

# Film critique

Psychology



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Cultural Psychology: “ Paris is Burning” (1990) Cultural Psychology: “ Paris is burning” (1990) A number of movies and documentaries have explored concepts related to cultural psychology that define and shape human behavior in the society. Cultural psychology examines the behavioral and psychological tendencies that constitute a culture. Cultural traditions and social interactions determine the behavior and expressions of people and their relations in the society (Matsumoto and Juang, 2012). “ Paris is burning” is an acclaimed 1990 documentary that depicts several concepts of cultural psychology through its themes and plot. The main themes of the film relevant to the study of cultural psychology include gender roles, femininity, masculinity, sexuality, social class, psychological distress, and social exclusion.

The themes in “ Paris is burning” illustrate, enhance, and contradict lessons from readings and lectures in class. The documentary idealizes femininity, masculinity and queerness, which reinforce gender roles assigned in the society (Kitayama and Cohen, 2010). It illustrates the challenges gay men and transgendered women faced in their everyday lives in New York City nightlife. Some of the men dressed as women, while some women assumed masculine roles in order to coexist in the society. Drag queens symbolized the gay liberation movement, and some viewers may see this psychological influence as a mockery of women. The behavior of the drag queens in the documentary contradicts the concept of masculinity and femininity.

The documentary portrays the gender system as a collection of gender and sexual subjectivities that surpass the basic concept of femininity and masculinity. The movie contradicts class readings in the way that members of the ‘ houses’ in the movie choose to identify with a certain gender

category. The gender organization totally disintegrates from hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality in the way that people have the ability to choose gender and sexual identities (Nascimento, 2010). Even so, it enhances class readings because the gender system expressly defines the role of members in the house in terms of sexual orientation. In this case, the movie configures gender roles socially, rather than biologically. For instance, house parents guide their children, house mothers cook and clean, while house fathers mentor their ‘ children’ and serve as authority figures.

The movie depicts the effect of cultural psychology on gay and transgender people. The movie challenges the myths of gender and sexuality because instead of focusing on cultural and social behavior of reproduction, it identifies with surface aesthetics. In essence, the clothing and make-up one puts on determines masculinity and femininity. For example, a scene in the documentary depicts a man walking into the house dressed as a woman, while a woman walks in dressed as a man (Coles, n. d). Astonishingly, they swap their bags at the checkpoint because of the resultant confusion that their newly assumed gender roles would cause. The class readings and lecture emphasize on social narratives of family and reproduction, but the documentary only serves patriarchal interests, which go against feminine and masculine identity.

“ Paris is burning” is an exhilarating documentary that presents a subculture with rules and regulations, which define the effect of cultural psychology. It is refreshing to see how people are happy in their social confines, rather than the traditional precincts of society. The documentary is useful for scholars in cultural psychology because of its relevant themes that touch on gender roles, femininity, masculinity, sexuality, social class, psychological distress, <https://assignbuster.com/film-critique/>

and social exclusion. In relation to class discussion, it is evident that the recurrence of actions results in stabilization, which eventually results in naturalness of the behavior of a specific group.

#### References

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Paris is Burning. Movie. YouTube.

Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWuzfleTFAQ>