

Analysis of Self, Other, and Relationships through Psychological Maneuvers in Lucy Prebble's the Sugar Syndrome

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Abstract:

Playwrights offer insights pertain to the fundamental affairs of the twenty-first century and how relationships might be rethought, and Lucy Prebble is no exception. She is attempting to model a sort of maneuvers to explore self, other, and relationships in her works including *The Sugar Syndrome* (2003). This study aims at depicting psychological maneuvers from various perspectives to interpret new conceptions of self-other relationships. The study starts with an introduction that sheds light on the play's characters and the relationships between them. It also displays the play's main theme, the psychological problems that are common in the contemporary world. Then, the study exposes the concepts of self, other and relationship. Drawing on the theories of self, other and relationship, the study moves further to analyze the relationship between self and other by means of psychological maneuvers. Finally, the study ends with a conclusion that suggests the possibility of the restoration of self and other from their difficult situations.

Keywords: Maneuver, Self, Other, Relationship, Lucy Prebble, *The Sugar Syndrome*

Introduction

The study relies on Lucy Prebble's *The Sugar Syndrome* (2003) in which Prebble introduces the relationships between the three characters Dani, Lewis, and Tim who met in internet chatrooms as well as the character of Dani's mother Jan, who has broken up with her husband. The play traces the relationship between these characters and shows their desire in the contemporary society. Dani is a seventeen-year-old girl who looks after a real relationship with a real man. At first, she befriends Lewis, a lonely boy who doesn't have a girlfriend. Then, she meets Tim, a man in his thirties who thinks Dani as a young boy because of his tendency and his sexual attraction towards boys (Loveridge, 2003). It investigates the way people reinvent or disguise themselves online, and the psychological attitudes to harmful behavior (Curtis, 2020). The play looks deep into several psychological issues that are popular in today's society. In this play, Prebble introduces a new style of writing to explore and shed light on important issues in our time such as alienation and the excessive usage of social media. The play highlights the gloomy side of excessive usage of internet among individuals (Yadav, 2019).

Literature Review

The heart of this study is the concepts of self, other, and relationship which are examined and analyzed through exploring and expressing maneuvers from various perspectives. Self-concept is divided into three basic self-representations: individual self, relational self, and collective self (Brwewer and Gardner, 1996). The formation of otherness is divided into two hierarchical types: Them and Us. It's the result of the rational process by which a controlling in-group ("Us" the self) forms one or many controlled out-group ("Them" other) (Staszak, J. 2008). Concerning relationship, and drawing on social exchange theory, every individual expects something from others. The self is viewed as superior to other and that what makes the relationship fragile (Prentice, 2001). Thus, self is a substantial aspect in the growth of personality. In the field of psychology, it is identified by behaviors and sensations of one's towards himself/herself and by an inside psychological process related to the self's feelings toward others (Wehrle and Fasbender, 2018).

Lucy Prebble

Lucy Prebble is a British playwright and producer who was born in 1980 in Haslemere, Surrey. She was educated and finished her study at Guildford High School. For her college study, she studied English at Sheffield University (Brown, 2019). She wrote poetry, short stories, and plays when she was at college. Though she admitted that her structure was terrible, Prebble won the PMA Award for her first short play *Liquid* in 2002 (Barker, 2009).

In an interview with her, Lucy stated that her love for the arts started when she was a child. She thinks of herself as a knowledgeable girl who reads everything available to her. Her real world is in books, especially literature because she finds her safety in literature as an art that reflects life, specifically the personal one. She admits that she prefers to be with books more than with her family for having fun. Therefore, she finds comfort and relaxing in books. In addition to her love for books, she likes watching TV and playing video games (Harrison-West, 2019).

Psychological Maneuvers in *The Sugar Syndrome*

The play starts with introducing Dani and Lewis chatting with each other while they are in bedrooms. From the beginning of their conversation, they seem that they both seek for the same thing. In the virtual world, it is easier and faster to communicate and explore feelings freely. It is a world where everyone can freely speak about everything, for instance, about sex, a case in which it might be difficult if people speak and reveal their feelings in the actual world. By asking a rhetorical question such as:

Lewis: How will I know it's you? What are you wearing?

Dani: Good question. Dirty yet practical. (Prebble, 1. 1. p. 33 - 34)

Lewis indirectly wants to invite Dani for an actual meeting. He intends to evoke and persuade Dani in order to see her in reality rather than via internet. This is the power of the self (Lewis) over the other (Dani). Because he is a man, Lewis believes that he is superior to Dani because she is a woman who can easily accept his request. Both Dani and Lewis are quickly involved in a practical conversation. Though it is their first meeting, Dani's respond to Lewis's question shows no objection to his involvement in her personal life. According to Pinguart and Sørensen (2000), women are

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considered to be lower and their self is more negative in comparison with men.

The nature of the relationship between Dani and Lewis is presented by the desire of the self to own the other. Dani and Lewis meet in Lewis's bedroom. They interact physically with each other. During their conversations, they both show that they need that physical communication. It serves as a starting point to make many maneuvers between them. Dani's desire for making a sexual relationship which she believes that it will end her depression and feeling of loneliness as socially isolated is failed. Lewis is self-pride who imagines that he can manipulate others. His self-esteem makes him guesses that he is superior to others. He doesn't confess his failure and his manipulative nature. **Dani emphasizes her psychological state of being depressed, alienated and lonely by stating that she feels "bad now"** (Prebble, 2003, p. 38). In accordance to Sharma and Agarwala, (2015), the feeling of the low level of self is linked to a behavioral problems of maladjustment and eating disorder and that is obvious in Dani's state. She is frustrated and psychologically ruined because she knows what Lewis really is. The man whom she supposes as a normal, Lewis is revealed, in the wake of rejection, to have psychotic trends that may run as deep as those of the once-dangerous child-lover, Tim (Wolf, 2003). She is failed to get her first real relationship accomplished.

The fragmentation among family members forces Dani to choose the chatrooms where she can seek to communicate friendly and deeply with others over the internet because it is the only place that she finds herself in and reveals her problems. The internet is the place by which adolescents can freely express what they want and reflect their true selves because they unveil their true identities and show the pureness in their online relationships which they lack in the real world (McNeely, 2009). For Dani, the Internet forms a space of freedom and meaningful contact. Beside her chatting with Lewis, Dani states that she:

Dani: I was chatting to this bloke who thought I was an eleven-year-old boy (Prebble, 2003, p. 38).

She is an alienated individual filled with problems who is unaware to the brutality of the real world. On the contrary, Lewis is aware of the actual world's brutality because he is alarmed when Dani tells him that she is chatting with a man who surmises she is an eleven-year-old boy (Varlami, 2019). He sees that those who live in the virtual world are "some sick fucks" (Prebble, 2003, p. 38). Ironically, he is one of them. He is the predator, the other who believes only in his fake high self-esteem.

In the final maneuverings between Dani and Lewis, Dani believes that Lewis is a psycho because Lewis gets involved in her life and behaves as he owns her. His jealousy is evoked because he perceives a threat that threatens his relationship with Dani. According to DeSteno et al (2006), jealousy is an essential aspect of human social life. Jealousy can be evoked by the existing of the encounter that threatens the self-esteem. It associated with negative emotions and aggressive behaviors which leads to hostile and abusive behavior aimed at relationship partners. As he observes that Tim is threatening his relationship with Dani, Lewis behaves aggressively with Tim and talks harshly with him because he realizes that his attempts to retain Dani are failed. He doesn't accept to be inferior or even equal to Tim. In turn, Dani's opinion about Lewis is obvious:

Dani: Maybe because you're quite obviously a psycho.

Lewis: I was worried. (Prebble, 2. 5. p.104)

Dani becomes furious with Lewis for two reasons: first, because he becomes a parasitical; and second because he goes and threatens Tim the man whom Dani relieved with because Tim is “a nice bloke” (Prebble, 2003, p. 58). She discovers Lewis’ reality as a mental man whom he values himself upon others’ expense and realizes Tim’s state as a good person forced to be positioned as other. This realization stems from Dani’s belief that her state and Tim’s are similar. They both alienated socially and psychologically, oppressed, and maladaptive. In this respect, Dani is able to distinguish between the virtual world and the actual one and also becomes in a good status to decide whom to choose, Lewis, the psycho one whom she knew through the internet or Tim, the man whom she starts to know also via internet.

Similarly, as Dani began her relationship with Lewis on the chatroom, her relationship with Tim also starts in the virtual world. He thinks Dani as an eleven years old boy (Jordan, 2015). Dani manages a meeting with him, as she did with Lewis, though Tim is unrealizable that Dani is in fact an adolescent girl. Tim is surprised to discover that the boy with whom he was chatting is actually an adolescent girl and becomes defensive since he thinks that this confrontation might be a snare. As soon as his apprehensions are calmed, both start bonding; they converse openly and directly about the dark sides of their actual life (Varlami, 2019). Each of them is and is not a disappointment to the other. Tim’s expectation and preference to meet a boy instead of a girl leads to many psychological questions of men like Tim’s state such as the psychological oppression by others, social victimization, and the lack of empathy. He hopes for a prepubertal boy but once he confronts with Dani, he confesses he's rather relieved that Dani is not the answer to his fantasy:

Dani: I’m a bit of a disappointment, I bet?

Tim: (*a deep breath*) Actually. I’m rather relieved. (Prebble, 1. 3. p. 44)

On the other side, Dani expects a freakshow sloppy old bloke and instead is faced by an elegant, intelligent former classics teacher in his thirties. Her pretending as a boy and hiding her authentic identity is also highly important. It reflects how relationships are complicated in twenty first century. Mutually tricked, they advance from being a partial frustration to each other to being a special form of support (Talor, 2003).

Unlike Dani’s first meeting with Lewis whose first meeting starts with a dirty question:

Tim: Do you like football? Who are your favourite players?

Dani: I don’t like football. I’m always in goal. (Prebble, 1. 2. p. 39)

Tim’s question seems to be more polite and social than those of Lewis’. This springs from the idea that Lewis knows that he is talking with a girl whereas Tim is talking with a boy. Dani reflects her psychological state as an isolated individual without friends and without a caring family. Her reply: “I’m always in goal” (Prebble, 2003, p. 39) is an indirect rhetorical message of Dani’s state of isolation and alienation. Though Dani has a family but she is alienated because she doesn’t sense that she is protected or cared of. According to Demo, Small, and Williams (1987) individuals, specifically adolescents need caring and appraisal from others, importantly those significant others (parents and close friends). The self is influenced by the nature of the relationship of parent-son/daughter with one another. For instance Dani’s sense of insufficient parental love causes her issues such as frustration, alienation, and eating disorder.

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Throughout her maneuvers with Tim, Dani discovers her hatred towards others by saying:

Dani: If people knew what other people really thought of them, I think they'd kill themselves.

Tim: Are you all right? (Prebble, 1. 2. p. 42).

She reveals her viewpoint to Tim towards her mother as other. She hates her mother but she doesn't reveal that to anyone except Tim. Her psychological state of being isolated and not being cared of makes her confused about the reason behind her hatred to her mother. She doesn't reveal or show her mother that she hates her. This might refer to the self-silencing which refers to the process of keeping parts of oneself out of relationship. It leads to disconnection between self and other. This disconnection activates pathways of mutual influence among psychological, biological, and social processes which finally causes depression, eating disorder, and lose of self (Jack, 2014).

Dani and Tim establish a relationship based on their deteriorated characters - Dani's eating disorder and Tim's guilt-ridden struggles with paedophilia. According to Gorman (2015, p. 4), "This is a play about lost souls and it will stay with people for a couple of days". Prebble wrote it in a very witty way and while it doesn't, in any way, glorify the motif of a paedophile, it does investigate the human condition and it combines that with the condition of an eating disorder. Tim realizes that Dani is suffering and notices her psychological state:

Tim: Are you sick?

Dani: Apparently. (Prebble, 1. 3. p.45)

He notices that Dani's state is obviously not because of meals disorder but a psychological one. Dani also doesn't believe that Tim is a child snatcher. Tim's recognition to Dani's psychological state makes him ask such a question. Tim is the only and first one who observes Dani's state, her deprivation and the psychological need for caring. Their situation is complicated, in the eyes of others they are treated as others and in their view they are oppressed selves. Their honest small talk is a good start of their communication and in the development of their relationship. Dani's and Tim's disclosures to their feelings and thoughts are valuable to their relationship's continuance.

Gradually, Dani and Tim find themselves in varied situations but they feel disconnected from others and are alternately helpless in their battle against their situations. Their opportunity to meet online comes when they both want it, and they embrace the fact that they eventually have someone who perceives and relates to their experiences and feelings. They understand each other and understand what they miss. In their views, life is not worth living without relationships between individuals who have to share their feelings with. Dani's statement "You interest me" (Prebble, 2003, p. 48), explores that she is relieved to be with Tim because he understands what she lacks and what she needs; caring and attention. Tim also finds the person whom he can share his emotions and worth to live with. His reaction, "And life suddenly becomes worth living again"(Prebble, 2003, p. 48) to Dani reflects some kind of progression and change. For the first time, he rejects to be called a pervert as a sign of change. This indicates that Dani has influenced him to rebel against others.

Evidently, companionship or close relationship is an essential way in solving ones problems. Joy et al. (2010) proved that the self is regarded as central to understanding behavior. It is known that everybody has a self that evokes over time. One of the basic factors that evokes the self is the

involvement in close or intimacy relationships. Close relationships are essential to human behavior to get experience. They can play a key role in building and rebuilding social and psychological life. They are intricately associated to the self, the essence of human behavior. So, they deeply and constantly form and reform the self. The inclusion of another individual self is an important way for the self-development (Aron, 2004), as in Dani's view:

Dani: I don't know. We should *get involved*, Tim, *do* some stuff. Do you want to go bowling?

Tim: No, I don't want to go bowling!(Prebble, 2. 1. p.78)

Consequently, Dani decides that her relationship with Tim should develop. She left her mother's house and goes to live in Tim's small house. "It is small and poorly decorated" (Prebble, 2003, p. 76). It is a good decision in Dani's view towards solving her problems and also Tim's as well. They decide to do things such as dancing and eating together as a way of interaction with each other. Their relationship becomes closer than any time before. She tells Tim "There we go. Get any stuff you need" (Prebble, 2003, p. 80) in order to help him get rid of his fears of communicating with others, especially women. While Dani and Tim are interacting with each other, Lewis tries to reach Dani. He shows that Dani is an "absent bitch" (Prebble, 2003, p. 80). It demonstrates his view of Dani as other. In turn, she believes that Lewis is obsessed and psycho:

Dani: God bless him. I think he's a bit obsessed with me. Bit of a geek, that's all. Jealous?

Tim: Desperately. (Prebble, 2. 2. p. 83)

Tim's reaction "Desperately" reflects that he doesn't not only feel jealous of Lewis but also he feels sorry about him. His eventually liberated self makes him feel sympathy about Lewis. Prebble depicts Tim as a perpetrator who endeavors to rescue himself and recreate his own self (Varlami, 2019).

Most individuals have sexual desire and they are attracted and wish to have sex with self or others (Fathi, 2013). Dani's question reflects her wish to fulfill her sexual desires:

Dani: So do you have, you know, a lot of stuff to look at?

Tim: Dani! (Prebble, 2. 2. p. 86)

As with Lewis, Dani seeks to make a physical relationship with Tim. When she enters Tim's bedroom she "seems to be waiting to see if he will re-emerge" (Prebble, 2003, p. 91), which denotes her desire to make a physical relationship with him. Sexual deprivation is one of Dani's psychological problems that she needs to solve. She fails to continue with Lewis because she finds out that he doesn't understand her well. She wants to be with Tim because she realizes that he is the person she was looking for. Tim is an adult wise man who has the capability to help her getting rid of her problems since their problems are somehow similar like their psychological needs of companionship and sexual satisfaction.

Having finally realized the self, Dani and Tim show how they are related with each other. While self-concept refers to the person's belief about his/her self as a unique person, the relational self refers to individuals to whom one feels related with others as a reference to the importance of the relationship (Sedikides et al, 2011). Tim reflects that he is changed because of his relationship with Dani. He emphasizes that he "cleared up" (Prebble, 2003, p. 100) of his past life. He is planning to establish a family along with Dani in the future. Concerning the family that they are planning to establish, Tim

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mentions what to call their kids in the future. It proves that Tim has been changed and he seeks to form a new life. Dani doesn't consider herself as individual. It is the relational self that Dani gets and believes in now. They are changed for better and that because of themselves:

Tim: You made a right mess of my flat.

Dani: *We* did. It wasn't just me. (Prebble, 2. 4. p.100)

Unlike Lewis who always says 'I', Dani says 'we' not 'I' as an expression of their related selves and the equality between herself and Tim's self.

Concerning Dani's relationship with her mother, female psychological desire is shown as primary and complicated. Being in a family without any type of connection and bonding among members, Dani doesn't sense to be helped or supported. This lack of bonding is the main reason for Dani's psychological state, and Jan's as well. The broken relationship between Jan and her husband makes Dani feel that she lacks the parental support, specifically from the father side. She frequently emphasizes how much she needs her father's presence in her life more than the money he sends, "he's never here" (Prebble, 2003, p. 113). With respect to the particular effects of mothering and fathering on adolescents' self, (Donnelly et al., 2008, p. 390) referred that the adolescents' self-esteem was mainly related with fathers'. This negligence from Dani's father makes not only Dani in bad psychological conditions, but even Jan. They both are frustrated and oppressed lonely individuals.

Apparently, it is the first time that Jan seems to be taking care of Dani's life. She realizes that Dani is in danger:

Jan: Do they have names, these friends of yours?

Dani: A lot of them do, yes. (Prebble, 1. 2. p. 40)

Jan's maneuverings with Dani are either power maneuvers or connection maneuvers. In power maneuvers, Jan wants to protect Dani and keep her home as much as possible she can because she knows the amount of dangers towards girls in Dani's age. In connection maneuvers, Jan probably knows Dani's psychological state of being lack familial connection, so she decides to be close to her daughter. But Dani feels that she doesn't belong to her parents because it's them who neglect and force her sense that she is alienated. She mocks and underestimates all people around her, including her parents because she doesn't feel that they care of her:

Jan: I had a telephone call today, from your tutor. Would you like to tell me what he said?

Dani: Did he comment on my excellent attendance and ask you for my hand in marriage? (Prebble, 1. 5. p. 52)

Her parents think that they care for her just because they pay her money. Dani mocks the way that her parents support such parental feeling because she needs to be cared of, felt of, and to be understood. Mockery can be defined as social actions whereby the speaker somehow or other reduces something of relevance to self, other, or a non-present other (Haugh, 2014). Dani believes that money is not everything in life. There are other things more important than money such as love, emotions, and patronage that's why she repeatedly mocks her mother. She doesn't feel connected to

her family and feels totally alienated. Whereas Jan considers herself as a relational self, Dani views herself as individual self. In this respect, Dani is the self who feels that she is different from others who don't understand her and don't pay any type of concern about her psychological state. When Jan says, "And I don't want to leave you on your own" (Prebble, 2003, p. 56), she tries to show Dani that they are connected and she belongs to her. Dani doesn't believe her mother's lies because she feels that she is a member of the family. In her view, the family's members should be connected and related to each other. So, that's why Dani doesn't believe her mother's concern and she mocks again by saying "Really? Well, you could have fooled me" (Prebble, 2003, p. 56).

The dialogue between Dani and Jan reveals that not only Dani is suffering, Jan also feels abused and victimized other. She discovers her husband's faithlessness because he is having an affair with another woman. As she explains her state of pain to her daughter, Dani shows no real reaction of caring, instead she mocks her mother's speech by saying "Poor you. You've never asked me what it was like. I'm starting to wonder if I was ever there" (Prebble, 2003, p. 56). Dani is surprised just because her mother is surprised because her father is away since a long time ago:

Dani: I'm surprised that you're surprised.

Jan: I'm not surprised. I'm just ... I'm really shocked (Prebble, 1. 9. p.72)

This reflects that Jan has been suffering for years. She prefers to keep silent for her daughter's sake. In such case, Jan accepts to be inferior and as other to her husband for two reasons. First, she is a good person who fights a lot in order to keep her family related. Second, she is a simple and pure person who accepts to be oppressed and treated as other as in Tim's case. Unlike her mother, Dani attacks her father and rejects to be treated as her mother. Jan rejects Dani's view of her father. In her view, they have to be grateful for him despite whatever he did. Throughout Jan's maneuvers with her daughter, we can conclude that Jan views man as self, and her view of woman as other. Since society restricts women and allows for more freedom for men, Prebble suggests that the opposition between males and females options "in the familial and the societal domain causes a certain trauma to women. Jan and Dani develop disparate addictions and obsessions but these are linked on the basis of their gender" (Varlami, 2019, p. 55).

In the maneuvers between Lewis and Tim, we can see how ironic Lewis' speech is. Lewis talks on behave of the society. He sees himself as a responsible to prevent what is abnormal and he also sees that it is his duty to prevent the relationship between Dani and Tim just because he and other people see that Tim is a pervert. Society is based on appearances because it classifies self and other according to their personal judgments and perceptions. The difference between Lewis and Tim is that Lewis believes in his self, high self-esteem. He takes a step forward and decides to attack instead of defense:

Lewis: You smug cunt. You ever had to wash the spraypaint off that door? Or do you just paint over it? Is that easier?

Tim: Goodbye, Lewis. (Prebble, 2. 3. p. 97).

On the other side, Tim decides to keep silent. This makes Lewis takes advantage upon Tim and classifies himself as self and Tim as other. Based upon his responsibility, Tim tells Lewis that he is worried about Dani because of her involvement with person like Tim. This act shows how Lewis

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degrades Tim and threatens him as bad other. Tim shows no reaction to Lewis's abuses and threats.

Conclusion

Through the art of psychological maneuvers, Prebble has traced the concepts of self and other in terms of relationships between the binary of self and other. The play is more about the collapse of the self and revival from difficult situations. It does indeed touch on deeply personal and disturbing cases of its characters in which Prebble succeeded to shed light on. It tackles the darkness within its characters like Dani's psychological state of instability, Tim's Tendency of paedophilia as an outright evil, and Lewis's aggressive conditions towards others. Prebble deals with these problems without judgment from the perspective of the ones suffering from them.

The message conveyed by Prebble's play is its attempt to uncover the abnormal phenomena, to fight them, and to find the appropriate solutions for them. Phenomena of homosexuality, perversion, and social and familial dysfunction, which she tries to shed light on and address by knowing its psychological motives. She also wants to provide a true awareness of the self and the other and raises that the relations between them are the suitable solutions for their troubles. This is due to the view that theatre reflects reality and mirrors its society.

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