

STUDY GUIDE



7 WEEKS (7 SEMANAS)

a Film by CONSTANZA FIGARI

CHILE / 2016 / 67 MIN

Spanish with English subtitles



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BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before watching a foreign film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country where that film comes from. Find two or three articles on the history of abortion in Chile and write a brief summary on what is happening and what has happened in the country. Please use reliable sources.

Chile used to have one of the most restrictive and Draconian laws regarding abortion,¹ and it wasn't until 2017 that the country changed its laws. According to the Human Rights Watch's website, "abortion in Chile has been illegal in all circumstances—even where the life of the pregnant woman is at stake—since 1989. Notwithstanding the penal code provisions, an astounding number of women every year risk illegal and therefore generally unsafe abortions, reflecting a general inability of women to control their fertility by other means."²

"Abortion has constituted a crime in Chile since 1874. The 1874 penal code, still in force, prohibits abortion in all cases. In 1931, a national health law (Código Sanitario) gave doctors the possibility to provide abortions, without criminal penalties for the doctor or the woman, where necessary to save the pregnant woman's health or life (so-called "therapeutic abortion.") According to this law, a woman needed the consent of two doctors to obtain a non-punishable abortion. In 1989, President Pinochet annulled this statutory exception to the general illegality of abortion as one of his last acts in office. Consequently, the national health law now prohibits abortion in all circumstances."³

INTRODUCING THE FILM

A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize 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 *7 Weeks*:

Camila is a young dance student. She has a committed boyfriend and supporting family, but when she discovers she is pregnant, all that love and encouragement become a burden. Her boyfriend is delighted and can't wait to get married and start a family; while her family is already dreaming of nursery rooms. But has anybody asked her if she wants to become a mother? Camila will have to set other people's expectations aside and make her own decision, no matter how difficult.



- From the information you researched about abortion laws in Chile, how do you think the plot will unfold for Camila?
- From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film? From this same text, try to identify the main elements from the film's plot and the socio-political background to the film.
- Do you think that the film will be politically charged? If so, why?
- How do the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- Can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about just from the marketing materials (i.e. trailer, poster, and still images)? In what ways does the marketing material differ from larger commercial productions?

¹ "How Chile Ended its Draconian Ban on Abortion," The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/01/opinion/chile-abortion-ban.html>

² "Abortion: Chile" Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/women/abortion/chile.html>

³ Ibid.

AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- Analyze the opening shot of the film. What does it tell you about Camila's character? What aspects of the **mise-en-scène**⁴ give you information about her? Connect what you find in the mise-en-scène to the major theme(s) that emerge from the narrative.
- What do the close up and medium shots of the different characters aim to portray? What can you uncover from the characters' emotions from these shots? Do these emotions vary throughout the narrative? Cite specific scenes in your answer and connect them to the plot.
- Analyze the scene where Camila tells Simón that her period is late. How is it filmed? What effect do the close-ups have on the viewer? Do you believe that the scene's cinematography is a plot device that makes an important point about the film?
- Think about the scenes in the dance studio. How are they filmed? Where does the camera linger and why does it stay there? What connections can you draw from the mise-en-scène in the dance sequences with the larger themes in the film?
- How does **diegetic**⁵ music dramatize and build suspense in the viewer? Choose two specific scenes where we hear diegetic music and explain what effect it has on the viewer. How does the music set the tone for the scene?
- How does the film build up suspense in the final third act? How do the filmmakers let you know that Camila is getting an abortion? Analyze different elements of filmmaking to support your answer (set design, dialogue, acting, lighting, placement of the camera, etc.)
- How do you know that Camila never wanted to be a mother in the first place? Pick two scenes from the movie and analyze how the viewer knows she feels differently than those around her. Discuss body language, facial expression, and acting in your answer.
- The color red seems to pervade the movie. Analyze two scenes where you see a red color palette and explore what the color red symbolizes in the context of the movie's themes.
- Pick another symbol prevalent throughout the movie and analyze its meaning in the context of Chile's history of abortion laws.
- Why do you think the filmmakers decided to open the film with a shot from the film's ending? What is the significance of that shot? Do you think it makes sense from a cinematographic standpoint?



⁴ "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."
"Term Index." The Columbia Film Language Glossary. <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/>

⁵ "Diegetic sound is any sound that emanates from the story (or narrative) world of a film, which is referred to in film studies as diegesis. Diegetic sound can include everything from the voices of characters to the sounds of objects or music coming from a radio or an instrument--anything that exists in the story world." *Columbia Film Glossary*.

NARRATIVE

- ❑ At the beginning of the film, Simón and Camila talk about how wonderful it would be to own a small cat. Why is this conversation relevant to the plot? How does it highlight and foreshadow other themes of the film? Why do you think Camila is willing to have a cat, but not a baby?
- ❑ How is Simón first introduced to the audience? How would you describe his personality and values? Does his character develop as the narrative moves forward? If so, in what ways does Simón change?
- ❑ How would you characterize the relationship between Simón and Camila at the start of the movie? How does it develop? Do you think it's a healthy relationship? Why or why not?
- ❑ Why do all the dancers congratulate Camila once they know she's pregnant? Analyze that scene and notice Camila's facial expression. Do you think the response would be the same if Camila's situation happened in the United States? Why or why not? What does being a mother symbolize for the other dancers, as they are female as well?
- ❑ Think about the relationship between Camila and her mother. Why do you think Camila's mother responds so negatively when Camila tells her she wants an abortion? Do you think Camila's mother supports her? Do you think Camila's mother develops as a character? What role do mothers play in their daughters' pregnancies? How does Camila's mother age, and the Chilean society that she was raised in, affect her thinking?
- ❑ Why do you think the filmmakers decided to film Camila's family without a father? What could that decision symbolize?
- ❑ Do you think Camila was right to get an abortion? Do you think Simón is right to be angry with her? Do you think Simón acted fairly? Why or why not?
- ❑ Analyze how Camila changes after her abortion. How would you describe her facial expression? Happy? Or sad? Why is her hair shorter? What do you think that haircut symbolizes?



THEMES

- ❑ Did you have any biased opinions about abortion before watching the film? If so, what were they?
- ❑ How, do you think, people's upbringing and environment influence their opinion on abortion? Think about your own family.
- ❑ Has your mind changed after seeing the movie? Why or why not?
- ❑ Do you think this film will change the minds of people who are against abortion? Why or why not? What devices does the film employ to illustrate its point?
- ❑ Camila appears to be a vegetarian and diet seems to play a big role in the film. Analyze scenes where the characters are eating and think about what eating may symbolize in the movie, as well as how diet plays a role in the themes of abortion and pregnancy.
- ❑ Analyze how Camila's pregnancy becomes the affair of others -- members of her family, fellow dancers at university, Simón's own family. How does this affect Camila? Analyze two scenes where you notice other people appropriating Camila's pregnancy. What do you think the filmmakers are trying to say about the experience of pregnancy? Do you think that women's bodies are often used as totems of public conversation? Consider other public debates, for instance, contraception.
- ❑ How does the film show that getting an abortion is emotionally painful? How does it emotionally hurt Camila to do it?
- ❑ How do you think the film stands on the abortion debate? Do you think the film demonstrates a nuanced message on abortion? Why or why not?
- ❑ Do you think religion plays a role on people's mind at the time of thinking abortion? Or society?
- ❑ Can you point to any large-scale socioeconomic factors that led Camila to get an abortion?

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THEMES (*continued*)

- ❑ One of the most important issues that the movie raises is the problem with making abortion illegal (remember that during this time abortion was still banned in Chile). What role does the law play in the movie? Do you think the response to Camila's decision would be as scrutinized by other characters if abortion was legal at the time? Do you think Camila would have said something earlier? Does legalization get rid of taboos? Do you think that taboos persist for a long time, or are they eradicated easily? What about people who grew up stigmatizing abortion?
- ❑ How do you view this film in the context of current issues occurring in the United States? Unlike Chile, abortion is a constitutional right in the United States, although this right is being suppressed in some States.^{6,7} Do you think Camila's situation would have been different if she were American? What does this make you realize about abortion laws in different countries?
- ❑ How do you think United States politics have affected abortion policies in Latin America? Is it a matter of politics, religion, socioeconomic circumstances, or maybe all of them?



⁶ "Abortion laws in the US: Here are the states pushing to restrict access," CNN. Eric Lavenon <https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/16/politics/states-abortion-laws/index.html>

⁷ Online resource detailing up-to-date abortion laws in every U.S. state: https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/overview-abortion-laws?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIv_x_dbt4wIVCp6fCh0mwgtPEAYASAAEgIz9_D_BwE

