cultural norms— particularly those surrounding the filial piety and emotional restraint— shape individual development and family dynamics, through the evolving relationship between M, his grandmother (Amah) and his mother. Through the evolving relationship dynamics, the film illustrates how practical and emotional crucible caregiving is for healing and identity formation. Fundamentally, the movie explores the tension between culturally conditioned expectations and emotional honesty, exposing the psychological toll of the wordless love, transactional caring, and represses sadness.

At the heart of the film is M’s emotional evolution. Initially driven by material gain and act of self- interest, however, over time, caregiving transform into an emotionally reparative act that reshapes his identity and capacity for intimacy. Throughout the film, this developmental trajectory aligns with the Erikson’s stage of psychosocial development, particularly the transition between identity vs. role confusion and intimacy vs. isolation [11]. M is characterized by lack of direction, low self-awareness and emotional maturity. His self-cantered decision to take care of grandma reflects a lack of moral identity as well as role uncertainty. But as he progressively takes on greater responsibility, he grows in emotional sensitivity and empathy, evolving into a more complete person. His sincere and emotional ultimate grieving response shows how intimacy and successfully resolved such that real connection triumphs over financial gain. In the end M realizes that her grandmother had already made him a millionaire by preserving her money throughout her lifetime rather than after her death, as he had thought.

Amah’s character serves the unresolved emotional toll of intergenerational trauma and cultural stoicism. Her endurance of pain, resistance to affection, and emotionally distant parenting of M’s mother can be interpreted through Bowen’s family system theory [5], where anxiety, unresolved relational tension and emotional cut off became inherited within the family system, where care is expressed through action and not emotion. Her complex relation with M’s mother indicates unresolved grief, and parental invalidation from previous life stages, which are demonstrated by the mother’s own emotionally restrained parenting style. It is characterized by bitterness and emotional isolation. Through shared vulnerability and caregiving, M and Amah formed a late-life emotional bond that reflects corrective emotional experience, offering healing for both [12]. Her battle with terminal illness reflection on life also resonates with stage of integrity vs. despair, the final stage of Erikson’s psychosocial theory. As her life draws to a close, she considers her history, moments of fulfilment and faces unresolved regrets [11].

M’s mother, meanwhile, symbolize the middle generation- torn between the demands of her own emotional needs and tradition. Her emotional restraintment and mental distance from both her mother and her son, suggest a history of repressed pain and emotional invalidation. Her response illustrate the cyclic nature of trauma transmission, in which a generation’s lack of parental sensitivity is repeated in the following, resulting in identity uncertainty and breakdown in relationships. Her defensive adjustment to cultural norms on responsibility and obedience, especially in the context of filial piety, is evident in her emotional detachment. More visible in the scene where she adjusts Amah’s oxygen mask without eye contact, signifies long way of unexpressed trauma and emotional distance [5]. Her strained encounters

reveal the emotional burden of such commitment without expression. This perspective is supported by dual filial piety research by [4], although she satisfies utilitarian care requirements, she lacks reciprocal emotional intimacy, maybe as a result of unmet childhood needs.

Additionally, the emotional texture of the movie is strongly influenced by attachment theory [10]. Through the transformation of M, initially showing avoidant traits, detachment, emotional numbing and superficial relational motives and unaware of his own affective needs- This detachment echoed the absence of secure emotional modelling during childhood, especially from his emotionally aloof mother, who frequently says “she is always like this- hard to please”. However M has what might be called corrective emotional experience- a curtail idea in psychodynamic theory- through sustained caregiving, making space for trust, repair and emotional closeness. His change in perspective emphasizes the therapeutic value of providing care, particularly when it is based on responsive, consistent interaction- two essential components of attachment security. As seen by the reviewer’s moving recollection of their own grandma, the film final moment arouse sentimental nostalgia and introspection. This aligns with the socioemotional selectivity theory [13], which asserts that individual value emotional fulfilling experiences and connections more than financial gain as they become older. A turning point where Amah asks M to brush her hair, marked the shift from instrumental caregiving to affective caregiving, came from his emotional tenderness suppressed in adolescent apathy [10].

The film also offers critiques of cultural scripts of caregiving. In many collectivist societies, familial care is expected as moral duty rather than emotional bond. M’s initial resistance and later transformation challenge this assumption. The movie, however, question this transactional narrative by demonstrating that providing care may only be transformational when it is based on emotional presence rather than duty. The process resonates with Giligan’s Ethics of care, which states that care is based in empathy roots deeper moral development more and relational integrity effectively than dictated by social norms [1].

Grief, as presented in the movie, transcends the conventional stages of loss and takes into the account the maturing functioning of anticipatory grief. M is able to process grief in real time as a result of his experience if witness Amah’s physical decline, a scene where M sits beside her while holding her hands- his dialogue “ I thought I came for wealth, but now I don’t want her to go” epitomizes his mourning before actual loss [14] . Amah’s daughter, on the other hand exhibit disenfranchised grief, mourning that is not publicly recognized due to relational distance or cultural suppression as seen by her inability to articulate her emotions and her unresolved maternal animosity [15]. These many grieving expression show how coping mechanisms and emotional expression are influenced by emotional socialization and family history. The movie shows how unresolved grief may influence regret, detachment, and emotional expression throughout generations.

Finally the film depicts the interplay between psychological development and cultural values. Using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory [16], the direct family interactions (microsystem) enables emotional learning and personal growth are only one factor, other factor include tensions between the generations- conflict between M’s mother and grandmother helps M learning love, care and duty (mesosystem), at (exosystem), forces like cultural scripts surrounding inheritance and caregiving, and macrosystem values like obligation, reputation and emotional expression. The film provides a psychological account of how family relationships impact moral identity and emotional well-being while sensitively exposing conflict between individual emotional fulfilment and collective commitments and obligations.

In conclusion, How to Make Million Before Grandma Dies is not just a portrayal of caregiving but is a multi-layered psychological investigation of the intergenerational transmission of trauma, care and grief. It highlights that healing not only emerges through words and grand gestures, but also through patience, love, humility and courage to be there emotionally in the period of loss. Following the change of young man’s heart, film conveys a universal message; the greatest lasting gift a family can provide is a genuine emotional bond.

4. Future implications

The insights drawn from this analysis have important ramifications for mental health treatment, education, and cultural involvement as well as future studies. Future studies should look more closely at how filial piety, intergenerational trauma, and emotional expression function within various cultural contexts as countries in Asia and beyond struggle with changing family structures and caregiving responsibilities. The knowledge of caregiving experiences contribute to psychological resilience or distress should be examined by longitudinal researches that look at how these experiences affect identity formation, relationship healing, and emotional regulation, particularly in younger generation. Interrogating culturally sensitive frameworks into mental health practice can be beneficial, especially for those who work in collectivist or intergenerational family systems. Counsellors and therapists can help clients deal with guilt related to unfulfilled cultural expectations and conflicting caring obligations. Including family

based intervention can help breaking the transgenerational patterns off emotional suppression, address emotional ruptures and repressed grief [17]. Career training program and educational institutes may also incorporate emotional literacy, empathy-building and communication skills. Younger generations can have a greater understanding of the psychological legacy they bear by engaging in reflective activities centred around family histories, trauma history and emotional responsibility.

5. CONCLUSION

“How to Make Million Before Grandma Dies” is more than a tale of greed and inheritance, it’s a delicate portrayal of grief, caregiving and what it truly means to connect, heal and grow within the context of Asian family dynamics. M’s emotional growth- from self-serving to true attachment illustrates how he uncovers the richness of care, memory and legacy. He declares his love by buying a burial plot for her and officially concedes her as his ‘number one’. Amah’s silence and M’s mother emotional distance highlight the profound repercussions of unresolved tragedy on successive generations. It is a powerful tool for comprehending how families deal with suffering, responsibility, and connection since its characters embody important psychological concepts like emotional detachment, avoidant attachment and filial piety. This story serves us a reminder that in a society where monetary aspirations are frequently the driving force, pursuit of genuine connection- both with oneself and with others- are most fulfilling rewards of all and that empathy and genuine presence creates space for healing and repair of relations.

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