



Manipulative Woman: A Psychological Study In Gillian Flynn's Gone Girl

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Abstract

Trauma theory is a wide field of research that copes with the psychological and physiological influences of traumatic experiences on individuals. Due to specific traumatic events, trauma refers to a kind of experience that impact a person's ability to manage, such as wars, accidents, sexual abuse, violence, disasters, and any type of event that affects a person's life. One of the various effects of such traumatic events is the significant and long-lasting psychological and physical effects, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Such influence causes instability in the individual's life and might lead to more catastrophic consequences, more importantly, may lead to committing homicide or suicide. The research also assumes questions of whether the motives of murdering are worthy or not in addition to this, the research explores the criteria used to evaluate the characters' motives. The present study is conducted to investigate the impact of instability on traumatised persons and their unpredictable behaviour and motives behind the homicide and murdering of some female characters in selected novels of the American writer Gillian Flynn.

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المرأة اللعوب : دراسة نفسية لرواية اختفاء فتاة لجيليان فلن

الملخص

تعد نظرية الصدمة مجالاً وحقلاً واسعاً يضم كثيراً من الأبحاث، التي تُعنى بالتأثيرات النفسية والفسولوجية لتجارب الصدمة على الأفراد. نتيجة الأحداث المؤلمة، فتشير هذه النظرية إلى نوع من الخبرة التي تؤثر على قدرة الشخص على الإدارة، مثل الحروب والحوادث والاعتداء الجنسي والعنف والكوارث وأي نوع من الأحداث، التي تؤثر على حياة الشخص. ومن الآثار المختلفة لمثل هذه الأحداث المؤلمة، هو التأثيرات النفسية والبدنية المهمة وطويلة الأمد، بما في ذلك ما يُعرف باضطراب ما بعد الصدمة (PTSD)، فهذا التأثير يسبب عدم الاستقرار في حياة الفرد، وقد يؤدي إلى عواقب وخيمة أكثر، والأهم من ذلك، قد يؤدي إلى ارتكاب القتل أو الانتحار. فجاءت هذه الدراسة لرصد تأثير عدم الاستقرار على الأشخاص المصابين بصدمة وسلوكهم، ودوافعهم غير المتوقعة وراء القتل في روايات مختارة للكاتبة الأمريكية (جيليان فلن).

Introduction

Earlier in the first half of the 20th century, there was a widespread belief that the neurotic symptoms of psychic patients are a one-to-one formulation, namely a one-to-one interrelationship between external and internal worlds. This was accepted and well-received by Freud's contemporary psychologists. As long as Freud adopted it, he shifted from such inter-subjectivity (as inter-psychic realm) to focus only on unconscious fantasies in neurotic conflicts (as intra-psychic realm). However, such psychoanalysis as a discipline no longer served the purpose assigned to it because new symptoms appeared and did not meet the analytical principles proposed for this task.

The urgent need for a new theory taking into its account the social aspects as socio-analytical dimensions with psychological ones was inevitable. Thus, Trauma theory was the substitution of Freud's. Trauma theory was proposed to identify the prevalence of violence against children and women, such as violence, murdering, rape, etc., and the scars inflicted by violence and torture. However, Trauma theory concerns only the disorder resulting from mono-dimensional, imminent traumatic events and neglected phenomena like those psychic disorders caused by post-traumatic stress disorder. Therefore, the study of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) significantly increased during the second half of the 20th century. A complex disorder known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is brought on by exposure to one or more traumatic events, such as those that occur during times of war, acts of terrorism, or natural disasters, and violent personal assaults like rape, sexual assault, acts of violence, and accidents. Many features have been presented to PTSD as follows. People with PTSD typically experience emotional empathy and have enduring recollections of being abused and suffering from severe sadness.

People with PTSD continue to experience intense, distressing thoughts and emotions connected to the traumatic incident long after it has ceased. They are able to relive the experience via flashbacks and nightmares. They may experience despair, fear, or fury and may be emotionally distant or separated from others. Persons with PTSD avoid circumstances or people who remind them of the traumatic experience and might have extreme negative reactions to something as mundane as a loud noise.

Gone Girl is a crime thriller novel by American writer Gillian Flynn. Crown Publishing Group published it in June 2012. The novel was popular and made the *New York Times* Best Seller list. The sense of suspense in the novel comes from whether Nick Dunne, Amy's husband, is responsible for the disappearance of his wife, Amy. *Gone Girl* is a story of a marriage gone cold and a sociopath person who will stop at nothing to get revenge. Echoing the domestic *noir* genre, Flynn takes that genre one step further by incorporating several plot twists that subvert the reader's expectations. The reader's ability to trust the narrator is chief among the subverted expectations. The novel consists of alternating chapters: one told by the husband, Nick, and the other told by Amy, his wife. Both narrators in this story are lying, and the multiple shifts in point of view as Nick tells his side of the story and Amy tells hers result in an atmosphere of confusion about who is telling the truth (Flynn, 2012).

Gone Girl is a literary work from the perspective of modern-day characters. Flynn has successfully shown her readers the self-concept that reflects the individual's self. Most of *Gone Girl's* characters do not embody a sense of traditional unitary self. They confront an interesting dilemma; they think about themselves as having a core identity, a distinct self that interacts with the world around them, and an internal sense of one sense. Yet, they also experience themselves as multiple, as many selves, a complex reality of often-conflicting inner experiences of who they are.

The novel revolves around the lives of Amy and Nick Dunne. They were the epitome of the perfect couple to everyone. However, everything changes when Amy disappears one morning. Amy Dunne is the protagonist and co-narrator of *Gone Girl*. In the narrative, Nick and Amy told the novel in first person and with Amy's journal entries. It reveals two sides of the story; the first side is what has happened to Amy and her disappearance. Amy's account of their marriage makes her seem happier and easier to live with than Nick depicts. While the second one sheds light on Nick's story in describing Amy as extremely anti-social and stubborn. Amy's

depiction makes Nick seem more aggressive than he claims he is in his story (Karody, 2022).

The story of their marriage is built on lies and manipulation. Amy goes missing on their fifth wedding anniversary, and Nick becomes the prime suspect of her disappearance. In the book's second part, it becomes clear that neither Amy nor Nick can be trusted as narrators and that the reader has been left in the dark. Amy claims that Nick has been having an affair with one of his pupils and that she has gone; she has carefully planned the events so that Nick is accused of killing her, thus displaying her psychopathic traits and need to be in control by framing him for her supposed death. The diary that gives all the information in the novel's first half is revealed to be faked and intended to implicate Nick (Lane, 2014).

The unreliability of both narrators forces the reader to constantly evaluate and analyze the information that both Nick and Amy present. The reader must compare one version of the story to the other and try to determine “who is the protagonist” or “good guy” and “antagonist” or “bad guy”. If both of the narrators are “bad guys”, who is the “hero” here?” Is All-American girl Amy a sociopath or an abused spouse? Is Nick Dunne simply a cheating husband or is he a killer?” (Buckland, 2009, p.1-12).

The couple finds themselves in a wrong marriage. Unemployment, financial problems increasing estrangement from each other, a move from chic Brooklyn to the sleepy confining Midwestern town, North Carthage in Missouri, of Nick's family to take care of his sick mother have contributed much to the worn down of what seemed to be a perfect relationship. Nick's loss of his job as a journalist made things worse. The husband loses ambition and starts working as a lowly adjunct professor of creative writing at a local college and works at a bar with his twin sister Margo as well. Instead of addressing the deterioration of their marriage and finding solutions for his wife's increasing discontent, he grows more distant and escapes into adultery with his adoring student Andie on one snowy night. A student of her husband's reveals the affair to Amy. As a result, she concludes that she must exact vengeance upon Nick (Iannone, 2020).

Amy has carefully arranged her disappearance from the house, with meticulously and cleverly constructed, odd clues left behind that eventually will frame Nick for her murder. Amy goes missing on the day of her and her husband's fifth wedding anniversary. Nick is subjected to many interrogations, all of which

end badly for him. His stoic and cold behaviour brings him under scrutiny from the police and even from his friends and family. Now, he is the prime suspect, and Amy strives to make both the police and the public believe that Nick is guilty. The widespread media attention comes in part from Amy's fame, as the inspiration for the fictional character in the "Amazing Amy book series" which her wealthy popular parents, Rand and Marybeth Elliot, wrote. The series is part of an educational program that supposedly most American children read while growing up. In the weeks preceding the incident, she carefully contrives fake accounts of Nick's growing abuse and her fear of him. She does this through a diary she makes sure will be discovered as evidence and through lies he continuously tells her neighbour (Indrasakti, 2018).

Nick then starts following the clues that Amy left for him, which were in the form of their traditional anniversary treasure hunt. Through mind games, Nick finally realizes Amy's deeds. In a television interview, he tries to convince her that he is sorry and that he feels repentant. Consequently, he succeeded in making Amy changes her plan. Amy, on the other hand, finds that there is a possibility of getting her husband back. Thus, she decides to return and save him from prison and the death sentence. During her time on the road, her stash of money was stolen, and eventually, an old admirer, Desi Collings, was ready to rescue her. Unfortunately for Amy, Desi was becoming more possessive and controlling over her every move. When she realizes that Desi will not let her go, she tricks him into believing she is in love with him. He ends up being killed in a grisly fashion in the very act of intercourse. Amy's second plan was to justify her absence in framing her friend in the kidnap and rape case (Nuraaeni, 2016, p.46-52).

When Amy gets back, she has covered in blood and appears like a rape victim or hostage. Reporters following the case closely and anticipating Nick's criminal judgment filmed the emotional sight of her homecoming. Amy returns as the picture-perfect, forgiving wife, acting as though the time apart between them was one of the most traumatic experiences of her life. Nick, Margo, the lawyer, and Officer Boney are the only ones who know the truth that she murdered the man and that the whole thing was a set-up. At the end of the book, Amy becomes pregnant with Nick's sperm to keep Nick around. Because of this, Nick has no choice but to remain in Amy's company, despite the fact that their marriage will never be the same now that Amy has vanished. Nick realizes he cannot escape his relationship with Amy and gives up trying to do so. Amy's psychotic thirst for power and Nick's

revulsion to her are characteristics that are established towards the end of the story (Salgado, 2005, pp. 2-13).

At this point, it is safe to claim that many characters have easily noticeable personality disorders, and the most complicated and dysfunctional of all would be Amy's personality. To describe the dysfunctional behaviours the characters with personality disorders might manifest and observe the character's behaviours and the dialogues between them. Among these socially destructive behaviours, manipulation, lack of remorse and regret, cheating, and lying are going to be discussed (Tamir, 2019, p.20-25).

According to Ulmann (1960, p.448), there are some types of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and one case of PTSD is Psychopath. It is one of the personality disorders defined by a distinctive cluster of behaviours and inferred personality traits. Science of Psychology is a form of PTSD where sufferers have narcissistic and antisocial tendencies. From that, the writer can understand the relationship between personality disorders and psychopaths. People who suffer from PTSD feel distressed and have a disability in thinking and behaviour. Psychopath is one of the types of personality disorders, which have characteristics in types of personality disorders such as Antisocial, Narcissistic, and Borderline Personality Disorder.

The heroine of *Gone Girl*, Amy Elliot Dunne, is a blonde lady in her early thirties. Rand and Marybeth Elliot's only child, Amy Dunne, served as the idea for their children's book series *Amazing Amy*. Incredible as it may seem, Amy does exceptionally well in American sales. Amy's parents put together a trust fund for her with a sizeable sum as payment for the sale of the *Amazing Amy* book series, making their family quite wealthy. Given the size of her trust fund, she may not even need a job to make ends meet. Amy Dunne, a character introduced early in the novel, rises to prominence as the story progresses, becoming an icon of the American dream regarding her attractiveness, intelligence, and professional success (Boggs, 2008).

It's also mentioned that Amy Dunne has a lot of schooling. She graduated with honours from both the Yale University School of Psychology and Harvard University with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. She is smart in the field of psychology and uses that knowledge to her advantage by penning personality quizzes for numerous American periodicals. Amy's high IQ is supported by her being qualified for her position, which calls for a wide range of skills and

knowledge (Freud, 1905). Amy and Nick's love tale begins when they meet at a writer's party. Nick and Amy Dunne had been together for two years when he proposed to her. At first, everything in their marriage appears ideal; they are a happy couple, and Amy Dunne makes a point of surprising her husband on a regular basis.

Amy never answers her husband Nick when he starts an argument, and he squanders a large portion of her trust fund on a wide variety of trivial purchases that she never questions. When her husband complained about the trust money, she made an effort to remain cool. Nick felt bad that he started the quarrel and apologized to Amy for his behaviour. Amy Dunne has been a very sensitive person ever since she discovered her husband's affair:

Amy Dunne: Hey, I've been thinking...Something positive. Maybe it's time.

Nick Dunne: Now is the worst time.

Amy Dunne: It would be a new start for us. As for me, I would have a real purpose here.

Nick Dunne: A child is not a hobby.

Amy Dunne: Not a hobby. An inspiration.

Nick Dunne: We could have had this fight four hours ago. I'm late. You really wanna be the couple that has a baby...to save their marriage? Reboot, retool, rekindle, whatever!. (*Gone Girl*, p. 45-46)

The above extract shows that Mrs Dunne reacts furiously to her husband's comments. She yells at Nick, using foul language and an aggressive tone, when she is angry. When she and her husband argued, she went so far as to physically assault him. This goes against the portrayal of Amy's character, in which her trials and tribulations culminate in her decision to vanish.

Accordingly, Amy planned to get her revenge on her husband by making him the prime suspect in her disappearance case when she found out about his extramarital affair. As a result, she starts the process of establishing and carrying out this strategy. She has a plot to frame her spouse as her killer by gathering incriminating evidence against him. Before vanishing, she turns over a table in their

home on purpose, so police will think she battled the criminal. Since she is aware that fingerprints would be thoroughly examined at the crime's site, she protects her hands by wearing gloves at all times. A lot of her blood is concealed in a syringe. She then dumps it on the ground and wipes it with her palm. The authorities could conclude that Amy Dunne suffered a serious injury at her house before going missing. She is confident that harming herself is necessary for her strategy to work (Rachmadany, 2016). This demonstrates her proficiency at staging a crime. She paid close attention to all of the specifics. For the sake of making her faux murder scene appear authentic. Amy's manipulative side is shown through her current acts. People who believe Amy Dunne's lies about the 9/11 attacks also illustrate this trait (Emler, 2001).

Virtually, Amy is a psychopath person in *Gone Girl*. When analyzing Amy's psychopath character, it is important to refer to the American professor of Criminology at Temple University, Joan McCord, who wrote about the characteristics of a psychopath in 1964. In her book *Crime and Family* (2009), McCord classified psychopaths into six groups based on their asociality, lack of impulse control, hostility, lack of remorse, and twisted ability for love. Amy's psychopath features are examined, and Flynn discusses the factors that contributed to her becoming a psychopath. For an explanation of the condition, Flynn looks to the PTSD hypothesis (Coleman, 1978). Disruption in the family and financial factors are two main explanations. The research demonstrates that all six of the theory's defining traits are present in Amy's psychopathic personality. The family's upheaval and financial issues complicated Amy's psychopathic situation. Some incidents are happening to Nick that are related to Amy's behaviour and are causing Nick to feel pressure to give in to Amy's wishes.

Traditionally, disruptive, destructive, and harmful to social order, psychopathic conduct was pervasive. Amy's psychopathic, asocial tendencies are plain to notice. Amy does not know anyone in her community, so she feels alone. Since Rhonda, the investigator, is unable to get enough information about Amy's case from Amy's neighbours, the inquiry has been slowed down. In particular, the psychopath is motivated by unrestrained wants, meaning that the individual is unable to regulate or postpone his or her desire for immediate gratification, pleasure, and fulfilment. Amy is totally out of her mind to go on a treasure hunt. She laid up the entire treasure hunt by providing hints. Nick and Boney, a detective, discover hints regarding Amy's abduction in the context of a treasure hunt. (Forrest, 1996).

The psychopath is characterized by a lack of goal-directedness and a tendency toward impulsive, goalless activity. Amy has the fifth of every month circled on her calendar so that she can commit suicide then. Since she believed she would modify her intentions to rescind a sign that she had previously written in the calendar, she is described as having erratic conduct and hazy goals. Amy is a very impulsive person. After Nick declares his undying love for Amy on national television by telling the host, "I love her" (*Gone Girl*, p.335). Nick and Amy want to get back together with each other. Nonetheless, Nick's confession on national television that he is a lousy husband but not a murderer and that he had violated commitments to Amy to be the man she wanted led to a shift in strategy (Forrest, 1996).

Amy is rather combative. That the psychopathic personality is a sociality that frequently takes the shape of "brutal aggression" because pleasure and the constraints of society are at odds with one another is highlighted. They said that the psychopath would resort to violence if they were forced to wait at all for their reward. Blood is all over the floor as Amy joyfully and fearlessly injects herself with a needle to make herself bleed. Adding, "The blood is profuse" lends credence to this theory. To have her blood spilt for medical reasons suggests that whoever did it is a highly violent person. Amy is responsible, and her blood is now staining the ceiling of the kitchen. She had no fear of needles or blood, as described here. Because of this, Amy has a reputation for being somewhat assertive. Amy is ready to risk physical harm in order to alter her appearance by repeatedly striking her face with a hammer. A beautiful face is not likely to be struck by someone who does not have the traits of an aggressive psychopath who saw a hammer in front of her (Hans, 2008).

Evidenced by his inability to acknowledge any wrongdoing, psychopaths can display "conscienceless abandon" in committing even the most heinous acts of violence. The psychopath generally shows little to no regret in response to such activities. Amy never exhibits any remorse or regret. Amy now understands the gravity of that predicament. On the contrary, she never has any regrets. She did not feel any remorse for what she had done. Her enthusiasm for performing them was genuine. This disorder coincides with and contributes to the development of psychopathy. Consider the following:

Nick: You killed someone, Amy.

Amy: I am a fighter. I fought my way back to you

Nick: You killed a guy. You slashed his throat with a box cutter.

Amy: You went on national television and begged for me to save your life. And I obliged, but I want that Nick. (*Gone Girl*, p. 18)

The above quotation reveals that Amy does not feel guilty: "... I've killed for you. Who else can say that?". Amy and Nick get along famously. A killer may do the act with relative ease. To get back to Nick, Amy had to murder someone. She can still go on living her life normally, but this demonstrates that she has no remorse.

Amy's inability to control her urges stems from her envy of Nick's romantic prospects. Amy unexpectedly approaches Nick when he is in the pub with the young woman. Therefore, Amy schemes to frame Nick for her murder because of her inability to control her sexual urges.

Amy: "I surprised him at the bar where he works. An out he comes with this girl.. who had no business being in a bar. On the very first night that we met. We walked by a bakery that was having its sugar delivered. And it was in the air, everywhere. A sugar storm. And before he kissed me. He leaned in. did this. Nick cleaned the lips of this girl with two fingers. (*Gone Girl*, p.30)

A psychopath's personality is characterized by a lack of empathy and disregard for others' feelings. In this situation, Nick and Amy's financial struggles and the added responsibility of caring for Nick's sick parents could potentially exacerbate any existing psychopathic tendencies in one or both of them. They may become more focused on their own needs and desires, ignoring the needs of those around them. This could lead to further strain on their relationships with each other and with Nick's parents. They need to seek help and support during this difficult time to prevent any negative consequences on their mental health and relationships.

Nick: I think I'm gonna be laid off.

Amy: We're in a recession. If it happens, we'll deal with it. I'll probably be next. (*Gone Girl*, p.34)

Amy tried offering her parents \$879,000 without first consulting with Nick, but he refused. However, Amy sees no cause for concern. As a result, the new family will have even more difficulty making ends meet. Therefore, Nick goes out and makes an additional purchase: a video game.

In Psychopathology, People who score high on the neuroticism scale are more likely to feel distressed, anxious, and wounded in response to hostile interactions. The degree to which these two people continue to feel emotional anguish from one another is likely to diverge with time (Maher, 1994, p.72).

Amy's character is determined not by her own words or actions but by the fact that her father is a writer who has made a fortune off writing about his daughter in the Amazing Amy novels. Amy's own life, preferences, and interests pale in comparison to her incredible self. It becomes glaringly evident how difficult it is for Amy to live up to the persona and be real when she fails her achievement of a fictitious character. Amy starts to lose it as her dad's new storyline involves the incredible Amy getting married. Her sardonic patience for the rewriting and rehashing of her life appears to have worn thin. However, her parents are certain that she will turn out just fine if she follows in their footsteps and achieves the same level of success as they have. Nick will ask her to marry him so she does not need to worry (Feist, 1925, pp. 362-370).

If Amy's father has already carelessly married her off in his book, she must also consider the potential of being deceived, divorced, or widowed in a remarkable fashion in the not-so-distant literary future for the sake of her parents' swollen treasuries and inflated egos. Amy's parents apparently place little value on her beyond the potential for financial and social advantage they may derive from capitalizing on their daughter's physical beauty. They did not show her genuine affection, provide emotional backing, or welcome her into their home. They are narcissists who build a world in which only they can thrive. They allowed Amy to think that a made-up character may be better than a genuine one. A lot more improvement is possible.

The study follows the textual analysis of the traumatic impact in relation to violent behaviour. Through thematic analysis, the study links the selected works with the theory of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is built on analyzing the various themes of homicide and victimization. Through the APA writing style, the selected novels have been discussed chronologically.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a theory concerned with psychological disorders and complex behaviours in which past events are always represented and fixed in people's memory. Tragic events such as war, sexual assault, rape, bullying, etc., are all motives by which fearful traumatic stress is triggered. Otherwise, PTSD represents and prescribes a likely opportunity for positive

psychological treatment via the ability of individuals to adapt to these symptoms through several methods like psychological and social therapy, regardless of the effects of their experience of tough times. Although PTSD has been proposed to diagnose soldiers who experience traumatic events during wars, its applicability to people living in social environments is possible and fruitful.

Based on the analyses of Gillian Flynn's selected novel, the current study comes out with several conclusions. The psychological disorders from which people suffer and behave abnormally as they act self-harm intentionally, like Amy when she gets exploited by her parents in *Gone Girl*, is not to relieve what she has experienced in the past. In contrast, most traumatised people misbehave to fulfil their needs, afraid of facing the reality of being psychological patients. The applicability of PTSD, as a theory used to diagnose specific psychological disorders in Amy's case, is paid off. It has been found that Amy has been exposed to trauma since her childhood. Concerning the investigation of the motives behind the homicide and murder committed by Amy in *Gone Girl*, PTSD reveals that the reactions, as a concept describing human behaviours, are the reason behind committing homicide. The way Amy has been brought up brings her about committing homicide. In addition to this, the notion of 'Struggle for Survival' can be considered as a vital motive for committing homicide, because of which Amy commits the crime thinking that she would revenge from her parents' treatment, on the other hand to revenge from her husband's betrayal.

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