

Leni Riefenstahl, the Nazi Party and the Female Gaze

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ABSTRACT

The female gaze pervades Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 film, *Triumph of the Will*, creating a blueprint for modern propaganda based on appealing to women and reinforcing gender stereotypes.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Leni Riefenstahl used her female perspective when directing *Triumph of the Will* to appeal to women while artfully reinforcing heteronormative Nazi standards that appealed to men. The 1935 Nuremberg rally film has now become the blueprint for fascist and authoritarian imagery, inspiring inverse artistic styles at the time in Frank Capra's *Why We Fight*. Riefenstahl's unique female gaze pervades *Triumph of The Will*, which rapidly became the first globally accessible view of Nazism during the early 1930s and successfully elevated the Nazi Party to "an almost God-like stature" in the eyes of Germans along with the rest of the world (Beinstein, 2017). This essay analyzes director Riefenstahl's female gaze, her use of gendered perspective and the effect it had on the rise of Nazi power. Ultimately, Riefenstahl's blueprint for propaganda, which is used today, relies upon reinforcing gender stereotypes.

METHOD(S)

In addition to researching the 1935 Nuremberg Rally and Leni Riefenstahl's complex life and style, I analyzed Riefenstahl and Capra's work using Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema* as a guide to understanding the differences between their methods and perspectives.

REFERENCES

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When analyzing *Triumph of the Will*, it becomes apparent that part of its power is rooted in reinforcing gender stereotypes. Propaganda preys upon fear. *Triumph of the Will* showed women images, through a lens of the female gaze, that triggered a societal-reinforced stereotype: "I need a strong man to protect me." At the same time, Riefenstahl effectively switched to images that inspired men: "I want to be part of the Nazi Party so that I can be powerful enough to protect women, children and my country." Effective use of the female/male gaze is a critical piece of the power of propaganda.

