

Critical Analysis Essay Example

HEADING

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English 101

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Mrs. Jenkins

What Is Cool?

TITLE

INTRO

The party is one of the most well-known social events across all cultures. Once reserved for celebrating birthdays, holidays, and other specific occasions, the modern party has grown beyond those limits, often sprouting up without singular intent or reason. Parties are a hub for social interaction among youths and have naturally been a space of uncertainty as attendees attempt to both "have fun" and "be cool." While the instructional video *Show Off! How To Be Cool At Parties* engages with some decidedly uncool ideas, it presents the idea of "coolness" as attainable, and grounds the archetype of the "Cool Person at the Party" within historical contexts.

SUMMARY

Show Off! How To Be Cool At Parties (Stunts, Tricks and Gags to Amaze Your Friends) is an instructional video released on VHS in 1986. Nearly a half-hour long, the video stars Malcolm-Jamal Warner, best known for his role on *The Cosby Show*, and a cast of relatively unknown actors and comedians as they attempt to instruct the viewer on the fine art of being cool around other people. Despite the central thesis of the video, much of its material is uncool, impractical, or downright strange. For example, there is some suspension of disbelief that even young children of the 1980s would find coolness in pretending to be attacked by a dog or playing the air piano.

Through a modern lens, *Show Off!* possesses a toothlessness, but this may be a direct response to the events of its time. According to Haynes Johnson of the *Washington Post*, 1986 was "A Year of National Shocks," a time when "events seemed out of control." In the waning years of the Cold War, 1986 was underlined by two major disasters: the failed launch of the Space Shuttle *Challenger* in January and the nuclear explosion at Chernobyl in April. These events sowed doubt about global technologies and fear in the systems and infrastructure designed to care for us. Retreating to the mundanities of nose whistling and "catching" an invisible ball in a paper bag were as much about staying grounded as they were maintaining a sense of control.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Show Off! How To Be Cool At Parties* is an instructional video that acts as a direct response to politics and trauma of the time through the social archetype of the cool person at a party. Although it presents a hazy idea of what "coolness" could look like, the video begs the opposite question: How does one become uncool at parties? Warner's introduction to the video includes the rule of having fun, not for one's own sake, but to ensure that one's friends are having fun. Perhaps the true turning point of "cool" is thinking outward.

BODY

Include:

- your opinion about the piece
- evaluation of author's success in achieving their goal
- larger idea or argument within the text

Sample Critical Paper

Ian Bruce



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