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# Reconfiguring Gender and Family in Musical Cinema: A Comparative Analysis of *Mamma Mia!* (2008) and Contemporary Popular Films

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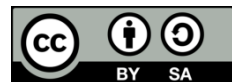
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## ABSTRACT

This study addresses the limited comparative analysis in previous research on musical films, which often focuses on single-text interpretations of gender, identity, and family representations. Accordingly, the objective of this research is to examine how *Mamma Mia!* constructs these meanings within the broader context of contemporary musical cinema by comparing it with *The Sound of Music*, *Frozen*, and *Little Women*. This study employs a qualitative research method using comparative textual analysis, drawing on representation theory, feminist media theory, and the sociology of family. The findings demonstrate that *Mamma Mia!* not only reflects evolving gender norms but also actively redefines family structures through post-patriarchal representations, emotional autonomy, and the concept of chosen family. In contrast to earlier cinematic traditions, the film indicates a shift toward postfeminist sensibilities characterized by agency, fluid identity, and affective kinship. This study contributes to media studies by emphasizing that musical films function as ideological spaces where social meanings are negotiated and transformed.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Media plays a central role in shaping contemporary understandings of identity, gender, and family structures. Within the field of media and cultural studies, it is widely accepted that media do not merely reflect social reality but actively construct and circulate meaning through symbolic systems, narratives, and visual codes [1]. Film, as one of the most influential forms of popular media, functions as a cultural text through which social norms are produced, negotiated, and normalized. Through character representation, dialogue, and audiovisual elements, films contribute to shaping public perceptions of what constitutes appropriate gender roles, legitimate family structures, and desirable forms of

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identity [2], [3], [4], [5], [6]. In this sense, cinema operates not only as entertainment but also as an ideological site where dominant and alternative meanings of social life are articulated and contested.

Among contemporary popular films, *Mamma Mia!* presents a particularly interesting case for examining the intersection of gender, identity, and family representation. While often framed as a light musical driven by nostalgia and popular music, the film offers a complex narrative centered on female agency, emotional autonomy, and unconventional family arrangements. Unlike traditional cinematic narratives that emphasize patriarchal authority and nuclear family stability, *Mamma Mia!* foregrounds a single mother, Donna, as the central figure who embodies both economic independence and emotional resilience. The absence of a clearly defined father figure, combined with the prominence of female friendship and solidarity, challenges dominant assumptions about the necessity of paternal authority within family structures. As such, the film opens up alternative ways of imagining kinship, belonging, and relational identity beyond the boundaries of conventional norms.

However, despite growing scholarly attention to gender representation and family discourse in popular media, existing studies on *Mamma Mia!* tend to focus on isolated textual analysis, often emphasizing narrative elements or musical aesthetics without situating the film within a broader comparative context. This limitation restricts the ability to fully understand the film's ideological position within the evolving landscape of contemporary cinema. As noted in previous studies, comparative approaches are crucial in identifying how cultural texts both reproduce and transform dominant social meanings [7] [8].

However, few studies comparatively examine how musical films negotiate gender and family meanings across traditional and postfeminist frameworks. To address this gap, the present study situates *Mamma Mia!* within a comparative framework alongside *The Sound of Music*, *Frozen*, and *Little Women*, as these films represent distinct yet interconnected configurations of family and female subjectivity. *The Sound of Music* represents a more traditional, heteronormative family model, in which domestic harmony is ultimately achieved through the restoration of paternal authority and the romantic union. In contrast, *Frozen* marks a significant shift by prioritizing non-romantic kinship, particularly sisterhood, as the central emotional foundation of the narrative, thereby challenging the dominance of heterosexual romance in defining relational meaning. Meanwhile, *Little Women* offers a critical exploration of female agency by foregrounding women's intellectual autonomy, self-determination, and ambivalent relationship toward marriage as a socially prescribed life trajectory. By placing *Mamma Mia!* in dialogue with these films, this study enables a more nuanced understanding of how contemporary cinema negotiates competing meanings of gender, intimacy, and family.

Building on this comparative positioning, this study aims to examine how *Mamma Mia!* constructs and reconfigures meanings of gender roles, family structures, and identity formation within contemporary popular culture. Specifically, the study addresses three key

questions: (1) how gender and female subjectivity are represented through narrative and characterization; (2) how family is redefined beyond traditional patriarchal frameworks; and (3) how musical elements function as a medium for constructing emotional and social meaning. These questions are essential for understanding the broader role of film in shaping cultural perceptions of identity and relational life.

The contribution of this study lies in three main aspects. First, at the empirical level, it extends existing research by situating *Mamma Mia!* within a comparative analytical framework, thereby highlighting its distinctive representation of gender and family. Second, at the theoretical level, it integrates representation theory, feminist media theory, and the sociology of family to provide a multidimensional analysis of popular film as a site of meaning production. Third, at the conceptual level, this study argues that *Mamma Mia!* represents a transitional cultural text that negotiates between traditional norms and emerging forms of relational identity characterized by autonomy, flexibility, and emotional connection. In doing so, the article contributes to broader debates on how contemporary media participates in redefining gender roles and family legitimacy in an era marked by shifting social values.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Representation theory provides the first anchor for this study. Hall argues that representation is a constitutive practice: meaning is produced through systems of signs, language, and cultural codes rather than transparently reflected from reality [9]. In film, this means that costumes, dialogue, framing, song lyrics, and narrative closure are not secondary ornaments but mechanisms through which social meanings are organized and naturalized.

Feminist media scholarship helps clarify the gender politics of these representational choices. Mulvey's account of visual pleasure shows how classical cinema frequently structures women as objects of spectacle for a controlling gaze [10]. Butler, however, complicates essentialist understandings of gender by theorizing it as performative, that is, reiterated through stylized acts rather than anchored in a stable essence [11]. Read together, these approaches make it possible to examine whether *Mamma Mia!* merely replaces one feminine stereotype with another, or whether it actually reconfigures the performance of femininity and masculinity.

To sharpen this discussion, the article also draws on Gill's formulation of postfeminist media culture, which identifies a sensibility in which empowerment, choice, and confidence become highly visible while structural inequalities are displaced into individualized narratives of self-management [12]. This concept is especially relevant because *Mamma Mia!* celebrates women's self-determination, yet does so through consumer-friendly pleasure, romance, and nostalgia rather than through explicit feminist critique.

The analysis of kinship is informed by the concept of chosen family. Although the term emerged strongly in queer kinship debates, subsequent scholarship shows that chosen

family names forms of belonging and care constituted through affective commitment rather than strictly through blood, law, or patriarchal lineage [13], [14]. This framework is useful for understanding how Donna, Sophie, Rosie, and Tanya inhabit a family logic that exceeds the conventional father-mother-child model.

Finally, scholarship on music, nostalgia, and female-centered culture is crucial because *Mamma Mia!* is a musical whose ideological force works through song as much as through dialogue. Graber shows that the film mobilizes ABBA's repertoire to produce a nostalgia that is not merely backward-looking but capable of reframing female collectivity and affective memory [15]. Research on film music and popular music further confirms that music strongly shapes viewers' narrative and emotional interpretation [16], [12]. Together, these perspectives enable a reading of *Mamma Mia!* as a text in which music is not supplemental but central to the construction of identity and social meaning.

Taken together, these bodies of literature provide the conceptual foundation for analyzing *Mamma Mia!* as a cultural text that negotiates gender, family, and identity through multiple representational layers. Representation theory clarifies that media constructs rather than simply reflect social meaning [1]. Feminist media theory enables a critical reading of how women's agency, visibility, and selfhood are organized within cinematic discourse [2], [3], [4]. The sociology of family explains why contemporary kinship representations increasingly move beyond the traditional patriarchal nuclear model [5], [6]. Meanwhile, scholarship on music and nostalgia illuminates how emotional meaning and collective memory become central to the film's ideological appeal [7], [8], [9].

At the same time, the existing literature reveals an important gap. Studies on representation, feminist subjectivity, family transformation, and musical affect are often treated as separate discussions, whereas films such as *Mamma Mia!* demonstrate that these dimensions are deeply interconnected. Gender is not represented independently of kinship; family is not narrated independently of emotion; and nostalgia is not merely aesthetic but tied to ideological re-signification. For this reason, the present study adopts an integrated reading that brings these theoretical traditions into dialogue. Such an approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how *Mamma Mia!* operates as more than a popular musical spectacle: it becomes a site where shifting meanings of femininity, intimacy, and belonging are symbolically produced and contested within mainstream culture.

### 3. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis with a comparative interpretive approach to examine how *Mamma Mia!* (2008) constructs meanings of gender, family, and identity in relation to other influential films that engage similar thematic concerns. Qualitative textual analysis is particularly appropriate for this research because the object of inquiry is not numerical frequency or audience measurement, but the production of meaning within film as a cultural text. In media and cultural studies, textual analysis enables the researcher to examine how representations are constructed through narrative

structure, visual codes, dialogue, characterization, and symbolic elements, and how these representations articulate broader ideological assumptions about social life. Accordingly, this method is used to interpret how the selected films organize meanings of femininity, kinship, intimacy, and belonging.

The study adopts a comparative approach because *Mamma Mia!* is not treated as an isolated text, but as part of a broader field of popular cinema in which representations of gender and family are continuously negotiated. Comparative reading makes it possible to identify both the distinctive features of *Mamma Mia!* and its relationship to earlier and contemporary cinematic models. By placing the film in dialogue with *The Sound of Music* (1965), *Frozen* (2013), and *Little Women* (2019), this research seeks to clarify how different films articulate contrasting configurations of domesticity, female agency, and relational identity. The comparative method is therefore not used merely to juxtapose plots, but to trace ideological similarities, differences, and transformations across texts.

Data were collected through repeated and focused viewing of the selected films, accompanied by systematic note-taking on scenes, dialogues, musical performances, and visual patterns relevant to the research questions. The researcher identified key sequences in which gender roles, kinship relations, emotional conflict, and identity negotiation were especially visible. Special attention was paid to scenes that foregrounded: women's decision-making and autonomy; the presence or absence of paternal authority; friendship and affective support as family-like structures; the symbolic role of music in expressing emotion and relational meaning; and narrative closure as an indicator of ideological resolution.

The data were analyzed through four interrelated stages: narrative analysis, character analysis, musical analysis, and comparative interpretation. These stages were not applied as rigidly separate techniques, but as overlapping dimensions of textual interpretation.

The first stage involved narrative analysis, focusing on how each film structures its story, organizes its conflict, and resolves key tensions related to gender and family. This includes examining plot development, central relationships, turning points, and endings. Narrative analysis is important because ideology in film is often embedded not only in individual scenes but also in the broader logic through which stories are told and resolved. In this study, particular attention is given to how family legitimacy is narratively constructed, whether through patriarchal restoration, emotional reconciliation, relational flexibility, or individual self-discovery.

The second stage focused on character analysis, especially the construction of female subjectivity, masculinity, and interpersonal roles. Characters are analyzed not only as fictional individuals but as representational figures through which films articulate social values. This stage examines how Donna, Sophie, Rosie, Tanya, Sam, Bill, and Harry are positioned within the narrative of *Mamma Mia!*, and how their actions, speech, and relationships construct meanings of independence, care, desire, and responsibility.

The third stage involved musical analysis, which is especially important given that *Mamma Mia!* is a musical film whose songs are integral to narrative development and

emotional meaning. Rather than treating music as background entertainment, this study analyzes songs as discursive and affective devices that shape character identity, reinforce emotional transitions, and contribute to ideological framing. The analysis attends to lyrical content, the placement of songs within the narrative, performance context, and the emotional registers created by musical sequences.

The final stage consisted of comparative interpretation, in which findings from the previous stages were brought together to identify broader patterns and distinctions across the selected films. The purpose of comparison in this study is not simply to show that the films are different, but to clarify how each one constructs family, gender, and identity within a particular ideological horizon. Through comparison, *Mamma Mia!* can be located more precisely between traditional family narratives and contemporary postfeminist or affective models of kinship.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Gender Representation: From Patriarchy to Postfeminism

A central finding of this study is that *Mamma Mia!* repositions women from the margins of narrative dependence to the center of representational authority. In contrast to more classical cinematic formations in which women are frequently incorporated into a familial order ultimately stabilized by patriarchal control, *Mamma Mia!* constructs a social world in which female subjectivity is narratively primary. This shift is significant because, as feminist film theory has long argued, mainstream cinema has historically organized women as spectacles of visibility rather than as subjects of action [17]. Mulvey's critique of the "male gaze" is useful here because it clarifies how classical narrative cinema often grants men the role of narrative bearers while positioning women as objects of visual pleasure [18]. Although *Mamma Mia!* remains a mainstream commercial film, it noticeably departs from this logic by allowing women not only to occupy the visual center of the film but also to determine its emotional, moral, and narrative direction.

This difference becomes particularly visible when *Mamma Mia!* is read against *The Sound of Music*. In the latter, Maria is certainly lively, caring, and influential, yet her narrative function is still ultimately tied to the restoration of a more coherent domestic order. Her role becomes meaningful within a framework that reassembles paternal authority, family unity, and heteronormative closure. By contrast, Donna in *Mamma Mia!* is not introduced as a transitional figure who helps return the family to patriarchal stability; she is already the center of domestic and economic life. She is a single mother, a business owner, and the household's primary emotional anchor. Her legitimacy does not depend on incorporation into marriage or male protection. In representational terms, this marks an important movement from female dependence toward female autonomy. Rather than being defined through lack, Donna is defined through competence, memory, desire, and resilience. Her life is not framed as failed because it lacks a husband; instead, it is portrayed as socially and emotionally complete on its own terms.

This representation can be read productively through Butler's concept of gender performativity [19]. Donna, Rosie, Tanya, and Sophie do not embody a singular, essential femininity; rather, they perform multiple and sometimes contradictory forms of womanhood. Donna represents laboring motherhood and emotional endurance; Tanya performs glamour and sexual confidence; Rosie performs comic frankness and relational warmth; Sophie performs youthful uncertainty alongside reflexive self-determination. Seen together, these figures undermine the idea that femininity must conform to a singular patriarchal script. The film does not simply "include strong women"; it pluralizes the very terms through which womanhood is made intelligible. In this sense, *Mamma Mia!* does not merely reverse gender hierarchy by replacing men with women at the center. More importantly, it opens a wider representational field in which femininity is flexible, performative, and socially negotiated rather than naturally fixed [20]. [4].

At the same time, a more critical reading suggests that the film is not wholly outside postfeminist culture. Gill argues that postfeminist media culture often celebrates female confidence, choice, and independence while embedding these very qualities within neoliberal values of self-management and individualized empowerment [21]. *Mamma Mia!* clearly participates in this sensibility. Its women are autonomous, expressive, and emotionally articulate, but structural questions of class, labor precarity, or broader gender inequality remain largely backgrounded. Female empowerment is expressed through personal style, intimate decision-making, and emotional authenticity rather than through collective political critique. This is not a weakness unique to *Mamma Mia!*; rather, it is one of the defining contradictions of postfeminist representation. The film appears progressive because it recenters women, yet it does so in a way that translates emancipation into lifestyle and relational freedom rather than institutional transformation [22]. [11].

The comparison with *Little Women* helps clarify this point. In *Little Women*, female agency is articulated more overtly as an intellectual and ideological issue. Jo March's ambivalence toward marriage and her insistence on authorship foreground women's struggle over the terms of self-definition in a social order structured by gendered expectations. Agency in *Little Women* is therefore not only effective but explicitly political. In *Mamma Mia!*, by contrast, agency is less confrontational and more affective. Sophie's decision to postpone marriage, for example, does not reject romance itself; instead, it rejects the assumption that marriage must serve as the immediate endpoint of female adulthood. This is still an important intervention, but it takes place within a softer register. The film's politics are not articulated through explicit feminist discourse, but through narrative reorganization: women remain central, men remain secondary, and closure no longer depends on restoring male authority. The result is a postfeminist text that is both pleasurable and ideologically meaningful, though not fully emancipatory in a structural sense.

## 4.2 Family Structure: From Nuclear to Chosen Family

A second major finding concerns the film's redefinition of family. Classical family narratives in mainstream cinema have typically privileged the nuclear model: father, mother, and child organized within a stable domestic hierarchy. Within this model, family coherence often depends on paternal certainty, romantic legitimacy, and genealogical order. *The Sound of Music* remains closely aligned with this logic, since its emotional resolution culminates in a restored and morally coherent family structure. Even where maternal warmth and children's emotional needs are emphasized, the family remains legible within a normative domestic framework. *Mamma Mia!*, however, departs from this paradigm by refusing to make biological paternity the basis of familial meaning.

Here, the relevance of Giddens and Weston becomes especially clear. Giddens argues that intimacy in late modernity increasingly shifts away from inherited duty toward negotiated emotional connection [23]. Weston, meanwhile, shows that kinship can be socially constituted through affection, solidarity, and care rather than blood ties alone [24]. *Mamma Mia!* dramatizes both insights. Sophie's search for her father initially appears to reaffirm the importance of biological origin, yet the film ultimately declines to provide a singular paternal resolution. Rather than identifying one "true" father and reestablishing the family around him, the narrative leaves paternity open and redistributes fatherhood across affective availability rather than biological certainty. This is crucial. The film begins with a question anchored in genealogy but ends with a social arrangement grounded in emotional acceptance. Family, in this sense, is not recovered through bloodline; it is reimagined through relational willingness.

Donna and Sophie's relationship remains the emotional core of the film, and this already destabilizes the patriarchal assumption that family legitimacy depends on the father as the symbolic center. Around them, Rosie and Tanya function not as peripheral friends but as durable kin-like figures. Their presence extends motherhood into the female community and transforms friendship into a structure of care. This is precisely where the concept of "chosen family" becomes analytically useful [25]. While Weston developed the term in the context of lesbian and gay kinship, the broader conceptual point applies strongly here: social belonging can be produced through affection and sustained commitment rather than through legal or biological form alone. In *Mamma Mia!*, family is not simply a household arrangement; it is an affective network.

The comparison with *Frozen* further sharpens this argument. Like *Mamma Mia!*, *Frozen* decenters heterosexual romance and elevates non-romantic relationality—in this case, sisterhood—as the primary bond that saves the narrative world. Nevertheless, there is an important difference. *Frozen* revalues kinship through siblings, preserving family as a biologically anchored structure even while displacing romance. *Mamma Mia!*, by contrast, goes further by loosening family from biological certainty altogether. It presents motherhood, friendship, and communal affinity as sufficient bases for belonging. If *The Sound of Music* represents the normatively integrated family and *Frozen* represents the

reevaluation of sisterly kinship, *Mamma Mia!* represents a more expansive community of women in which family is affective, social, and open-ended.

This does not mean that the film completely abandons conventional family longing. Sophie still wants to know where she comes from, and the desire for paternal recognition is not ridiculed or erased. What the film does instead is to subordinate biological origin to relational practice. The emotional lesson is not that fathers do not matter, but that family legitimacy cannot be reduced to paternal certainty. In this respect, *Mamma Mia!* offers a subtle yet significant critique of the nuclear-family ideal. It does not attack the family as such; rather, it expands the very category of family beyond its patriarchal and heteronormative limits. That expansion is one of the film's most important cultural interventions.

### 4.3 Masculinity Reconfiguration

The transformation of gender representation in *Mamma Mia!* is not limited to women; it also involves a notable reconfiguration of masculinity. In classical patriarchal cinema, masculine identity is frequently associated with authority, decisiveness, rational control, and narrative mastery. Men advance the plot, possess knowledge, and stabilize disorder. In *Mamma Mia!*, the male characters—Sam, Bill, and Harry—do not occupy this position. They are not the custodians of truth, nor are they the unquestioned organizers of social order. Instead, they are written as emotionally available, supportive, and relatively non-dominant figures whose significance derives from their willingness to participate in an already existing female-centered social world [2], [11].

This matters because it shifts masculinity from authority to emotional presence. The men are not represented as weak; rather, they are decentered. Their masculinity is softened without being ridiculed. They do not restore patriarchal order; instead, they adapt themselves to a world in which women already possess agency and social centrality. This is especially visible in the paternity plot. In many conventional narratives, the revelation of the true father would restore hierarchy and certainty [12]. In *Mamma Mia!*, the men do not fight for possessive paternal entitlement. They accept ambiguity and embrace connection without demanding control. This is a substantial departure from masculinities organized around lineage, ownership, or symbolic dominance.

From a feminist media perspective, this softer masculinity is significant because it shows that challenging patriarchy does not require simply vilifying men. Rather, the film imagines men as capable of relationality without domination. This is one of the reasons the film's gender politics remain attractive to mainstream audiences: it displaces patriarchal privilege without converting the narrative into a zero-sum antagonism between sexes. Men are welcomed into the film's affective structure, but only on revised terms. Their legitimacy depends on care, flexibility, and emotional openness rather than power [4], [11].

Still, a critical note is necessary. The film's reconfigured masculinity is partly enabled by the men's buffer of humor, nostalgia, and charm. Their non-dominance is rendered pleasurable and non-threatening. This softens the political edge of the critique,

since patriarchy appears to dissolve through interpersonal warmth rather than through confrontation with unequal structures. Nonetheless, within the representational economy of mainstream musical cinema, the shift remains important. Masculinity is no longer equated with command; it is re-signified through accommodation and emotional participation. That is a meaningful departure from older cinematic norms.

#### 4.4 Music as Narrative and Ideology

Another major finding is that ABBA's music in *Mamma Mia!* functions not merely as entertainment, but as an ideological and affective medium through which identity, memory, and social relations are organized. Graber argues that the film's use of ABBA's repertoire mobilizes nostalgia not simply as retro pleasure, but as a potentially disruptive force within postfeminist culture [7]. This insight is crucial because it shifts analysis away from the common assumption that the soundtrack is merely decorative. In *Mamma Mia!*, songs are narrative events. They reveal emotional states, intensify interpersonal tensions, and transform private feeling into collective expression [7], [9].

"Dancing Queen," for example, does more than create a festive atmosphere. It stages female collectivity as joy, mobility, and liberation. The sequence suspends ordinary constraints and gives the female characters a shared space of exuberant public presence. In representational terms, this matters because pleasure itself becomes a political resource. Women are not merely enduring, caregiving, or sacrificing; they are publicly inhabiting pleasure together. Similarly, "The Winner Takes It All" articulates emotional vulnerability in a way that gives Donna interpretive depth beyond the stereotype of the invulnerable strong woman. The song does not weaken her agency; it humanizes it. Strength in the film is therefore not built on emotional silence, but on the ability to endure, express, and survive loss.

This is where nostalgia becomes analytically important. Grainge argues that nostalgia in contemporary media is not reducible to longing for an irrecoverable past; it is also a mode of cultural reinterpretation in the present [8]. *Mamma Mia!* exemplifies this logic. ABBA's songs carry historical associations with an earlier pop era, but the film recontextualizes them within a narrative centered on women's autonomy, female friendship, and non-normative kinship. The past is not simply retrieved; it is re-signified. Nostalgia thus becomes a vehicle for reworking collective memory in line with contemporary desires. What appears at the level of style as retro pleasure also operates at the level of ideology as rearticulation [7], [8], [12].

Music also differentiates *Mamma Mia!* from the comparative films. In *The Sound of Music*, songs often reinforce domestic harmony, moral innocence, and familial cohesion. In *Frozen*, music helps articulate the interior emotional struggle and sisterly attachment. In *Mamma Mia!*, however, the soundtrack carries an additional cultural charge because the songs preexist the film and bring with them a public memory that audiences already share. This creates a layered reception process: viewers do not simply interpret the characters through music; they also reinterpret familiar songs through the film's gendered and

relational framework. The result is a feedback loop between nostalgia and new meaning. Music becomes the medium through which the film's ideological work is felt rather than merely understood [7], [8], [9].

#### 4.5 Negotiating Tradition and Modernity

The final and perhaps most important finding is that *Mamma Mia!* should not be read as a straightforward rejection of tradition. Its cultural force lies precisely in its negotiation between inherited conventions and emergent values. Romance remains central to the plot. Marriage is still present as a social form. Reconciliation and communal celebration continue to matter. In these respects, the film does not fully abandon the grammar of mainstream popular cinema. Nevertheless, it significantly revises how that grammar functions.

This is why the film is best understood as articulating a hybrid ideology. Traditional motifs remain in place, but they are reworked through contemporary assumptions about autonomy, emotional authenticity, and flexible kinship. Sophie does not renounce love, but she refuses to let marriage prematurely define her life trajectory. Donna is not anti-romantic, but neither is her life rendered incomplete by the absence of a husband. The male characters are not expelled, but they no longer govern the narrative order. Family is not rejected, but it is detached from patriarchal certainty. In short, the film preserves enough of the familiar to remain culturally accessible while altering its ideological structure enough to register social change.

Gill's account of postfeminist sensibility helps explain why this hybrid form is so effective [4]. Postfeminist texts often work not through overt rupture but through soft revision: they retain recognizable genres, pleasures, and emotional formulas while inflecting them with the language of choice, selfhood, and empowerment. *Mamma Mia!* fits this pattern. Its politics are embedded in tone, affect, and narrative arrangement rather than explicit critique. This may limit its radicalism, but it also explains its broad appeal. The film does not ask audiences to reject tradition wholesale; it invites them to feel tradition differently.

Seen comparatively, this places *Mamma Mia!* in a distinctive position. It is less normatively domestic than *The Sound of Music*, less biologically anchored than *Frozen*, and less overtly ideological than *Little Women*. Its specific contribution lies in making post-patriarchal relationality pleasurable, musical, and emotionally legible within mainstream cinema. That is why the film matters analytically. It demonstrates how popular culture can revise social norms not only through direct critique but through affective normalization. By turning female-centered community, uncertain paternity, and non-dominant masculinity into forms of joy and belonging, *Mamma Mia!* participates in a broader cultural shift in which family and gender are no longer secured by hierarchy alone, but increasingly negotiated through choice, care, and emotional reciprocity.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study underscores that *Mamma Mia!* represents a significant cultural shift in how gender, identity, and family are conceptualized in contemporary musical cinema. Rather than positioning itself within a fixed ideological framework, the film negotiates between tradition and transformation, offering a hybrid representation that reflects evolving social values. Its narrative emphasizes relational flexibility, emotional autonomy, and alternative forms of kinship, suggesting that popular media can subtly reshape dominant understandings of social life through accessible and affective storytelling.

The implications of this research extend to media and cultural studies by reinforcing the idea that musical films should not be treated as merely ment-oriented genres, but as meaningful sites of ideological production. The study highlights how cinematic texts can normalize social change by embedding new values, such as non-patriarchal family structures and fluid identities, within familiar, emotionally engaging formats. This insight is particularly relevant for scholars examining the intersection of media, gender discourse, and cultural transformation in contemporary society.

However, this research is limited to textual and comparative analysis, focusing primarily on narrative and representational dimensions. It does not account for audience reception, industry influences, or the socio-economic contexts surrounding film production and distribution. As a result, the findings are interpretative and may not fully capture how meanings are negotiated across different audiences or cultural settings.

Future research is encouraged to expand beyond textual analysis by incorporating audience studies, cross-cultural comparisons, and intersectional perspectives, including class, sexuality, and generational differences. Investigating how viewers interpret and internalize representations of family and gender in musical films would provide a more comprehensive understanding of their societal impact. Additionally, comparative studies involving a broader range of contemporary musicals could further clarify the evolving role of the genre in reflecting and shaping modern identities.

For the general public, this study contributes to a deeper awareness of how seemingly light and entertaining films participate in shaping perceptions of relationships, family, and selfhood. By recognizing these underlying meanings, audiences can engage more critically with popular media and better understand how cultural narratives influence everyday social values and expectations.

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