

 PRAGDA | SPANISH FILM CLUB

DISCUSSION GUIDE



WITHOUT PRESCRIPTION

A film by JULIANA MAITÉ

Puerto Rico / 2022 / 83 MIN
Spanish with English subtitles

www.PRAGDA.com

BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before watching a film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country that film comes from. Learning about the filmmaker is also a relevant way to gain insight on the context in which the film was produced. You can learn more about Juliana Maité at <https://pragda.com/film/without-prescription/>

INTRODUCING THE FILM

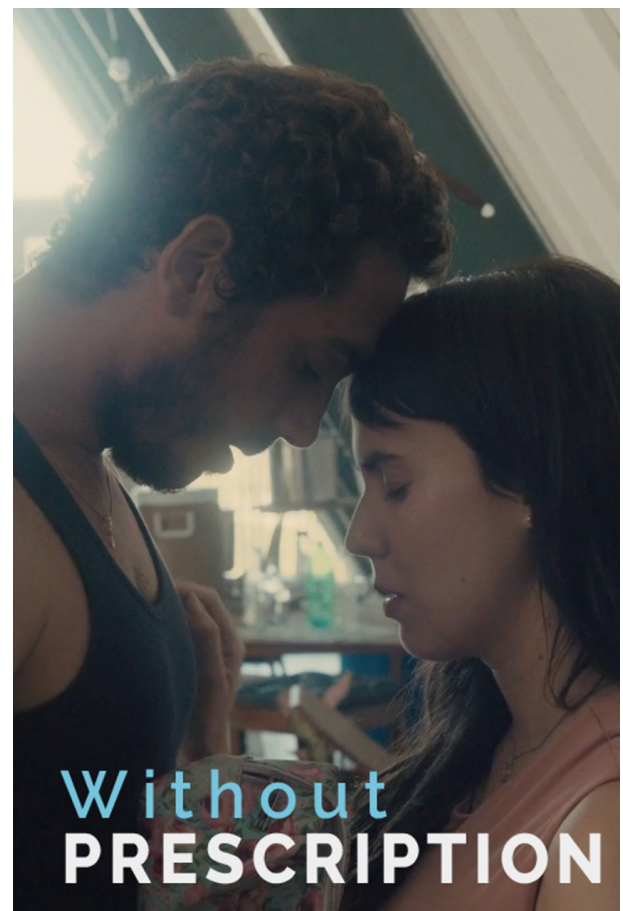
A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film's narrative, genre, style, and key participants in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film's marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this synopsis for *Without Prescription*:

Olivia is getting ready for her family's Christmas Eve party. But her obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) voice in her head, which has been under control for some time, suddenly returns, prompting a desperate search for the pills that have helped her in the past.

The lack of health insurance forces Olivia to reach out to her friend Jessica – whom she met years ago in a mental institution. Jessica introduces her to David, the town's pharmacist's son, who agrees to sell her the pills.

Trapped inside David's apartment by a rainstorm, the two strangers start uncovering truths about each other and begin a healing process that doesn't necessarily involve pills.

- > From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film? From this same text, try to identify the main events of the film's plot and the socio-political context of the film.
- > Do you think that the film will have a political message? Cite specific language from the synopsis to support your answer.
- > How do the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- > Viewing the marketing materials alone (i.e. trailer, poster, and still images available at <https://pragda.com/film/without-prescription/> without the aid of the synopsis, can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

NARRATIVE

- > The onset of Olivia's OCD begins very early in the film and rapidly progresses, despite having gone years since her last spiral. Why do you think it's reappearing at this point in time? What do you think might be her triggers?
- > What's your first impression of Olivia's relationship with her mother Maite? Is she supportive or detrimental to Olivia in her struggles?
- > What does the voice in Olivia's head keep insisting that she do? Why do you think the filmmaker chose this compulsive action in particular? Do you think the action represents a deeper conflict within Olivia?
- > How does the narrative develop Olivia's growing isolation from those around her? What's ironic about the way it utilizes the festive backdrop and its cast of characters to worsen it?
- > Who shows up unexpectedly at David's apartment while Olivia is buying pills? Is this character how you expected them to be? How does this smaller side-character play a major role in plot development?
- > According to Olivia, what was the true reason David sold her the pills? What do you think is the real reason? Why? Where does the scar on David's side come from? What do you think the scar represents?
- > Olivia's relationship with David is transactional at first but grows from there. How is David, in some ways, an even better "medicine" for Olivia than the pills she seeks out? Conversely, how does Olivia have a similar effect on David and his own struggles?
- > What does Olivia give David as she leaves? What's symbolic about it?
- > The last scene shows Olivia back in the bathroom at her mom's house, stopping short of throwing her pills in the trash. She reads a new text messages, and, smiling, rejoins the Christmas Eve party. What can we infer about Olivia's fate beyond the credits based on this scene?

CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

- > How does the diegetic music and sound establish the film's setting in the opening scene?
- > What sound editing techniques do the filmmakers employ to convey Olivia's mental illness?
- > When Olivia and David meet for the first time outside the pharmacy, how do the characters' choreography (positioning) in the frame portray the nature of their dynamic at this point in time? Do you think this directorial choice was deliberate?
- > When Olivia reaches her breaking point in the bathroom, in what ways do the filmmakers use cinematography and editing to build anxiety?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES *continued*

- Reflect on the set design, particularly scenes set in David's apartment. How does the mise-en-scene in David's apartment reflect the themes in the film?
- There is a brief frame with Olivia warming coffee in the microwave, her reflection imposed over the microwave's transparent glass. Describe how the framing and staging of this scene illustrates Olivia's internal struggle.
- How would you describe the cinematography in the film? Is it stylized or more refined? How does it serve the film's themes?

THEMES

- Actress Marietere Vélez, who plays Olivia, also wrote the film and had been previously diagnosed with OCD. With this fact in mind, what do you think was her goal in making this film? How does her casting as the lead character transform the film? Do you think it would be different had they cast someone with no ties to OCD?
- Reflect on the film's Christmastime setting. In what ways does the film utilize the Christmas setting to reflect its themes? In what ways is this "jolly" holiday flipped on its head in regard to Olivia's worsening mental illness?
- The film in some ways acts as a commentary on health insurance accessibility in Puerto Rico. How is Olivia's situation made worse by her healthcare status? Do you think this is a widespread issue within the country?
- The film attempts to shine light on OCD and present its challenges from the perspective of a singular character. What various issues / conversations does the film seek to highlight as it relates to OCD? How are these issues made present in this fictional character study?
- Describe the use of rain as a motif in the film. How is it used as more than a plot device?
- Although it's never stated outright, the film makes apparent that David also suffers from a mental disorder. How would you characterize this illness based on clues provided throughout the film? Why do you think he never sought professional help?
- Both characters allude to no longer asking for help from those around them, a culmination of perceived negligence from their families and peers. What does this imply about the social impact of mental illness?

