

 PRAGDA | SPANISH FILM CLUB

DISCUSSION GUIDE



A FILM ABOUT COUPLES (UNA PELICULA SOBRE PAREJAS)

A film by NATALIA CABRAL & ORIOL ESTRADA

Dominican Republic / 2021 / 89 min
Spanish with English subtitles

BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before watching a film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country that film comes from. Learning about the filmmaker is also a relevant way to gain insight on the context in which the film was produced. You can learn more about Natalia Cabral and Oriol Estrada at <https://pragda.com/film/a-film-about-couples/>.

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's marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this synopsis for *A Film About Couples*:

Directed by *Miriam Lies'* award-winning team, Natalia Cabral & Oriol Estrada, *A Film About Couples* is equal parts a candid exposition of the cinematic industry and a joyful exploration of marriage.

Natalia and Oriol are a couple of filmmakers in their thirties who have a little daughter named Lia. One day, they receive an offer to direct a documentary and they decide to make a film about couples in love. Natalia and Oriol interview many couples, always wanting to know how they get along and what their most typical problems are. But as filming progresses, wounds from their own relationship begin to open up, fights and doubts seem to be endless. But finishing the film will be their opportunity to reformulate their love for each other and their love for cinema.

- From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film?
From this same text, try to identify the main events of the film's plot and the socio-political context of the film.
- Do you think that the film will have a political message? Cite specific language from the synopsis to support your answer.
- How do the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- Viewing the marketing materials alone (i.e., trailer, poster, and still images available at <https://pragda.com/film/a-film-about-couples/>) without the aid of the synopsis, can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

NARRATIVE

- Analyze and reflect on the relationship between Natalia and Oriol. How does it evolve throughout the film?
- *A Film About Couples* begins with the two protagonists screening their newest film. The audience's reaction seemed underwhelming, and the couple discusses their discontentment for the lack of people in the theatre. How does their philosophy regarding screenings change by the end of the film?
- A large portion of the film's beginning revolves around the pre-production phase of the couple's next project. What are the various processes that one must go through when starting a film? What issues arise?
- As the film progresses, Natalia and Oriol face many issues affecting their relationship. What are the reasons they fight? How do they resolve their conflicts?
- In *A Film About Couples*, Natalia and Oriol blend fiction and documentary as they film their newest feature. To what extent is this a fiction feature? To what extent is it a documentary?
- Throughout the film, the audience is exposed to various moments of both intimacy and arguments. How honest are these moments? Are they natural occurrences that feed its documentary status, or are they staged moments that develop the film's narrative plots? Provide specific examples from the film.
- What is the role of the interviewees throughout the film? How do their relationships interact with that of the directors? Do their testimonies advance the narrative?
- As the film ends, the credits present the names of the two directors in a circular formation. What is the reasoning for this? What moment in the film does it respond to?
- The film begins and ends in the same way: a screening of their newest film in an almost empty theatre. Why did they choose to end their film in this manner? What commentary does it make on their status as both a couple and filmmakers?



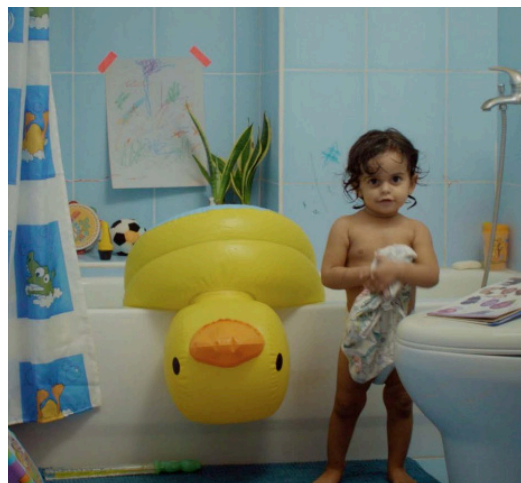
CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

- One of the most striking visual elements of *A Film About Couples* is its small aspect ratio. What was the reasoning behind its use? What effect does it have?
- Describe the color palette of this film. How does it set the mood and tone?
- Describe the use of dialogue in *A Film About Couples*. How does it stylistically compare to other films? Does it feel organic?
- Analyze the use of sound within *A Film About Couples*. Although the film primarily consists of diegetic sound there are occasional moments in which a recurring non-diegetic theme is used. What are some of the moments in which it is used? Why is it used in these scenes?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES *continued*

- Throughout the film, cameras and other filmmaking equipment can be seen in many different shots when the directors are interviewing couples. This element is relatively uncommon in documentary filmmaking. Why did they choose to bring attention to the technical aspects of filmmaking?
- How does the documentary-narrative hybrid interact with the viewer's perception? In what ways does it help to present a story while also documenting the facets of various relationships?
- The final shot of the film is a static long take of the couple's child playing alone in the bathroom. This final shot shifts the focal point away from Natalia and Oriol after following their relationship for the entire film. Was there any reasoning behind the use of this shot. How does this shot compare to the rest of the cinematography within the film.



THEMES

- The film's title, *A Film About Couples*, not only refers to the documentary that Natalia and Oriol are making, but it also refers to the project as a whole. Explore the greater significance to this title.
- *A Film About Couples* directly addresses romantic relationships as the primary theme of the film. What commentary does the film make on couples? What are the various elements of relationships that Natalia and Oriol explore?
- Besides the primary theme regarding couples, what other themes play pivotal roles in the documentary? How are these themes depicted?
- *A Film About Couples* delves into the complexities of intimacy and vulnerability within couples, highlighting the importance of trust and emotional connection. How do Natalia and Oriol learn to open to one another?
- Alongside their struggles related to their relationship, Natalia and Oriol also struggle with the creative process of filmmaking. What are some of the difficulties that come with filmmaking? Consider the various stages of production including before and after filming.
- Discuss the dynamics of gender roles and expectations within couples. How do Natalia and Oriol challenge traditional norms and emphasize equality, respect, and shared responsibilities?
- Approximately thirty-eight minutes into the film, Natalia and Oriol review footage filmed in an outdoor market. Although they acknowledge that the footage does not correlate with couples, they comment on how it would be well accepted in Europe and in festivals. What makes a film a "festival film"? Why would Natalia and Oriol want to participate in festivals?
- How does the lack of communication between Natalia and Oriol lead to the stagnation of their relationship. What does the couple learn about the importance of effective dialogue and active listening in maintaining a healthy relationship?
- *A Film About Couples* examines the challenges and rewards of intercultural relationships as Oriol and Natalia not only come from different backgrounds, but also work in a foreign nation. What are some of these challenges and rewards?
- The film explores the delicate balance between individual aspirations and compromises necessary for a successful partnership. As Oriol and Natalia learn to navigate their own lives, what sacrifices must they make?