



DON'T CALL ME SON

(MÃE SÓ HÁ UMA)

a Film by ANNA MUYLAERT

BRAZIL / 2016 / 82 MIN

Portuguese with English subtitles

With Naomi Nero, Daniel Botelho, Dani Nefussi, Matheus Nachtergaele, Laís Dias, Luciana Paes,
Helena Albergaria, June Dantas, Renan Tenca, Luciano Bortoluzzi

INTRODUCING THE FILM

A film **synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarise the film's narrative, genre, style and key participants in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for **DON'T CALL ME SON**:

This poignant coming-of-age film from Brazil is focused on Pierre, seventeen and in the middle of puberty. Ever since his father's death, his mother Aracy has looked after him and his younger sister Jacqueline, spoiling them both. But when his mother is arrested for having stolen him from a hospital when he was a newborn baby, Pierre's life changes dramatically. His biological parents Gloria and Matheus have spent seventeen years searching for him; they are now desperate to make up for the lost years and spend time with their eldest son, whom they call Felipe. Observed from a critical distance by his younger brother Joca, Pierre/Felipe moves in with his well-heeled new family, who are determined to mould him according to their ideals. But Pierre has his own designs for his life.

- ❑ From the text, identify the key plot and main characters as well as the historical background to the film.
- ❑ How does the trailer, poster, and image stills encourage you to watch the film in the cinema?
- ❑ Can you make any assumptions about what the film is about just from the marketing (i.e. trailer, poster, and image stills)?



CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ The first scene (1:32-2:40) is filmed with a follow shot, allowing the audience to follow the main character through the nightclub. While the audience is given various close-up shots of the main character in the first scene, the lighting and costume makes it difficult to uncover his physical characteristics. Explain the connection between the difficulty as an audience member of following this character without being able to identify him, and the theme of the narrative.
- ❑ The kitchen scene (3:58-5:20) is a compilation of close-up shots of various household objects/materials. The lack of dialogue suggests that special attention should be paid to what these objects/materials represent. Notice the type of clothing being worn, the type of food being prepared, the quality of the kitchen instruments, etc. What can the audience assume about the socio-economic status of the household?
- ❑ Keeping in mind costumes, dialogue, and any behaviors, how are the characters introduced to us at the start of the film?
- ❑ What do you think is the meaning behind the use of mirrors in the film?
- ❑ "Non-diegetic sound is sound whose origin is from outside the story world."¹ The arrest scene (20:00-21:31) makes use of non-diegetic music and slow motion shots. Listen to the music and notice your reactions to this scene. How do these film techniques add to what is taking place in this part of the narrative? Why is this part of the narrative important to the narrative as a whole?



CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES *continued*

- ❑ At the first meeting in the restaurant (31:45-35:10) the close-up shots of everyone at the table suggest that attention should be paid to more than just the dialogue (i.e. facial expressions, posture, behaviors). How do the close up shots attempt to reveal how the characters feel? How do these feelings connect to the relationships that develop throughout the narrative?
- ❑ “Mise-en-scène...is used in film to refer to everything that goes into the composition of a shot--framing, movement of the camera and characters, lighting, set design and the visual environment, and sound.”² How is the sense of 'being an outsider' represented visually? Think about character relationships and behavior, and elements of mise-en-scène to develop your response.

¹ “Term Index.” The Columbia Film Language Glossary. <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/>

² Ibid.

LANGUAGE

- ❑ Does the language difference present a barrier to your viewing experience? What about the subtitles?
- ❑ The names Pierre, Felipe, and son get interchanged for one character throughout the film. Explain the significance of a name and connect that to the significance of the film’s title.
- ❑ Is there a difference between the way the two mothers of Pierre/Felipe talk? Why do you think this is?



NARRATIVE

- ❑ What assumptions can you make about the film from the opening minutes? What do you think the film is about?
- ❑ In what ways do the characters (Pierre/Felipe, Matheus, Glória, and Joca) develop throughout the film?
- ❑ Think about your responses to the characters. Did you like them? Why, or why not?
- ❑ Notice how throughout the film, the audience follows Joca’s private life as well. How do you think this glimpse into Joca’s life is important to the narrative as a whole?
- ❑ Which aspects of the narrative appealed to you the most? Why do you think the director didn’t give more insight into the mother that was taken to jail? Is it morally correct, fair, or sensible how the non-biological family is forced apart?
- ❑ What tone does Muylaert (director) leave us with in the last scene (1:15:50-1:18:22)? Is the narrative suspended, or is there a resolution?



THEMES

- ❑ The New York Times wrote that “the movie is a critique of identity on several levels: biological, sexual, social, cultural and class-related.”³ Explain how the “search for identity” theme plays on the different levels (mentioned in the quote throughout the film).
- ❑ How does the first scene (1:32-3:10) introduce the film’s theme of identity?
- ❑ Some young people have been teased and/or harassed for being LGBTQ. Why do you think this happens? How would you react if you found a friend dressed in opposite sex clothing? Would you feel different about them? Why?
- ❑ What do the reactions to Pierre/Felipe’s gender and sexual fluidity tell you about Latin American culture?
- ❑ How do you feel about Pierre/Felipe’s biological parents wanting to change him?
- ❑ In the dinner scene (29:02-35:10), examine the interactions (verbal and nonverbal) between Pierre/Felipe, Matheus, Glória, Jaqueline, and Joca. How are they all simultaneously struggling with their identities as they meet for the first time?
- ❑ There is no dialogue in the living room scene (1:06:26-1:07:48), yet the behaviors and gestures of each character communicate feelings of identity. Compare how each character identifies themselves in this scene to the way the characters identify themselves in the dinner scene (29:02-35:10).
- ❑ What are the images and associations that come to mind when you hear the word family? What do you think the most important part of being a family is? Is your own family unique in some way?
- ❑ Pierre hides his makeup and women’s clothing from his first family, but flaunts it with his second. How does the dynamic in each family contribute to this change?
- ❑ How did you respond to the relationship between Felipe and his brother at different points in the film? Select two contrasting scenes and explore the emotions evoked, considering how the audience’s emotional response is manipulated, and how this informs the narrative. Where do your sympathies lie? How do you define the relationship of Felipe and his sister? Do you think they will stay in touch in the future? Explain why.
- ❑ Why do you think Pierre/Felipe’s biological family is given a team of assistants to help find the missing child and break up the non-biological family, while the non-biological family is given little support by the state?
- ❑ What can you say about the different socio economical classes represented in the film. What are the elements in the story that manifest these differences?
- ❑ Does the last scene (1:15:50-1:18:22) give the audience a concluding message regarding the film’s themes?



³ Holden, Stephen. “Review: ‘Don’t Call Me Son’ Considers Identity and Fluidity.” New York Times, November 1, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/02/movies/dont-call-me-son-review-anna-muylaert.html?_r=1

