DVD REVIEW

Side effects

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“One pill can change your life”, or so they say . . .

The film Side Effects was on my must-see movie list, and as all things go lately, time to sit and watch DVDs just was not available due to work commitments and the like. As I sauntered into a colleague of mine’s office one morning I happened to see this particular DVD lying on her table. I snapped it up and told her that I have to watch it and out of her office I went. I could not wait to get home, and as it was a Friday I knew that it was movie time! It is rather a strange phenomenon how one has, at face value, certain ideas about a film and the storyline contained in it, and when one views it one’s ideas prove to be quite wrong. With this being said I want to mention that DVD titles might often at times be misleading, though not in the bad sense of the word.

The film portrays the life of Emily Taylor (played by Rooney Mara), a married woman who develops severe depression as a result of her husband Martin Taylor’s
(played by Channing Tatum) incarceration for insider trading. Her posh high-flyer life is suddenly taken away from her due to her husband’s imprisonment, and although Martin is released from prison and reunited with her, Emily continues to struggle with depression and suicidal ideas and plans. Following a botched suicide attempt she is taken to a hospital’s emergency room where Dr Jonathan Banks (played by Jude Law), a psychiatrist has a consult with her. Dr Banks starts treating Emily and has regular follow-up sessions with her. He prescribes a new experimental psychiatric drug by the name of ‘Ablixa’. Whilst on this medication Emily stabs her husband Martin to death in what is held forth in her defence as a sleep-walking state, an apparent side effect of Ablixa. A plea-bargain is reached between the prosecutor and Emily’s defence lawyer and she is admitted to a mental institution for a period of confinement and treatment.

Dr Banks’ professional status suffers as a result of Emily’s case and he is soon asked to leave the practice in which he was a partner. With his professional integrity in question and his image damaged, Dr Banks finds that he is unable to accept any wrong-doing on his part, and he begins to investigate Emily and her case anew. This is where the storyline of the film changes from the predictable to the unpredictable and many new twists and turns in the storyline is portrayed. What happens following the start of Dr Banks’ own investigation will not be divulged here as it is up to you to figure out how this bizarre and intriguing film develops and ends.

It is estimated that more than twenty percent of the American population is taking some form of mood and mind-altering drug at present, and in the United States the psychiatric drug industry amounts sales of many billions of dollars annually. With mental illness as the world’s leading cause of impairment and disability the astounding sales figures are no wonder, although recent developments or rather lack thereof in the psychiatric drug industry research efforts, especially neuroscience-related research, is causing great concern amongst the psychiatric fraternity. It would appear that the psychiatric drug industry, as is the case with many practicing psychiatrists, is stuck in the old-school view of psychiatric disorders. According to Connecticut psychotherapist and author Gary Greenberg...one pharmaceutical giant after another...has shrunk or shuttered its neuroscience research facilities...Greenberg also noted that...clinical trials have been halted, lines of research abandoned, and the new drug pipeline has been allowed to run dry...

Side Effects is a very interesting and rather intriguing film to view, and as psychologists reviewing the film we were left with a lot of questions and introspection as to our own methods of clinical practice and views pertaining to psychiatric and psychological difficulties and disorders. The film is a must-see, not only for its entertainment value, but also because it challenges the viewer on many levels with regards to the topic of mental health and psychiatric treatment.
Special Note: We invite all readers of New Voices in Psychology to visit the website – www.newvoicesinpsychology.co.za – and make predictions and comments as to what you deem the outcome/ending of the movie to be. The first eight readers to make comments will receive a complimentary copy of Side Effects, courtesy of Ster-Kinekor and the New Voices in the Psychology editorial team.

Title: Side effects  
Running Time: 102 minutes  
Presented by: Endgame Entertainment/Filmnation Entertainment  
Written by: Scott Z. Burns  
Directed by: Steven Soderbergh  
Distributor: Ster-Kinekor Entertainment  
Date of Release: 2013 © Filmnation Entertainment

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Franco Pierre Visser is a senior clinical psychologist and lecturer in the Psychology Department at the Unisa. He specialises in Forensic and Neuropsychology and is regarded as one of the country’s foremost psychological experts in both criminal and civil matters and as such has worked on a number of high-profile matters.

Nikki Themistocleous is a senior clinical psychologist and lecturer at the Psychology Department at the Unisa. She specialises in psychopathology and psychological assessment. Nikki also has a private practice in Johannesburg where she predominantly focuses on forensic psychology, with a particular interest in divorce matters, adult and family psychotherapy, and play therapy.