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Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) in Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*

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Abstract:

This article aims to identify Borderline Personality Disorder (BDP) in Jo who is the main character in *A Taste of Honey*. Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* turned into an amazing dramatic achievement when initially staged in London by Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop Company in 1958. It was also made into a high acclaimed film in 1961. The play is about the immature Jo and her associations with those around her - her untrustworthy and half-whore mother Helen, Helen's spouse Peter, the black sailor who abandons her pregnant, and Geof the gay person art understudy who moves into help with the infant. It is additionally about Jo's unshakeable hopefulness all through her trials. *A Taste of Honey* traverses two acts containing two scenes. The entire play happens around a similar place, which is a shabby and miserable rented flat in Manchester. The main subjects of the play are pregnancy, race, premarital sexuality and loneliness.

Keywords: Borderline Personality Disorder, A Taste of Honey, Mother-Daughter Relationship, Pregnancy.

Introduction

Shelagh Delaney was born on November 25, 1939, in Salford, Lancashire, Britain and died on November 20, 2011 at the age of seventy-two. Her father, a transport examiner, and her mother were a piece of the English average workers, the social gathering that educates of her composition. Delaney went to Broughton Secondary School however started composing even before she finished her instruction. She had no further enthusiasm for formal instruction, and after she left school, she held various employments, including salesgirl, usherette, and assistant. *A Taste of Honey* was created when Delaney was eighteen-years of age. In spite of the fact that this two-act play was initially being composed as a novel, it was changed as a play in reaction to Delaney's disappointment with the contemporary theatre. Delaney felt that she could compose a superior play, with more sensible discourse, than the plays that were as of now being organized. *A Taste of Honey* turned into a startling hit, winning a few honours both as a play and later as a film.

A Taste of Honey recounts the status of Jo, an eighteen-year-old girl from Salford, whose mother travels between various relationships with little respect for her daughter. By and large, Delaney's characters were lauded for their fair, reasonable voices. The play was likewise singled out for its precise delineations of regular workers lives. Delaney had

confidence in social challenge and had not been reluctant to stand up on the need for a more practical theatre, one that delineates the common labourers' condition of numerous English residents. Furthermore, Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* is an example of feminist experience. As the theatre critic Hickling (2008) pointed out, Delaney is the first original feminist working-class playwright. The play was performed on May 27, 1958 at the "Fringe Theatre in London" (Myers 2008), followed by director "Joan Littlewood" (Spencer 2006), and it succeeded to reach a mass of audience. Delaney's play is a work that reflects the social orientation of the 1950s in England. When playwright and literary critic Graham Greene (Rudden 2005) watched the play, he praised it that it is as fresh as Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, but more mature. Even today, "Methuen publishing's best-selling contemporary play *A Taste of Honey*" (Rudden 2005) deals with pre-marital sex, homosexuality, love and aching, depression, betrayal and racism issues as a rebellion with a female approach. In a short period, the play "became a source of inspiration for female writers" (Billington 2012).

The Plot of *A Taste of Honey*

A Taste of Honey tells the sad story of an eighteen-year-old girl named Jo who grew up without knowing her father. At the point when the play starts Jo and her alcoholic and half-whore mother Helen are going to move into a bitterly cold and wet flat that Helen has as of late rented. Jo's sweetheart Jimmy- a black navy sailor proposes marriage and gives her a ring. It gets to be distinctly clear that they move around regularly. Later Helen weds Peter who is ten years more youthful than her, and she abandons Jo. Peter makes it evident from the beginning of the play that he doesn't need Jo with them when they are married. In need of love, Jo makes a one-night intercourse with Jimmy, and then he leaves to work away for six months and stays away forever. Jo, who is pregnant now, works day by day at a shoemaker's shop and in the evenings at a pub. Subsequently, Jo is greatly supported by a homosexual art student Geof with whom she shares her small flat. Geof helps Jo in cleaning and cooking, but this happy friendship breaks down when Helen turns with a bruised eye. Helen, who learns that her grandchild will be black, kicks Geof out of the house with an extreme reaction. Moreover, Helen also leaves the house and lets her daughter Jo with stragglers unaware that Geof has left.

Borderline Personality Disorder in Jo

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a condition portrayed by challenges in controlling feeling. This trouble prompts to serious, flimsy emotional episodes, impulsivity and precariousness, poor mental self-view and stormy individual connections. Individuals may make rehashed endeavours to keep away from genuine or envisioned circumstances of relinquishment. The term "borderline personality disorder" arose out of the experiences of psychoanalysts, (Krawitz and Watson³), and starts mainly at the beginning of early adulthood.

According to Dr Arnold Lieber, BPD signs vary from person to person, and women are more likely to have this disorder than men. He introduces the common signs of the disorder as in the following:

- Inappropriate or extreme emotional reactions

- Highly impulsive behaviours
- Having an unstable or dysfunctional self-image or a distorted sense of self (how one feels about one's self)
- Feelings of isolation, boredom and emptiness
- Difficulty feeling empathy for others
- A history of unstable relationships that can change drastically from intense love and idealization to intense hate
- A persistent fear of abandonment and rejection, including extreme emotional reactions to real and even perceived abandonment
- Strong feelings of anxiety, worry and depression
- Impulsive, risky, self-destructive and dangerous behaviours, including reckless driving, drug or alcohol abuse and having unsafe sex
- Hostility
- Unstable career plans, goals and aspirations

Dr Johnson (2016) states that “genetics, environmental factors and brain abnormalities” may cause to BPD, and it is most likely to occur in the person when those issues are combined. Also, it is estimated that “2–3% of the general population may suffer from this disorder making it the most commonly diagnosed personality disorder” (Freeman et al. 2).

The main characteristic of BPD is that there is a constant pattern of incoherence and distinct impulsivity in the perception of the person and the emotions that occur in young adults and under different conditions. As Delaney's play *A Taste of Honey* starts, the stage represents a comfortless flat in Manchester and the street outside. Helen and her daughter Jo are loaded with baggage because they have just moved into that flat whose roof is leaking.

JO: Why should I run round after you?

HELEN: Children owe their parents these little attentions.

JO: I don't owe you a thing.

HELEN: Except respect, and I don't seem to get any of that.

JO: Drink, drink, drink, that's all you're fit for. You make me sick. (8-9).

In this conversation we observe that Jo has hostile feelings towards her mother, and with an impulsive behaviour, she also confesses that it is her mother who makes her sick. Obviously, Jo is tired of her mother's life, and at every opportunity she expresses that she cannot stand her. Jo continues to criticize Helen as in the following:

JO: You always have to rush off into things. You never think.

HELEN: Oh well, we can always find something else.

JO: But what are you looking for? Every place we find is the same.

HELEN: Oh! Every time I turn my head my eyeballs hurt.

Can't we have a bit of peace for five minutes? (9).

The circumstance that Helen and Jo end up in devastated, defenceless and miserable conversation is evident. We get an early introduction of the connection between the characters: Helen and Jo are always contending. Jo feels that she can possibly make more of herself than Helen has. Helen appears not to care what happens to Jo. There is, however, an insight of pride in Helen's acknowledgment of Jo's imaginative endeavours. Jo calls her mother "Helen" which is extremely bizarre.

The daughter is completely mindful of her mom's status as a 'semi-whore'. We catch wind of Helen's rootless life, always progressing, frequently avoiding some person. Another impulsive behaviour of Jo is that she wants to leave school (12-14). However Helen tries Jo to convict continuing on her education:

HELEN:Have you ever thought of going to a proper art school and getting a proper training?

JO: It's too late.

HELEN: I'll pay, You're not stupid. You'll soon learn.

JO: I've had enough of school. Too many different schools and too many different places.

HELEN: You're wasting yourself. (15).

As the play continues, we notice several contempt of Jo towards Helen. On the other hand, by the time when Helen's lover Peter, who wears a black patch on his eye arrives, Jo's mood changes which is a sign of BPD. The daughter who hates her mother suddenly turns into a protective position; Jo does not leave Helen and Peter in private:

JO: I don't know where the bathroom is.

HELEN: It's in a little hole in the corridor.

JO: Is he staying?

PETER: Yes, I'm staying.

JO: Then I'll go for my bath later. (16).....

JO: You look very pale and sickly, Helen. (19).

In continuation, we are introduced to Jo's boyfriend, a twenty-two-year old man who is black. They are walking in the street, and the young man proposes Jo to marry him and gives her a ring. Jo accepts the proposal and goes home. At home Jo tries to remove her curiosity by asking her mother about her marriage and divorce in the past:

JO: He was rich, wasn't he . . .

HELEN: He was a rat!

JO: He was your husband. Why did you marry him?

HELEN: At the time I had nothing better to do. Then he divorced me; that was your fault.

JO: I agree with him. If I was a man and my wife had a baby that wasn't mine I'd sling her out.

HELEN: Would you? It's a funny thing but I don't think I would. Still, why worry? (28).

Afterwards, in the Christmas period, Helen and Peter go on a pre-honeymoon, by leaving Jo alone and upset. While Jo was alone at home, her boyfriend comes in and finds her with tearful eyes. However, Jo denies that she was crying and says it is because of her cold disease. In the continuing, Jo and her boyfriend keep talking:

JO: Will you stay here for Christmas?

BOY: If that's what you want.

JO: It's what you want.

BOY: That's right.

JO: Then stay.

BOY: You naughty girl!

JO: I may as well be naughty while I've got the chance. I'll probably never see you again. I know it.

BOY: What makes you say that?

JO: I just know it. That's all. But I don't care. Stay with me now, it's enough, it's all I want, and if you do come back I'll still be here. (38-39).

One of the BPD signs is having the feelings of isolation, boredom and emptiness. Loneliness, isolation and emptiness is a devastating problem for Jo. It can be said that one of the supreme problems of people in the middle of the twentieth century is the sense of loneliness. Jo thinks that over time she will lose feelings of existence without others. This thought might have increased her fear of being alone. All that she wants is to have somebody around her, so she requests her boyfriend to stay with her. In fact, it is not because of Jo's sexual desire, but of the fear of staying alone. Jo then asks Helen about her father because she wants to know who he is. Jo grew up without seeing her father, therefore it is natural that she

wonders about him. As Helen's words make it clear, Jo is the product of a non-marital union. Soth et al. state that daughters with father absent since birth are inclined to BPD. In BPD, people act impulsively. Helen also has BPD because she acted impulsively and cheated her husband once with a mad man and consequently became pregnant.

HELEN: Well, now you know.

JO: How could you give me a father like that?

HELEN: I didn't do it on purpose. How was I to know you'd materialize out of a little love affair that lasted five minutes?

JO: You never think. That's your trouble.

HELEN: I know.

JO: Was he like a . . . a real idiot?

HELEN: I've told you once. He was nice though, you know, a nice little feller!

JO: Where is he now, locked up?

HELEN: No, he's dead. (43).

Jo is annoyed by what she hears and questions her mother how she could be with a half-wit man. Helen tells her daughter that she experienced her first sexual partnership with Jo's father because she was married to a Puritan. Then Helen and Jo say farewell to each other. The mother leaves her daughter lonely again and goes with her recent husband to their own home.

In Act Two a few months have passed, and we meet Jo and Geof playing outside, yet Jo's pregnancy is quite obvious. Meanwhile, Jo has left school and started to work. On the other hand, Geof is an art student who is homosexual. Subsequently, Jo almost begs Geof for staying with her and recommends him to live together. Geof feels pity for Jo, because she needs someone to look after her. It is obvious that Jo is in a depression. She also has the feeling that the father of her baby will never return again. When time passes, Geof asks Jo to marry him, but Jo rejects the marriage proposal. Since Jo's pregnancy is obvious, she thinks everyone is looking at her. Because of this, she feels embarrassed and leaves her job. It is also clear that Jo always spends her time at home, because she is ashamed of other people's looks. As a characteristic of BPD, Jo holds strong feelings of anxiety, worry and depression. Later in the play, Geof gives Jo a doll so that she could have the opportunity for practicing motherhood. As soon as Jo sees the doll, she shows an extreme emotional reaction- a characteristic of BPD:

JO: (seeing the doll): The colour's wrong.

Geof: Jo.

JO: The colour's wrong. (Suddenly and violently flinging the

doll to the ground.). I'll bash its brains out. I'll kill it. I don't want his baby, Geof. I don't want to be a mother. I don't want to be a woman.

GEOF: Don't say that, Jo.

JO: I'll kill it when it comes, Geoff, I'll kill it. (75).

Jo represents extreme sarcasm, sarcastic speech and verbal explosions. Thinking of her baby's colour and half-wise nature, Jo demonstrates a deep anger bursting with anxiety. When her anger passes away, Jo thinks that the baby's father will never return, and accepts Geof's marriage proposal in order not to leave the baby without a father. Jo's intense hate changed into intense love for her baby which is a sign of BPD. Later, when Helen learns that her grandchild will be black, she figures out extreme emotional reactions. Helen shows hostile feeling towards the un-born baby and even wants to drown it (86). In the end of the play, with an aggressive feeling, Helen leaves Jo for having a drink but also says that she will return back.

Conclusion

Staged in 1958, Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* is considered as the first feminist play in England. The main character Jo, an eighteen-year-old girl, has grown up with her alcoholic mother Helen, without knowing her father. In the play Jo possesses the features of Borderline Personality Disorder (BDP) which is a serious and complex psychological personality disorder affecting 2-3% of the population. Women are more likely to have this disorder than men, and they are at extreme risk for pregnancy. In the play Jo is abandoned by the black sailor who caused for the pregnancy. The common features of BPD are having highly impulsive behaviours and unsafe sex, also. In *A Taste of Honey* both Jo and Helen become pregnant out of marriage. Another characteristics of BDP is that the person keeps feelings of isolation, boredom and emptiness which are evident in Jo. Her tolerance to loneliness is contracted, and she experiences a feeling of emptiness that cannot be filled. Jo always needs the presence of someone and prays Geof to stay with her. She is also endowed with hostility, dangerous behaviours, unstable career plans, goals and aspirations which are signs of BPD.

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