



## Mamma Mia! A girl needs a dad!

*By David Benkof*

Mamma Mia!, which opened last weekend, has touched a chord with gay filmgoers. Gay and bisexual men, many of whom who love musicals anyway, flocked to the cinema to see gay icon Christine Baranski's showstopper performance, musical numbers with a gay vibe like "Dancing Queen," Colin Firth's gay character, and of course the fabulous Meryl Streep. That's to say nothing of heartthrob Dominic Cooper's shirtless scene on the beach. But strangely enough, it seems virtually nobody in the lavender set except me even noticed the main theme of Mamma Mia!: that girls need their fathers.

In the musical-cum-movie, Sophie (Amanda Seyfried), dreams of having her father walk her down the aisle at her wedding. Sophie never know who her father was, because her feminist mother in the 1970s arrogantly insisted she could raise a child on her own, even though she could have narrowed the father's identity down to three men at most. It's clear in the show that Sophie ached for her absent male parent throughout her childhood and adolescence, and at one point she even confronts her mother Donna (Meryl Streep) to complain about having to grow up without a Dad.

But gay and lesbian people have frequently insisted that fathers don't matter. In the first gay-marriage state, Massachusetts, gay activists have insisted on laws that mean that an adoption agency that gives even a slight tiebreaker preference to families with both a mother and a father will be shut down by the government. Gay and lesbian leaders repeat like a mantra that "studies show gays can be go od parents," which is true but beside the point, not to mention the fact that most experts say more studies need to be done. Most importantly, few if any of the studies have examined the most relevant questions - such as whether a lesbian can provide what a father traditionally accomplishes for both sons and daughters.

In Sophie's case, does anyone seriously think that a second mother would have provided what she was aching for? The father-daughter relationship has been an essential component of young women's healthy development throughout history. Women learn how to be women - and how to relate to men - in part from their father's guidance and example. No lesbian could ever play that role - nor should. That doesn't mean gay people can't be parents; I admire same-sex couples that adopt children who otherwise would have no parents at all. But don't expect me to salute same-sex couples who make a baby from scratch that will never have a mother, or never have a father. To delib erately deny your own child a parent of each sex is an act of unspeakable cruelty.

I could understand either one of two possible reactions to Mamma Mia! by gay viewers. One, they might come out of the show saying, "Good songs, but that stuff about children needing fathers is heterosexual propaganda. A mother can provide everything a father can." Alternatively, they could emerge saying, "Good songs, and it made me re-evaluate my opposition to policies that privilege mother-father families. I feel for Sophie, and I realize that a little girl needs her Dad."

But it appears neither of those reactions has happened in any measurable way. Gay viewers have liked the songs (of course) and sympathized with Sophie, but not changed their ideology one bit. Why?

I believe that on this and other issues, the gay and lesbian movement has been so single-mindedly focused on complete equality, that it fails to notice the people it is hurting. I do think equality is a good thing, but is it

more important than a little girl having a father? I don't think so. The gay movement, unfortunately, does.

My advice to gay Mamma Mia! fans comes straight out of the film's lyrics: "See that girl. Watch that scene." And re-evaluate your priorities.

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