

STUDY GUIDE



THIS IS CRISTINA (ELLA ES CRISTINA)

A film by GONZALO MAZA
CHILE / 2018 / 82 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.

“While both men and women cultivate close relationships, the dynamics of these relationships appear to be quite different. A study published in *Adaptive Human Behavior and Physiology* sheds light on the differences between men’s and women’s romantic relationships and best friendships.

Forming close bonds with others is an integral part of being human. From an evolutionary standpoint, people need secure and supportive relationships to survive and to reproduce. Be it a romantic relationship or a close friendship, there are certain attributes that characterize intimate relationships.

The dynamics of male and female friendships were quite different. Women’s friendships were most intimate when they and their best friends were most similar in terms of things that seemed to affect the quality of the relationship itself, such as education, humor, and happiness. Men’s friendships were most intimate when they and their best friends were most similar in ways that affect involvement in social activities, such as finances, outgoingness, and social connection.”¹

- ☐ Based on the background information, what themes do you think the film will explore?

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 *This Is Cristina*:

Frances Ha is called Cristina in this Chilean generational comedy produced by Salma Hayek and directed by Gonzalo Maza, screenwriter of *A Fantastic Woman* and *Gloria*. Maza is renowned as one of the great screenwriters of Latin American cinema.

Cristina and Susana have been best friends since high school. But now, at over 30 years of age, they are getting a wake-up call. Cristina has just gone through a divorce and is not prepared for her new bachelorhood, while Susana returns to live at her mother’s house. When the women fight and drift, they must deal with a long list of selfish, self-centered, and egotistical men on their own.

With beautiful black and white cinematography inspired by the films of John Cassavetes and Jim Jarmusch, which Maza has cited as references, *This is Cristina* makes clear that Maza is as talented a director as he is a screenwriter.



- ☐ From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film?
- ☐ From this same text, try to identify the main elements of the film. Is it the plot or the characters? Explain why you believe so.
- ☐ 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)?

¹ Male and female friendships are maintained by different psychological dynamics, study finds. Beth Ellwood. April 27th, 2021. *Social Psychology*. <https://www.psypost.org/2021/04/male-and-female-friendships-are-maintained-by-different-psychological-dynamics-study-finds-60584>

AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ What effect did the black and white cinematography have on you as you watched the film? What do you think was the director's purpose for choosing this style?
- ❑ The director cites John Cassavetes and Jim Jarmusch influence for his black and white cinematography. What about these two filmmakers can you recognize in Maza's film?
- ❑ Throughout the movie non-diegetic sounds ² plays a large role. What tone or mood does this effect set on the experiences of the two protagonists? Does it add to the narrative, or the character development of the film? In what way?
- ❑ Try to think about two or three shots that really spoke to you; what about them is significant? Why do they stick out in your mind?
- ❑ In the opening and closing scenes, the camera shows images of the stairways of one of the apartments. What meaning do you think these shots have? Is it the same meaning for both shots?



² Non-diegetic sound is sound whose origin is from outside the story world. Voice-overs are typically non-diegetic since the narration does not appear in the film's story world. Usually, the music soundtrack of a film is non-diegetic." "Term Index." The Columbia Film Language Glossary. <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/>

NARRATIVE

- ❑ Cristina and Susana are best friends, yet they show many differences throughout the film. What are two large differences and/or similarities that you see in them? What is each of their character development like?
- ❑ The depiction of urban life is seen throughout the film, how does this add to the film? What effect does it have on the viewers?
- ❑ Why do you think that the storyline involves both friends getting involved with self-centered, egotistical men? Do you think that the situation reflects what happens often in that generation?
- ❑ What role do you think Luciana has in the film? How does her character add to possible themes of the film? For example, what it might be like for women in a patriarchal society?
- ❑ How does Susana's character develop? Think about her caring for the dogs.
- ❑ When Cristina was in her acting workshop, Romulo mentioned how everything must be political? What do you think about this statement? Think about themes that were mentioned in the film like gender issues and Machismo.
- ❑ Throughout the film, there are many bicycles, what meaning do you think it has besides the death of their friend. Does it serve as a reminder of her life or a way to connect Susana and Cristina?
- ❑ Reflect on the scene where Cristina goes to a show that includes people performing naked with what appears to be white paint over their bodies. What do you think of this scene? Does it relate to the life of Cristina and Susana? What was your interpretation of the scene?



THEMES

- ❑ Do you think that the movie does a good job portraying a generation of a young urban and Chilean women struggling and fighting for respect and recognition from themselves and others?
- ❑ How does the fact that the movie is in black and white reflect the experiences that Cristina wishes to forget?
- ❑ What differences do you notice between Susana's way of thinking and her fathers'? What about Cristina and her mother? What does this tell you about the differences between both generations?
- ❑ What message does the film send about female friendship and companionship vs. romantic relationships?

