

## Review of the Film *Rocks*, by Sarah Gavron, Director

Daniel Acheampong  
University of East London

*Rocks* is a film that tells the story of a young girl, Shola, who is tasked with looking after her little brother as her mother faces challenges with her mental health and leaves the family home. The film follows Shola's — fondly known as Rocks — journey and showcases her unique challenges through the joys of sisterhood. I didn't really have any expectations when going to see the film and was just looking for some light-hearted relaxation from the taxing but rewarding life as a trainee educational psychologist. Little did I know that the very thing I was looking to escape for a moment would bring me back to thinking about my practice as an educational psychologist.

This film was an opportunity to see how the interactions between systems can impact a child's development and life. With Shola struggling to finance her and her brother's upkeep due to her mother's departure, she is forced to truant and find a job at a nail salon. She harnesses her skills in make-up that she honed in the playgrounds of her secondary school to generate an income. With no one at school aware of her struggles at home, she becomes withdrawn, even from those close to her, including her friend Sumaya. Social services are now looming and paying regular visits to the house. Fearing being placed in foster care, she flees her home to go to another friend's house as Sumaya's family don't have room in their home. Struggling with the shame and stigma of her situation she finally confides in her friend, who divulges her story to her parents, and sees Rocks and her brother separated by social services and placed in different homes.

In this film, we are invited into this story of girlhood, friendships that seem to transcend the hardships of life and adolescences. Shola shows great resolve to preserve the relationship she has with her closest friend Sumaya, even when she isn't able to meet her need for shelter and safety. Throughout, Shola has strong attachments that keep her head

above the rising tides of poverty and possible homelessness. This film displays the significance of having people who are available to form strong attachments that we can use as a secure base to tackle and resolve challenging situations. Although this may appear fundamental, many professionals working with young people need to prioritise this and understand the support network of a young person and the accessibility of it as it can be vital in creating the necessary change needed.

One of the best things about this film, and which gives it such power, is that the writers carried out workshops with over 80 young people to develop the scenes and script for the film. The writers adopted narrative techniques such as writing diary entries to get the actors to connect with their characters and think about who they would be. Taking a person-centred approach like this, it's no wonder I felt that the film resonated with me so much as an educational professional. It meant that the views and beliefs of the young people were incorporated into the formation of the characters seen on screen, giving a valuable insight into how their lived experiences shape the characters' way of being.

For educational psychologists, I would suggest this film as a must-watch for understanding the realities of the impact of different events and situations across a young person's entire system and for considering how the issues raised in it might inform our practice. Young people sometimes have no control over the life circumstances handed to them. We can collaborate with others to see how the expectations and challenges between systems such as family, school and local authority services can cause such disruption in the lives of young people and to ensure that young people have the support needed to facilitate change and promote positive outcomes.