



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 9, 2013

“Side Effects”: Dramatic Film About a Mind-altering Drug

Side Effects is a film that encapsulates the present-day world’s increasing reliance on the pharmaceutical industry. It is a satirical indictment of the prescription drug culture that has permeated the past few decades and provides a warning to those who are allured by the promised benefits of such medicines. And it poses a serious question: Do psychotropic drugs do more harm than good?

The plot of *Side Effects* centers around a fictional drug called Ablixa. The movie’s marketing campaign includes a website for the fictitious anti-depressant with a commercial wherein a reputable physician, played by Jude Law — star in this film — recommends Ablixa while a series of both sad and happy scenes are displayed for viewers to the tune of new-age music one typically finds in these sorts of ads. Just before the commercial ends, a calm voice recites a list of warnings and numerous possible side-effects of the medication, many of which are worse than the condition being treated. Sound familiar?



As the movie opens, we are introduced to a young New Yorker named Emily Taylor (Rooney Mara), who is plagued by depression when her husband, Martin, (Channing Tatum) returns home after a four-year stint in prison for insider trading.

Martin is naturally concerned by his wife’s condition and brings her to an emergency room where he meets Dr. Jonathan Banks (Jude Law), a psychiatrist who takes Emily on as a private patient and treats her with a gamut of psychotropic drugs like Prozac.

None of the medications seems to be doing the trick however, prompting Emily’s former therapist Dr. Victoria Siebert (Catherine Zeta-Jones) to recommend that Dr. Banks prescribe the marvelous new anti-depressant Ablixa for Emily.

And on Ablixa, Emily seems to miraculously begin to snap out of her depression. She is smiling again and able to enjoy the things that had previously wracked her with a sense of discomfort and hopelessness. She is becoming the wife she wanted to be for her husband and learning to love her life again.

Ominously, however, some strange side effects become noticeable. For example, Emily begins to sleepwalk and even prepare meals in her sleep, setting the table for three — herself, Martin, and Madeline, the child she lost through miscarriage.



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However, these odd side effects seem to be a small price to pay, given the improvements Ablixa has made in Emily's life.

A significant event, however, changes everything. A major character is killed, and a question arises as to who is the killer. Suddenly no one is to be trusted, and the supposedly miraculous psychotropic drug now appears nightmarish.

Side Effects is unpredictable and thrilling, with some impressive twists that have stunned critics. It sheds light on an issue that has of late been a significant backdrop of some major news stories: Is there a connection between psychotropic drugs play and violent behavior?

Recently, *The New American* [questioned](#) whether psychotropic drugs could have been a factor in the Sandy Hook shootings. Friends and family of alleged shooter Adam Lanza contend that he was taking prescription medications, but toxicology reports have yet to be released.

Throughout the last decade, a number of notorious school shooters have been found to be either on or withdrawing from antidepressants, known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI), including Columbine shooter Eric Harris, who was taking the powerful Luvox; Jeffrey Weise, who killed 10 students at Red Lake High School while on Prozac; and Kip Kinkel, who, during Prozac withdrawal, killed his parents and then went on a shooting spree at his high school.

"In virtually every mass school shooting during the past 15 years, the shooter has been on or in withdrawal from psychiatric drugs," writes Lawrence Hunter of the [Social Security Institute](#). "Yet, federal and state governments continue to ignore the connection between psychiatric drugs and murderous violence, preferring instead to exploit these tragedies in an oppressive and unconstitutional power grab to snatch guns away from innocent, law-abiding people."

The connection between psychiatric drugs and violence is not limited to school shootings, but has also been seen in the high-profile cases of John Hinckley, Jr., who attempted to assassinate President Ronald Reagan; and Ted Kaczynski, the "Unabomber," who killed three and injured 23.

Side Effects depicts a clear connection between the use of psychotropic medications and violence. But is the fictional movie's depiction realistic? Real-life psychiatrist Peter Breggin observed in a [Fox News](#) report:

One of the things in the past that we've known about depression is that it very, very rarely leads to violence. It's only been since the advent of these new SSRI drugs that we have murderers, sometimes even mass murderers, taking antidepressant drugs.

Side Effects' focus on such an intense and oft-misunderstood subject by itself makes it a worthwhile choice for moviegoers, particularly those who are already skeptical about the use of psychotropic medications.

The film does an excellent job of toeing some lines without characterizing anyone as either a complete antagonist or protagonist. Dr. Banks, for example, while potentially guilty of medical negligence, seems not to be either a corrupt physician or a puppet of the pharmaceutical companies. The director's use of twists is positively Hitchcockian and will likely keep audiences at the edge of their seats.

Though Tatum, Mara, and Jones all turn in fine performances, Jude Law virtually steals the show as Dr. Banks, evoking a variety of emotions from the audience.

Some moviegoers may be irked by the presence of foul language in the film, as well as sexuality involving mostly married couples.



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Overall, *Side Effects* is refreshingly different from any film that has hit the big screen in a long time. Its plot takes a brave look at mind-altering medications that have gained a significant foothold in today's culture. It's well worth the ticket price, in this reviewer's opinion.



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