

IDENTIFYING INVISIBLE INTER-GENDER AND INTRA-GENDER RELATIONS IN *PEOPLE IN TROUBLE* BY SARAH SCHULMAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies the invisible elements of inter-gender and intra-gender relations in Sarah Schulman's novel *People in Trouble*. Inter-gender relations are the relationships between individuals of different genders, whereas Intra-gender relations are relationships between individuals of the same gender. Inter-gender and intra-gender relations include romance, friendship, professional, and familial relationships. Sarah Schulman's novel *People in Trouble* is a thought-provoking exploration of inter-gender and intra-gender relations. Throughout the novel, Schulman examines the complexities of love, sex, and power dynamics between men and women and between people of the same gender. The focus of this research is on the exploration of the elements of inter-gender relationships, such as power dynamics, trust and respect and on the elements of intra-gender relations, such as intimacy, communication, and compromise, as depicted by Schulman in *People in Trouble*. Through a close reading of the novel, this study seeks to identify how Sarah Schulman presents the complex dynamics of inter-gender and intra-gender relations. This research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the novel by examining how the characters interact and navigate their relationships with each other and themselves. Moreover, it seeks to explore the implications of the presented relationships and how they influence the lives of the characters.

Keywords: Communication, Compromise, Inter-gender, Intra-gender, Power

INTRODUCTION

This study analyses the book *People in Trouble* by Sarah Schulman in order to reveal the underlying themes of gender dynamics. Relationships between people of various genders are called inter-gender relationships, while those between people of the same sex are called intra-gender relationships. This study aims to delve deeper into the aspects of relationships between the sexes portrayed by Schulman in *People in Trouble*, specifically the power dynamics, confidence, and respect between partners and the closeness, communication, and agreement between members of the same gender. By analysing the characters' interactions and their strategies for navigating their relationships with one another and with themselves, this study hopes to contribute to a more thorough comprehension of the book.

Gender: Gender is a term used to describe the socially constructed characteristics of masculinity and femininity. "Butler's theory means that we fashion our own gender identities through the fusion of individual inclinations and social pressures" (Lindquist 114). It refers to the roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes assigned to males and females in a given society. "Changes in women's roles have also caused gender relations" (Santasombat 148). Gender is an important factor in literature because it can be used to explore power dynamics, cultural norms, social roles, and individual identity. Schulman uses the topic of gender relations effectively. Gender relationships can be divided into inter-gender and intra-gender.

Inter-Gender relations: Inter-gender relation refers to the relationships between people of different genders. "Gender is not caused by biological factors" (Mikhalevich and Powell 14). This includes romantic and familial relationships. It also encompasses how people interact with each other in various settings, such as the workplace, school, and social environments. Research is done on the following inter-gender relationships as depicted by Schulman in *People in Trouble*.

Power Dynamics: The power dynamics of the various relationships between the characters in the novel are complex and varied. "Feminist theories reveal that gender and sexual power dynamics are not specific to one historically recorded role, interaction or relationship, but are part of the systematic expression of the institutional structures" (Wood 482). The characters often find themselves in positions of either dominance or subservience, depending on the situation, which can cause tension and conflict. In her novel *People in Trouble*, Sarah Schulman portrays power dynamics as an inter-gender relation. "Power Dynamics is a part of the system" (Schulman 107). Through her characters, she demonstrates how men often wield their power and privilege in relation to women to control them and their choices. Schulman's depiction of

power dynamics as an inter-gender relation in *People in Trouble* is a powerful reminder of the complex and unequal ways in which power is distributed among genders.

Trust: Trust is an essential part of any relationship, and the characters in *People in Trouble* often struggle to trust one another. “Trust is a dynamic emotional relationship which entails responsibility” (Flores and Solomon 205). In *People in Trouble*, Schulman explores the complex nuances of trust in inter-gender relations. Peter is unable to fully trust Kate due to his unpredictable behaviour and sometimes aggressive advances. “It’s about trust” (Schulman 148). She conveys the complexity of trusting someone of the opposite gender and the need for both parties to be honest and open with each other in order to foster a strong and secure bond.

Respect: In her novel *People in Trouble*, Schulman creates a narrative that examines the importance of respect as an inter-gender relation. One should “increase the value of respect by proving to be a worthy audience” (Ellingsen and Johannesson 135). Throughout the novel, Schulman shows how respect is essential to relationships between men and women and how it can be used to create trust, understanding, and harmony. “For a long time, I’d been living my life according to somebody else’s idea of respect” (Schulman 111). Peter learns to appreciate Kate’s opinion and trust her judgement, while Kate learns to accept Peter’s ideas and feelings. As the two build a strong relationship based on respect, they can move past their differences and come together to create a deeper bond than any other. Schulman presents a powerful insight into the importance of respect in all relationships, regardless of gender.

Intra-Gender Relations: Intra-gender relations refer to the relationships between members of the same gender, such as between two women or two men. “Gender is socially-constructed” (Murthy 208). Intra-gender relationships can be a source of support, understanding, and love. Research is carried out on the following intra-gender relationships as portrayed by Schulman in *People in Trouble*.

Communication: In her novel *People in Trouble*, Sarah Schulman examines communication as an intra-gender relation. “Communication comes from the Latin word *communicare*, to “make something common” or “share,” and it means to share information between people and transfer information from one place to another” (Hestad 32). She paints a picture of communication that is both intimate and fraught with tension. Schulman emphasises the importance of communication in female relationships, especially in terms of how it can foster closeness or create conflict based on the communication between Kate and Molly. Schulman’s characters often express themselves in not socially sanctioned or accepted ways, yet they manage to create meaningful connections with each other. “Sometimes communication

just doesn't work" (Schulman 96). This portrays communication as an intimate yet fragile link between people of the same gender.

Intimacy: In her novel *People in Trouble*, Sarah Schulman explores the complexities of intimacy between people of the same gender. Through her characters, Schulman conveys the idea that same-gender relationships are just as valid and meaningful as any other type of relationship. Schulman's characters like Kate and Molly understand the implications of their intimate connections. Through their stories, Schulman portrays the vulnerability and fragility of same-gender relationships, highlighting the risks and rewards of exploring intimacy with someone of the same gender. "Intimacy is work, but it's worth it. It's the best place to be" (Schulman 213). Schulman's portrayal of same-gender relationships as a legitimate form of intimacy allows her characters to explore their identities and find acceptance in their relationships.

Compromise: In Susan Schulman's novel *People in Trouble*, the concept of compromise is explored as an intra-gender relation between the characters. "To be uncompromising is to be obstinate and inflexible, so that it is morally right to compromise" (Day 471). Compromise is depicted as a positive negotiation that allows for both sides to get something out of a conflict. This element is seen in the characters Peter, Molly and Kate. While they are often divided into their opinions and desires, they are still able to find a middle ground and come to an agreement. Compromise is presented as a way for the characters to maintain their relationships and gain something out of the situation. Through compromise, the characters are able to learn more about each other and build relationships. "Compromise is not a bad thing. It's a good thing. It's the way people find a way to stay in the same room" (Schulman 98). This is especially evident in the relationships between the female characters in the novel. By showing the characters' ability to come to a mutually beneficial agreement, Schulman emphasises the importance of compromise in intra-gender relationships.

CONCLUSION

This research has identified the invisible inter-gender and intra-gender relations elements in Sarah Schulman's novel *People in Trouble*. Through a close reading of the novel, this study has examined the complexities of love, sex, and power dynamics between men and women and between people of the same gender. It provided a deeper understanding of the novel by exploring how the characters interact and travel through their relationships with each other and themselves. Sarah Schulman's novel is a profound exploration of intra and inter-relationships that offer valuable insights into the complexities of inter-gender and intra-gender relations.

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