



The Identity of Father and Daughter in Aftersun Movie Through Collective and Individual Memory

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2025-12-10 Revised: 2025-12-25 Accepted: 2026-06-17 Keywords: Aftersun; Collective Memory; Halbwachs; Identity; Individual Memory DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.8761 Corresponding Author: Euis Meinawati euis.eum@bsi.ac.id English Literature, University Bina Sarana Informatika, Jakarta	<i>Film functions as a medium through which memory and identity are constructed, particularly in the context of family relationships. The present study draws upon Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective and individual memory to analyze the father-daughter relationship depicted in the film Aftersun. A plethora of studies have previously examined the nexus of memory and identity in cinematic works. However, research that explores the intricate interplay between collective and individual memory within the context of intimate family relationships remains under-explored. The present study aims to analyze how Calum and Sophie's shared experiences shape their emotional closeness, as well as how Sophie, as an adult, reinterprets her childhood memories to reconstruct her understanding of herself and her father. The data were collected through repeated viewings, dialogue transcription, and selection of relevant scenes, employing qualitative descriptive methods. The findings indicate that collective memory, manifested through shared activities and dialogues, fosters cohesion and relational identity. Conversely, unshared individual memories influence Calum's role as a father. In adulthood, Sophie engages in a process of self-reflection and identity reconstruction, working through her memories of childhood to reinterpret her shared identity with her father.</i>

1. Introduction

Contemporary films often reflect human psychological issues, such as family dynamics, trauma, and identity formation. (Khatiri, 2025) posits that contemporary narratives frequently employ family dynamics to depict complex social and psychological struggles experienced by individuals. This perspective aligns with the findings of (Sacilotto et al., 2022), who contend that cinematherapy facilitates the relatability of individuals grappling with psychological challenges to characters confronted with comparable difficulties in the cinematic narrative.

Consequently, films function not solely as a form of entertainment, but also as symbolic spaces in which audiences can reflect on, reinterpret, and emotionally process personal relationship dynamics. As (Bellagamba, 2023) contends, cinema has the capacity to evoke repressed emotions and memories, creating an emotional experience that resonates with psychoanalytic processes.

Memory is a fundamental aspect of self-understanding and identity construction. This is supported by (Matsumoto, 2025), who found that remembering past experiences helps people revise and strengthen their self-schemas, showing that personal memory is crucial to identity. Recent research also shows that narrative coherence in autobiographical memory constitutes a pivotal element in the development and maintenance of self-identity (Hallford et al., 2021). Furthermore, beyond the individual level, memory also functions relationally, maintaining coherence and authenticity within social and familial contexts (Sutton, 2022).

In this regard, (Tan, 2018) contends, film functions as a psychological medium that prompts viewers to simulate emotions, interpret character motivations, and internally resonate with the narrative, thereby allowing them to process aspects of their own lived experiences.

Within this theoretical framework, *Aftersun* (2022) emerges as a particularly salient object of study. The film under scrutiny herein portrays the delicate and personal emotional bond between a father, Calum, and his young daughter, Sophie, during a period of shared leisure. *Aftersun* does not rely on explicit conflict; rather, it employs fragmented scenes of quotidian activities, such as swimming, casual conversations, and home videos, which then take on profound emotional significance. (Kotaman, 2025) observes that memory functions as the primary narrative device in *Aftersun*, influencing both the audience's interpretation and the characters' identities. These seemingly ordinary moments ultimately form the foundation of Sophie's adult recollections and emotional understanding.

Cinema's ability to depict family relationships and emotional tensions within specific cultural contexts has been extensively recognized in prior studies (Dharejo, 2023). This idea aligns with (Zurcher & Webb, 2018) observation that cinematic narratives frequently construct familial relationships through subtle emotional cues and intergenerational interactions, allowing films to convey the complexities of family bonds. This perspective is particularly salient in *Aftersun*, where

childhood memories that were initially regarded as uncomplicated gradually unveil latent emotional layers as Sophie matures.

These interactions become the shared memories that Halbwachs describes as collective memory, while Sophie's adult reinterpretation represents the construction of individual memory shaped by past social contexts. Consequently, the present study focuses on how the interaction between collective and individual memory influences the identities of both father and daughter in the film.

The present study seeks to answer two fundamental questions concerning the father-child relationship within the framework of memory perspective. Firstly, how *Aftersun* portrays the father-daughter relationship through the emotional dynamics between Calum and Sophie, and secondly, how reflections on childhood memories influence Sophie's understanding of her father and shape her emotional identity in adulthood.

This phenomenon provides a deeper understanding of the complexity of emotional relationships between generations and the impact of childhood memories on the formation of individual identity in adulthood. This finding aligns with the conclusions of (Elias & Brown, 2022), who assert that cross-generational family narratives and memories facilitate individual self-understanding by establishing a connection between past and present, thereby reinforcing emotional bonds and personal identity. Furthermore, (Daines et al., 2021) emphasise that childhood experiences, both positive and negative, have a long-term influence on emotional well-being and family relationships in adulthood.

Despite the proliferation of research on family relationships, trauma, and emotional dynamics in film, there remains a paucity of studies that systematically employ sociological memory frameworks, particularly Maurice Halbwachs' concepts of collective and individual memory, to analyze identity formation in the context of intimate families. (Kanbur, 2018) demonstrates the capacity of cinema to serve as a medium for the mediation of individual and cultural memory, thereby influencing the formation of collective memory and cultural identity, while (Plantinga, 2021) argues that historical fiction films mobilize both collective and individual memory to shape group identity and a shared past. However, extant studies primarily address memory at cultural or historical levels, rather than examining how collective and individual memory interact within close familial relationships.

Similarly, (Nairi, 2017) research on collective identity and traumatic memory in cinema applies Halbwachs' framework to broader social trauma, emphasizing the formation of group identity. However, this analysis does not thoroughly explore the intricate interplay between shared family memories and personal memories in intimate intergenerational relationships, such as the father-daughter dynamics depicted in *Aftersun*.

This discrepancy underscores the necessity for an examination that focuses on the manner in which family memory practices give rise to cross-generational identities.

Moreover, the novelty of this study lies in its application of Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective and individual memory to analyze identity formation in cinema. This study establishes a distinctive analytical framework that examines how *Aftersun* (2022) represents the father-daughter relationship through the interplay of shared familial memories and personal recollections.

The present study employs Halbwachs' theory as a lens, offering a unique perspective on the manner in which collective memory shapes emotional bonds and the manner in which individual memory reconstructs personal understanding of past experiences. This approach underscores the pivotal role of memory in shaping identity, particularly within the context of intergenerational relationships, and offers insights into the manner in which cinematic narratives can effectively convey intricate psychological and emotional dynamics through the integration of collective and individual memory.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how *Aftersun* (2022) depicts the father-daughter relationship through the lenses of collective and individual memory, with particular attention to the interaction between shared and personal memories in shaping identity. The present study aims to explore how childhood experiences influence Sophie's understanding of her father and her emotional identity in adulthood. This research makes a significant contribution to the field of film studies by extending the application of Halbwachs' memory framework. It also provides valuable insights into the intricacies of intergenerational relationships, making it relevant for scholars in related disciplines such as film studies, psychology, and media analysis.

2. Method

The present study employs a qualitative approach, which prioritizes interpretation over measurement. This approach enables researchers to explore the emotional, psychological, and symbolic dimensions that emerge in *Aftersun* (2022), particularly as they relate to the depiction of memory in the father-daughter relationship.

As posited by (Ramadhani et al., 2023), the employment of descriptive qualitative methods empowers researchers to furnish meticulous, factual portrayals derived from visual sources without compromising the integrity of the subject of study. This approach is particularly well-suited to film analysis because the narrative structure and emotional depth characteristic of film require interpretation rather than quantitative measurement.

The primary data comprised scenes and dialogues that elucidate both collective and individual memories, encompassing shared activities, emotionally significant interactions, and Sophie's reflective moments as an adult. Scenes were

selected based on their relevance to Halbwachs' theoretical concepts, specifically moments that depict shared social experiences between Calum and Sophie or moments that emphasize personal reflection and emotional isolation.

The data was collected through repeated viewings, dialogue transcription, and the selection of moments that align with Halbwachs' concept of memory. To distinguish between collective and individual memory, collective memory was identified through scenes involving shared interactions, joint activities, and mutual emotional engagement, whereas individual memory was identified through scenes portraying personal reflection, emotional withdrawal, or experiences not directly shared between the characters.

The analysis entailed data reduction, the establishment of analytical categories designated as Collective Memory and Individual Memory, and the organization of selected scenes accordingly. Interpretation was conducted subsequent to the categorization process, with a focus on how actions, dialogue, emotions, and symbols corresponded to the predefined memory categories. To ensure analytical rigor and validity, the interpretation process involved peer discussion to review scene categorization and thematic consistency, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings. All methodological procedures were conducted systematically to maintain transparency and consistency throughout the analysis.

3. Results

This study examines scenes from *Aftersun* (2022) that illustrate the interplay between collective and individual memory and its impact on the characters' identities. The analysis focuses on the emotional experiences and reflections of Sophie and Calum, examining both their shared experiences and Sophie's personal interpretations as an adult. The findings indicate the presence of recurring patterns in the way shared interactions foster the development of emotional bonds, while unshared personal experiences contribute to the formation of individual identity.

The dialogue and actions of each character have deep psychological and symbolic meanings that can be interpreted through the lens of Halbwachs's memory theory. To ensure objectivity, the analysis was cross-verified through multiple viewings and peer discussions to minimize researcher bias in interpreting subjective elements like emotional nuances.

Collective Memory

This subsection underscores the formation of collective memory through shared interactions and emotionally reciprocal moments between Calum and Sophie. These moments serve as foundational elements for the development of relational identity.

Data 1.

The scene where Calum says **"I love you"** to Sophie before they part ways (0:02:28).

This scene depicts Calum directly expressing his affection for Sophie, creating a significant emotional moment between father and daughter. The simple dialogue, **"I love you"** has deep relational meaning because it involves a reciprocal interaction. This moment becomes part of the collective memory because the importance of the experience arises from the participation of both characters.

According to Halbwachs, collective memory is formed from shared experiences that build social identity as discussed in (Cordeiro, 2017) who emphasizes that groups emerge from the interplay of individual and collective memories, reinforcing social bonds. Sophie's memory of this scene is shaped by these shared experiences and mutual emotional recognition. Consequently, this scene functions as an emotional reference point that reinforces the father-daughter bond throughout the narrative and directly addresses the research question concerning emotional dynamics in relational identity formation.

Data 2.

The scene where Sophie and Calum watch paragliding together, and Sophie says to Calum, **"I think it's nice that we share the same sky."**

This scene is indicative of collective memory, as its emotional significance is derived from a shared perception and experience. The observation of paragliders in a shared social environment suggests that memory is influenced by the social frameworks in which it is embedded, a notion that aligns with Halbwachs's assertion. As (Bilsel, 2017) further elucidates, memory is socially constructed through shared places and environments that foster collective consciousness. The open sky in this scene functions as a symbolic shared space that facilitates collective memory formation. Sophie's statement evinces an awareness of emotional connection and mutual presence.

The combination of Data 1 and Data 2 reveals that collective memory in Aftersun is constructed through simple yet emotionally synchronized interactions, thereby reinforcing emotional closeness and relational identity. This finding provides a substantiated response to the initial research question.

Individual Memory

This subsection delineates recurrent patterns of individual memory formation through Calum's introspective reflections and emotionally unshared experiences, which contribute to internalized identity and emotional vulnerability.

Data 3.

The scene where Sophie asks her father, **“What did you do for your 11th birthday?”** and Calum replies, **“Nobody remembered it was my birthday.”** (52:31-52:44).

This scene underscores Calum's personal emotional experience of neglect and loneliness, which constitutes an individual memory because it is internally reconstructed and not shared with Sophie during her childhood. Halbwachs's theory posits that individual memory emerges from subjective interpretation of experience. (Cordeiro, 2017) notes that individual memory filters collective experiences, shaping personal identity within social contexts.

This moment provides a contextual framework for understanding Calum's emotional state and offers insights into his behavior during the vacation. This scene illustrates how unshared childhood experiences shape Calum's paternal identity and contributes to Sophie's later understanding of him, addressing the study's focus on intergenerational memory influence.

Data 4.

The scene where Calum says to Sophie, **“Once you leave where you grew up, you don't totally belong there again.”** (54:42-54:50).

This concise reflection underscores a profoundly personal encounter. Calum's words are indicative of his individual memory, as they are derived from his internal thoughts and reflections, rather than from experiences he has shared with Sophie. This memory exemplifies how an individual constructs an understanding of identity and emotions through the internalization of past experiences. (Cordeiro, 2017) highlights that individual memory reconstructs personal narratives, influencing self-perception. In conjunction with Data 3, this scene serves to reinforce a pattern of emotional isolation and introspection that is characteristic of Calum's individual memory formation and, indirectly, shapes Sophie's adult emotional interpretation.

Data 5.

The scene where Calum walks alone at night on the beach. Time scene (1:11:10-1:12:49).

This scene is indicative of a profoundly personal emotional experience for Calum. This phenomenon is best understood as a personal memory, as the moment was formed entirely through Calum's subjective internal state, independent of Sophie's presence or participation. According to (Sutton, 2022), autobiographical memories fulfil a significant role in the processing of emotional vulnerability and the interpretation of authentic moments that contribute to an individual's internal narrative.

This pattern of solitude underscores the manner in which individual memory is constructed through emotional withdrawal, thereby contributing to the formation of Calum's internal identity and, in turn, indirectly influencing Sophie's adult self-understanding.

Data 6.

The scene where Calum sits alone in the carpet shop and eventually lies down on the carpet (46:04–46:47).

This scene is indicative of individual memory, as it unfolds within Calum's private emotional space. According to Halbwachs, such recollections are shaped intrinsically rather than being socially constructed. Calum's actions are indicative of emotional exhaustion and temporary withdrawal from relational performance. Recent research emphasizes the dynamic interaction between cognition and emotion, highlighting their influence on the processing and integration of internal experiences into personal memory (Uniyal, 2024).

The data presented in Figures 3–6 collectively demonstrate a consistent pattern in which Calum's unshared emotional experiences form individual memories that subtly influence his identity and parenting behavior. This finding addresses the second research question.

Collective and Individual Memory

This subsection illustrates how collective memories are retrospectively reinterpreted through individual memory, particularly in Sophie's adulthood.

Data 7.

A scene where adult Sophie watches a video recording of her and her father's vacation to Turkey when Sophie was 11 years old (1:33:46).

This scene is a paradigmatic illustration of the interplay between collective and individual memory. The recorded footage captures shared moments, thereby functioning as collective memory. However, adult Sophie employs a reconstruction of these memories through personal interpretation, thereby noticing emotional details that had previously been overlooked. As recent research in the field suggests, collective memory is internalized on an individual level through personal interpretation and re-evaluation (Eustache & Orianne, 2023). This scene illustrates how collective memory is transformed into individual understanding, shaping Sophie's adult identity and directly addressing the study's core research questions.

Data 8.

rave scene flashing lights (1:30:06–1:32:08).

This scene is characterized by a shared social experience, leading to the creation of collective memories through shared participation, music, lights, and group interaction. Conversely, Sophie's emotional experience and perception of the

atmosphere manifest as individual memories, as her reactions are subjective. This phenomenon exemplifies Halbwachs's theory that collective experiences are invariably filtered through the lens of individual perception, thereby shaping the formation of memories.

Contemporary studies demonstrate that emotionally intense audiovisual stimuli are processed differently by each individual, resulting in distinct memory formation even within shared environments (Hu & Yang, 2023). This interplay serves to substantiate the study's findings concerning the manner in which shared childhood moments are interpreted through the individual emotional lenses of adulthood.

Data 9.

The Scene Where Sophie Loses Her Swimming Goggles While Swimming with Calum (29:50).

This scene portrays a shared activity between Sophie and Calum, which fosters the creation of collective memories through their joint engagement in swimming. However, the loss of her swimming goggles introduces a moment of subjective disruption, transforming the shared experience into an individual memory shaped by her own perception. (Eustache & Orianne, 2023) posit that the concept of "collective memory" is contingent on individual consciousness, suggesting that the recollection of shared experiences is subject to reconstruction by each participant. This scene further demonstrates how shared experiences contribute to identity through personal emotional interpretation, reinforcing the long-term impact of childhood memories.

Data 10.

The scene where Sophie tells her father that last night, she was kissed by a boy her age, His name is Michael (1:23:22-1:23:41).

This interaction constitutes both collective and individual memory. As a shared dialogue, it strengthens relational bonding while holding distinct emotional meanings for each character. For Sophie, the act of sharing this experience signifies a moment of emerging self-awareness and trust, constituting an important step in her emotional development. For Calum, the moment functions as a parental response to his daughter's growing independence, which he processes with a mixture of attentiveness and emotional restraint. (Fivush & Salmon, 2023) posit that such exchanges facilitate children's development of emotional meaning and integration of experiences into their evolving sense of self. Despite the fact that the moment is collectively experienced through dialogue, the emotional weight and interpretation of the event differ for Sophie and Calum.

This demonstrates how collective interaction can simultaneously generate individualized memories. This scene encapsulates the study's overall findings by illustrating how collective interaction and individual interpretation converge to shape intergenerational identity formation.

4. Discussion

The present study posits that *Aftersun*'s construction of collective memory is primarily through shared activities and everyday interactions between Sophie and Calum, such as swimming together, casual conversations, and spending time in shared spaces. These seemingly mundane moments function as social frameworks through which emotional closeness is sustained within the father-daughter relationship. Sophie's assertion that they "share the same sky" exemplifies the manner in which shared space and perception can engender a sense of attachment and fortify emotional closeness within father-daughter relationships.

This finding aligns with Halbwachs's concept (Bilsel, 2017; Haas et al., 2025; Pożarlik, 2015) which posits that collective memory emerges from social interactions that reinforce shared meanings. Concurrently, these shared interactions establish the foundation for subsequent individual interpretations. In this context, Sophie's recollections of Calum stem not only from their shared experiences but also from her personal reinterpretation of those experiences as part of her identity and emotional dynamics.

However, in *Aftersun*, collective memory does not function as a static or unchanging entity. Sophie's subsequent reinterpretation of her childhood experiences underscores the notion that collective memory, while inherently social in nature, remains subject to transformation through individual perception and temporal distance. This dynamic tension between shared memory and personal meaning-making becomes central to the film's theorisation of father-daughter identity, rather than merely a narrative outcome.

From the perspective of film studies, these findings underscore cinema's capacity to represent collective memory not through explicit narration, but through affective cues, gestures, silence, and visual intimacy. *Aftersun* deliberately avoids overt exposition, instead employing minimal dialogue and embodied interaction to construct relational memory. In this manner, the film exemplifies the notion that cinema serves as a potent medium for the visual representation of social memory processes.

Atmospheric elements and emotional restraint are found to be more efficacious in conveying meaning than narrative clarity. This positions *Aftersun* as a significant contribution to cinematic discourse on memory, illustrating how film can articulate emotional histories without relying on conventional storytelling techniques. In this regard, *Aftersun* advances film studies by demonstrating how memory operates as a cinematic structure rather than a narrative theme.

The memories formed by each character's inner experiences contribute an essential interpretive layer to the narrative. This finding aligns with recent research in the field of individual memory (Dings & Newen, 2023; Eustache & Orianne, 2023; Haj, 2023), which posits that episodic and autobiographical memories are actively reconstructed through personal interpretation, narrative self-understanding, and ongoing cognitive and emotional processes. Within Halbwachs' framework, such memories are classified as individual memories, as they are not reinforced through social interaction.

In *Aftersun*, this theoretical framework is narratively articulated through Calum's silence, which functions as a deliberate strategy to reveal the limitations of collective memory. The unspoken experiences of the subject indicate an emotional imbalance within the parent-child relationship, wherein shared memories coexist with concealed vulnerabilities. This finding suggests that not all elements contributing to identity are socially transmitted, and that individual memory has the capacity to profoundly influence relational dynamics, even in the absence of explicit communication.

This observation unveils a notable deficiency in Halbwachs's theoretical framework, which places significant emphasis on social reinforcement mechanisms yet provides scant elaboration on phenomena such as silence, emotional repression, and unarticulated suffering within intimate relationships.

The dynamic interplay between collective and individual memory constitutes a continuous reconstructive process that shapes identity across the life span. According to scholars in the field, the act of remembering is not solely a matter of individual cognition. Rather, it is influenced by the prevailing social contexts and subsequently reconstructed through the lens of personal cognition (Haas et al. 2025; Heux et al. 2023; Hirst & Stone 2015).

These perspectives highlight the intricate relationship between individual memory and collective frameworks, emphasizing that the process of recollection is ultimately shaped by one's psychological state. Consequently, the presence of shared recollections within interpersonal relationships has been demonstrated to serve a crucial function in the reinforcement of emotional bonds. Conversely, the existence of divergent personal memories has been shown to expose latent vulnerabilities between individuals.

The findings of this study demonstrate that memory in the film *Aftersun* cannot be understood through a single framework. Instead, memory emerges from the interaction between shared social experiences and individually reconstructed interpretations. This dual structure of memory has important implications for understanding relational dynamics in film narratives.

The interaction between collective and individual memory demonstrates that emotionally significant relationships are shaped not only by shared experiences, but also by the way each individual internally reconstructs those

experiences over time. Consequently, analysts must deliberate on the manner in which the memories depicted in the film can concurrently fortify relational bonds while also unveiling psychological inconsistencies that are not immediately evident. Moreover, these findings suggest that subsequent analyses of character relationships, particularly those involving parent-child dynamics, should consider potential discrepancies between shared events and individualized memories.

Such disparities can influence the formation of identity, emotional distance, or unresolved tensions within the narrative, underscoring the necessity for a more nuanced comprehension of how memory functions in cinematic representations of intimacy and loss. By situating film as a site where collective and individual memories intersect, conflict, and are reconfigured, this study contributes to memory studies by extending memory theory into audiovisual and affective domains.

5. Conclusion

The film demonstrates how the bond between Calum and Sophie emerges from collective moments that engender emotional unity and individual memories that unveil personal traumas. Consequently, these recollections enable adult Sophie to reinterpret her past, thereby illustrating cinema's capacity to portray the interplay between collective and individual memory in the development of intergenerational identity.

Researchers identified ten pieces of data indicating that collective memory, as manifested in dialogue and shared activities, reinforces relational security and closeness. Conversely, individual memory, particularly Calum's internal struggles, illuminates the vulnerability that shapes identity. Sophie's act of rewatching vacation footage demonstrates how shared events are subjectively reconstructed, thereby reinforcing the notion that memory reconstruction is an integral part of emotional development and identity formation.

Furthermore, researchers identified two limitations. Initially, access to pertinent and current references was constrained, as the majority of journals are not open access, and publications from the last decade are restricted. This limitation imposed a restriction on access to current academic sources. Secondly, errors in the placement and use of theory necessitated revision to align with Halbwachs' framework.

Consequently, researchers anticipate that subsequent studies will be prompted to utilize more accessible and contemporary sources, as well as employ Halbwachs' concepts to other films that address intergenerational trauma to achieve more comprehensive insights. This research makes a significant contribution to the field of film studies by demonstrating how cinema reflects both collective and individual memory. Additionally, it offers practical value in understanding the role of memory in the formation of identity.

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