

The Odd Life of Timothy Green - Movie Review

The Odd Life of Timothy Green directed by Peter Hedges and debuted in 2012, opens with our main characters Cindy (played by Jennifer Garner) and Jim Green (played by Joel Edgerton) being informed that it is time for them to stop attempting to have children- because they have reached the end of their fertility treatments.

The Greens have officially been labeled as infertile, this is defined as the inability to conceive children after years of unprotected intercourse, and psychology shows us that infertility often produces anxiety, depression, and stress on relationships. With the Greens residing in a small town of no more than a few thousand residents, the pressure of starting a family is always looming over them. This small town with traditional values would view that bearing children is a sign of a successful and happy marriage, and considered to be vital to the well-being of the community as a whole. It is often expected that the couple will experience moments of pain and jealousy when witnessing their friends or members of their community effortlessly start a family when their own dreams of having a child are all but shattered. A study conducted by Jaffe and Diamond (2011) state that a couple experiencing infertility can experience pain and jealousy when viewing families with children.

We see this jealousy in Cindy, who projects her resentment heavily onto her sister who appears to have the perfect family life filled with three perfect children. Later during the day, the couple travels to their quaint farmhouse in Stanleyville, "the pencil capital of the world." In an attempt to cope with the news, they open a bottle of wine and fill a small box with notes that describe their idea of the perfect child. After burying the symbolic box, a strange and somewhat magical storm bring their perfect child to life. The next morning the Greens awaken to a ten-year-old child (played by CJ Adams) Timothy who refers to Cindy and Jim as Mom and Dad. The only drawback is that the Greens' perfect child has leaves growing out of his ankles, leaves that cannot be cut but naturally fall off after Timothy has a meaningful or life-changing encounter with others. After a few scenes of attempting to pass Timothy as a foster child, we are introduced to Jim's father- James. James is a very traditional brute who believes that his son and daughter in law should not be fostering a child but instead continuing to attempt to have one of their own.

In accordance to Diana Baumrind's parenting styles, James is easily characterized as the Authoritarian Parenting type while the Greens are characterized as the Permissive Parenting type. James Green (played by David Morse) is the Authoritarian Parent who believes that children need to be kept on a short leash and he also believes in enforcing rules that are to be followed and obeyed without any questions. Along with high expectations, this style of parenting also expects 'proper' behavior. In one scene, we see James playing dodgeball with the community children and Timothy. Because Timothy is unaware of how to play the game, he spends a few moments enjoying the sun. During this time, James has managed to get every child except Timothy out of the game and waits a few moments before hitting Timothy with the red rubber ball directly in the face. As a result, Cindy rushes to aid Timothy inside to make sure he is okay

and Jim is left to confront his father- which he does not. Later in the movie when they are asked if they confronted Jim's father, the Greens responded with "It's complicated." This shows that not only is Jim unable to confront his authoritarian father, but he was raised to not question his father's actions no matter what. On the other hand, the Permissive Parenting Style which is projected through the Greens highlights a parent's ability to believe in the autonomy of individual children and that they should be treated as equals. The Greens have few to no rules and include Timothy in the decision-making process. The Greens have low demandingness along with no control over young Timothy. This is shown when they tell Timothy to not hang out with an older neighborhood girl alone, as a result of their permissive parenting style and low control, Timothy disobeys them and continues to hang out with the girl anyway. Towards the end of the movie, we do not see a sudden change in parenting style with the Greens, but we do see a change in the authoritarian parent James.

The climax of this movie is not when Timothy has lost his leaves and prepares the Greens for his departure, but when Jim decides to face his adult bully- his boss. Throughout the movie, we see Jim struggle to confront his boss Franklin Crudstaff (played by Ron Livingston) who is seen throughout the movie bullying his subordinate Jim. Bullying although typically associated with young children, is a result of are being teased, made fun of, and verbally or physically abused by one's peers. A study conducted by Boulton, Smith, & Cowie (2010) concluded that those who experience bullying are socially anxious, and have their self-esteem snowball from time to time. Because of Jim's authoritarian raising, he has the tendency to back down at signs of power, and Franklin uses this to his advantage when the Greens invent a pencil made of leaves, (which are inspired from the leaves on Timothy's legs) and decides to steal the idea as his own. In order to overcome his bully, Jim decides to confront his boss in front of the entire community during a town meeting about his aggressive behavior and stealing the town saving idea that his family created.

By the end of the movie, Cindy and Jim Green are interviewing to get approved for their adoption application. When the interviewer asks them what they would do differently, but the Greens wouldn't change anything. The proudly say "We'd make different mistakes; better mistakes." A few scenes later we see the Greens welcoming their newly adopted child into their home and no longer have to dream about what their own child would be like thanks to Timothy.