

AN EXPLORATION OF MANIPULATION AND REJECTION INTO THE MIND OF THE FEMALE NARCISSISTIC SOCIOPATH: GILLIAN FLYNN'S GONE GIRL

Akanshya Handique

(PhD scholar)

Dr. Vinaya Kumari

(guide)

Dr. Sankar Patowary

(co-guide)

Amity Institute of English Studies and Research.

Amity University, Noida.

ABSTRACT

There is a lack of comprehension about the concept of psychopathy among females. The continued dependence on male psychopathy conceptualizations and measurement frameworks, as well as the inability to determine what the construct looks like in females, are both stumbling blocks to the progression of research in this field. There are many depictions of male psychopaths in popular culture, particularly in film. Films such as Psycho, The Shining, Silence of the Lambs, American Psycho, and, more recently, No Country for Old Men include key male psychopathic characters who have left an indelible mark on the history of cinema. It is an epidemiological reality that there are more male than female psychopaths in society, and the fact that there is a prevalence of male psychopaths in film is a reflection of this epidemiological fact.

Keywords: narcissism, manipulation, rejection, Female Narcissistic Sociopath

INTRODUCTION

Narcissists are fans of authority and control over others. They take advantage of a variety of characteristics in their quest for dominance. Narcissistic tendencies may be broken down into three levels: manipulation, rejection, and seduction. At first, psychopaths are quite selective in choosing their victims. Then you should portray them in a more endearing and engaging light. They give careful consideration to both the advantages and disadvantages of their prey. The second step is that they single out their prey and begin to exert their control over them while wearing their alluring front. They are able to win their victim's trust one step at a time. They form a love attachment extremely fast and rely on their fabricated feelings to maintain it. Finally, if they determine that the prey is not useful to them, they will cast them aside by levelling false allegations against them. Narcissism is a phrase that is often used to refer to abnormal levels of self-love. On the other hand, loving oneself in a healthy, adaptable, and constructive way. It encourages the person to have a good life and accomplish their goals. On

the other hand, pathological narcissism is obsessed with admiring one's own reflection. In the book *Narcissism and Character Transformation*, the author makes the following point:

“An important aspect of the multiplicity of meanings was examined by Andreas-Salome.... She tried to explain the contradictory tendencies of narcissists, who seek individuality at all costs and yet cannot live outside a continuing state of fusion.... The fact is that narcissism always has a dual orientation.... Thus, we are dealing with a narcissism that is centrifugal or centripetal, primary or secondary.... healthy or pathological, mature or immature, merged with the drive component or opposed to it, its antagonist. (Schwartz-Salant 34).”

Gillian Flynn reveals the narcissistic characteristics of a psychopathological disorder in the novel *Gone Girl*. The acts of the main character Amy Dunne, who exemplifies excessive narcissism, are shown in this passage. She is subjected to a number of insults and physical assaults beginning in her youth. She exerts her dominance over others around her to shield herself from any potential embarrassment. Amy may have the appearance of being a kind girl, but she is a master manipulator. She engages in illegal behaviour in order to achieve the goals that she has set for herself. Amy's narcissistic behaviour may be traced back to her upbringing, which was heavily influenced by her parents.

Amy was born to parents named Rand and Marybeth. They spent their formative years in New York City. Both of them specialise in the psychology of children. They went through five miscarriages and two stillbirths before finally succeeding in having Amy. Because Amy is their only kid who is still alive, her parents have very high hopes for her. The most severe kind of child abuse is when the parent elevates the child to the status of an idol. It is said in the book *Personality Disorders in Modern Life* that "some psychopaths receive defective parenting and maltreatment from infancy, like the sociopath, whereas others come from loving homes" (Millon et al. 154). Amy was victimised by her parents' excessive adoration of her. Her mother and father have always set a high standard of excellence for her. After Amy failed to live up to their expectations, they banded together to create a new Amy. They are both authors of the popular children's book series that goes by the name *Amazing Amy*. Through her portrayal of this made-up figure, she rises to the level of stardom. Amy's parents were able to meet her bodily demands, but they were unable to meet her psychological requirements. As a result of this, Amy is reduced to nothing more than a symbol for her parents' company. Amy is self-conscious about her lack of experience and begins competing with *Amazing Amy* to establish her credentials. The following are the terms that Amy uses to communicate her sorrow:

“I know I should feel sorry for them, but I don't. I've never been more to them than a symbol anyway, the walking ideal. Amazing Amy in the flesh. Don't screw up, you are Amazing Amy. Our only one. There is an unfair responsibility that comes with being an only child – you grow up knowing you aren't allowed to disappoint; you're not even allowed to die. (291).”

David Fincher is the director in charge of *Gone Girl*. His body of work includes films like *Seven*, *Fight Club*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, and, most recently, *The Social Network*. Fincher is a master at telling macabre stories, and his films include such classics as these. The film adaptation that Fincher created of *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn fits well within the profile of his critically praised body of work that is known for being psychologically complex and unsettling. Trent Reznor, the lead man for *Nine Inch*

Nails, has worked on the music for several of David Fincher's most recent films after the director reached out to him for assistance. One of the things that makes *Gone Girl* more emotional is how well Trent Reznor is able to use his music to reflect the dark and unpleasant psychological undertones of David Fincher's work.

The film "*Gone Girl*" starts out with a line of dialogue that immediately establishes the picture as belonging to the mystery and crime genre. A troubling realisation is voiced by Nick Dunne, the film's male main character, who says, "When I think of my wife, the first thing that comes to mind is the back of her head." In my head, I can see myself busting apart her beautiful head, exposing her brain, and searching through it for answers. What do you think is one of the most fundamental things to ask in a marriage? How are you doing right now? What have each of us done to deserve this? What are our options? " This violent and penetrating period of introspection functions as an essential red herring over the course of the movie. When Amy Dunne goes missing, the viewers in the theatre immediately have a top suspect in mind. In order to bring together all of the evidence, Nick Dunne is seen to be having an extramarital affair with a student, and he is also shown to be continuously denigrating the character of his wife in conversations with his sister. Another one of the director's brilliant sleights of hand is that he has Amy Dunne narrate the developing events in the film via a series of clues that have been placed in skillfully concealed locations. This narrative paints for us an abiding image of Amy's character, which is that of a patient and loving wife who has put up with a lot for her husband. To speak more specifically, it is almost as though Fincher has crafted two separate pictures. The first version of events is straightforward; Nick Dunne seems to have been responsible for the death of his wife. It is impossible to deny the proof, which ranges from Nick's wish to divorce his wife to the fact that his wife's blood is all over the floor of their kitchen. The audience is left with a limited set of conclusions after seeing the movie, and they all lead to the tragedy that lovely Amy, who was honest and compassionate, has passed away. The audience will experience a break in continuity on a psychological level when the second storey is told. The music has been wallowing in the morbid melodies and primordial resonances of a well-known murder mystery up until this moment. The next sections of the film should depict the investigation that leads to the finding of Amy's damaged and bloodied corpse. This is something that emerges from all of the crime-mystery motifs that we are familiar with. Suddenly, there is a shift in the tone of the soundtrack, the pace picks up, and the whole atmosphere of the movie shifts. The spectator recognises they have been tricked when they see something on the screen that is physically impossible. Amy Dunne is seen at the wheel of a car on an open road as she travels in the direction of a new life. However, how? This makes absolutely no sense at all. There is a strong desire to review the movie's previous scenes in order to see whether the shocking conclusion is consistent with what came before. One realises, choking on their own breath, that it is true. The storyline in "*Gone Girl*" is meticulously pieced together, which helps to amplify the impact of the following revelation: Amy Dunne was the one who arranged her own suicide. She methodically planned the events leading up to her faked death with one sole goal in mind: to implicate her husband and have him condemned to death. She also pretended to be dead. The saying "hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" comes to mind, which has been used several times yet never loses its relevance. The audience is left to merely marvel at the incredible cleverness of Amy's creative evil and the precise specifics of

Amy's nefarious plot, which no one could ever anticipate since such things are impossible to comprehend. Due to the complexity and depth of *Gone Girl's* storyline, it is beyond the scope of this review to provide an in-depth analysis of how the events of the film develop. It is the character of Amy Dunne, as well as the concerns that she raises about the female psychopath, that is the primary focus of attention in this storey. This quick analysis will be carried out by situating Amy's behaviour within the context of the four core components of psychopathy, which are interpersonal, affective, lifestyle, and antisocial.

As has been indicated, female psychopathy is a phenomenon that is neither well understood nor well explored. Even though there isn't a lot of research on the topic, certain important studies have shown that there are significant gender disparities. However, first things first, there has to be a scientifically sound definition of psychopathy. Psychopathy is a unique mental entity that is regarded as a severe kind of personality disorder and has been shown to be generally untreatable despite the many therapeutic attempts that have been made (Harris & Rice, 2006; Maibom, 2014). In terms of how it manifests itself, the disorder is characterised by certain characteristics of personality and behaviour. These characteristics include impaired processing of emotions (such as an absence of empathy and guilt), egocentrism, grandiosity, poor judgement, callous and manipulative interpersonal relationships, and behaviour that is driven by a desire for sensation (Glannon, 2014). Hare and Neumann (2010) say that psychopathy is also characterised by overt and impulsive forms of antisocial behavior.

“As noted, research has revealed that there are key gender differences in the phenotypic expression of psychopathy. Collectively, these studies suggest that, although psychopathy occurs more frequently and typically more severe in men, the disorder also exists in women (Wynn et al., 2012). Further, the behavioural expression of the disorder is likely to differ across gender with females showing more emotional and verbal violence as well as relational manipulation, and, to a lesser degree than males, criminal behaviour and physical violence (Dolan & Vøllm, 2009). For a detailed explication of these differences, the reader is directed to Botha et al. (2015, in press).”

In terms of the lifestyle factors that contribute to psychopathy, some of the important characteristics are sexual promiscuity, a parasitic lifestyle, impulsivity, and irresponsibility. As the storey progresses, we find out that Amy Dunne exhibits several of these characteristics. She has been in a series of sexual relationships, all of which resulted in her seeking to ruin her partners' lives and their reputations. She has been engaged in a string of sexual relationships. She is very exploitative, as seen by the way she used emotional blackmail to force her ex-boyfriend to continue financially supporting her while she is on the run from the law. As was said, the predominant phenotypic expression shown in the movie is that of a primary psychopath. Amy does not display a great deal of spontaneous behaviour; rather, the majority of her actions are instrumental, well-planned, and purposeful. This form of instrumental planning is taken to disturbing extremes toward the climax of the film, when she has to perform a series of anatomically unsettling manoeuvres in the lead up to the murder of her infatuated ex-boyfriend. This form of instrumental planning is taken to disturbing extremes toward the climax of the film. The problem of violent behavioural displays is brought up here in the middle of the movie, which is a very contentious aspect of female psychopathy that comes to the forefront at this time in the movie.

Violent behavioural displays, adolescent delinquency, the revocation of conditional release, and criminal flexibility are all examples of the antisocial component of psychopathy. It is difficult to demonstrate that Amy has chronic psychopathy, and the sole proof of this comes from a sequence of flashbacks throughout the movie that reveal some of her previous relationships. The chronicity of psychopathy is difficult to prove with Amy. Components such as juvenile delinquency, however, are not capable of being analysed. The same is true for the revocation of conditional release, which applies to criminals who have already been convicted. Despite this, it is abundantly evident that Amy is capable of exhibiting a wide variety of crimes, ranging from dishonesty and theft all the way up to murder in cold blood. This latter behaviour also raises questions about the problem of violent behavioural displays, which is a crucial aspect of the antisocial component. According to the findings of an empirical study, this characteristic of female psychopaths is really rather uncommon. For instance, studies have revealed that female psychopaths engage in less overtly violent behaviour and instead engage in more manipulative and damaging types of relationship aggression (Forouzan & Cooke, 2005). According to the findings of other studies (see Perri & Lichtenwald, 2010), one of the key characteristics of female psychopathy is the use of violence for instrumental purposes. The fact that Amy displays a significant amount of the major symptomatology of psychopathy makes her an interesting case study. As a result, she provides the audience with a powerful demonstration of the disease, which is one of the reasons why she is such an intriguing character. In addition to this, it enables the therapist or academic who is employing the filmic representation to offer a thorough evaluation of her psychopath behaviour on all of the important characteristics that are being considered. On the basis of the evidence that has been compiled above, it is evident that Amy Dunne would score well above the minimum threshold of 25/40 (see Cooke & Michie, 2001) on the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R), with significant score elevations in the interpersonal and affective components of the test. (Cooke & Michie, 2001). In this way, Amy is a great example of a major female psychopath for the audience to think about.

GILLIAN FLYNN'S NEW KIND OF GENDER TROUBLE

When people talk about the books written by Gillian Flynn, the phrases "misogyny" and "feminism" often come up as significant themes in the conversation. Flynn considers herself to be a feminist, despite the fact that she has been accused of promoting "misogynist stereotypes" and harbouring "a profound antipathy towards women" (Burkeman, 2013). In her own words, she describes what feminism means to her: "also the opportunity to have women who are horrible people" (Burkeman, 2013). She underlines the fact that "in literature, they may be dismissably awful—trampy, vampy, bitchy sorts; nonetheless, there's still a strong backlash against the concept that women can be merely pragmatically nasty, bad, and selfish [...]." The psycho-bitch is completely deranged; she has no reason for acting the way she does, and as a result, she is a person who may be disregarded due to her psycho-bitchiness (Burkeman, 2013). 28. Because this woman, the "psycho bitch," is not pragmatically bad as she does not have any motivations, she rejects the traditional portrayal of the femme fatale seen in works of literature. On the one hand, she achieves this by arguing that the "psycho bitch" does not fit the mould of the femme fatale. On the other hand, she seems to be implying that it is still sexist to have this

easily disregarded vamp or this straightforward femme fatale in written works. An analysis of feminism is required because Flynn's novels are post-feminist in regard to the unravelling of culturally determined gender roles such as the Cool Girl. This is particularly so because Flynn's intention was to write female characters that are equal to men because they are not simply crazy but rather lack morals and are pragmatically violent. It is vital to evaluate *Gone Girl*, *Sharp Objects*, and *Dark Places* since all of her works present distinct variations of this new femme fatale, who can be defined as a female antagonist that is absolutely equal to males in regard to wicked character qualities and sheer maliciousness. According to Robert Palmer, "the lack of female villains is indicative of a larger cultural problem that has little to do with feminism; instead, it has everything to do with a society that strongly circumscribes roles for women." "The lack of female villains is indicative of a larger cultural problem that has little to do with feminism" (Palmer, 2012). Not only do Flynn's writings represent fresh versions of gender-affected individuals, but they also demonstrate the impacts of contemporary media, consumerism, and conventional ideas of gender and sex on our society in the current day. These novels are in need of a historical and cultural assignment regarding feminism because it is feminism that makes it possible for this post-feminist agenda to exist in the first place. This historical and cultural assignment is necessary since these novels represent recent cultural conflicts, such as the constant sexual harassment or the social oppression of women. In addition, the purpose of these three novels is to unravel gender in accordance with post-feminism. This means that Flynn not only asserts that the idea of a woman who must obey moral superiority is counterproductive to feminism, but she also unravels media-based gender roles in a consumer society to demonstrate that, despite the fact that culture and society continue to affect the presupposed gender roles, both male and female characters need the opportunity and the freedom to be equally amoral and violent in order to participate fully in the culture. By doing so, Flynn utilises Judith Butler's gender problem theory in an effort to eliminate preconceived notions of gender brought on by contemporary consumer culture and the media. This strategy is forward-thinking, and as a result, it opens the door to the prospect of establishing post-feminist gender equality. Therefore, since Flynn takes an approach that has never been done before, post-feminism is now possible in literature. She deconstructs, critiques, and vitiates the gender-based social and cultural tensions that are ever-present in today's world. This dissertation will primarily show that Gillian Flynn is one of the first authors of fictional texts that approaches complete gender equality, as claimed by Judith Butler. This will be done in order to emphasise that consumerism and culture are still aimed at keeping both men and women from breaking free from predilections that have been placed upon them. Since there are no extensive analyses of both the criticism and the innovative idea of gender equality that might prove the present-day attainment of post-feminism, this dissertation will primarily show that this post-feminist approach in literature, which also takes into account and reflects on recent feminist movements, emphasises that post-feminism in society and culture is possible, despite the fact that it has not yet been completely achieved. For instance, the #MeToo movement is still going strong and is almost certainly going to be a required step in order to achieve post-feminism in the future.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the novel *Gone Girl* paints an uncommonly accurate and in-depth portrait of the female psychopath by addressing head-on a significant number of the essential characteristics of the disease that have been clarified via empirical study. The film acts as a very beneficial addition for academics in the field of psychopathology since it helps to reveal crucial aspects of a phenomenon that is little understood, namely the female psychopath. In this way, the film operates as a highly useful complement.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1]. Botha, R., Louw, D.A., & Loots, S. (2015). Gender and cultural considerations in the assessment of psychopathy. *Crime Quarterly*. Under review.
- [2]. Cooke, D. J., & Michie, C. (2001). Refining the construct of psychopathy: Towards a hierarchical model. *Psychological Assessment*, 13 (2), 171-188. doi:10.1037/1040-3590.13.2.171
- [3]. De Vogel, V., & De Ruiter, C. (2005). The HCR-20 in personality disordered female offenders: A comparison with a matched sample of males. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 12, 226-240.
- [4]. Dolan, M., & Vøllm, B. (2009). Antisocial personality disorder and psychopathy in women: A literature review on the reliability and validity of assessment instruments. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 23, 2-9.
- [5]. Forouzan, E., & Cooke, D. J. (2005). Figuring out le femme fatale: Conceptual and assessment issues concerning psychopathy in females. *Behavioural Sciences and the Law*, 23 (6), 765-778. doi:10.1002/bsl.669
- [6]. Glannon, W. (2014). Intervening in the psychopaths' brain. *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, 35, 43-47. doi:10.1007/s11017-013-9275-z
- [7]. Grann, M. (2000). The PCL-R and gender. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 16 (3), 147-149. doi:10.1027/1015-5759.16.3.147
- [8]. Hare, R. D. (2003). *The Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised* (2nd ed.). Canada, Toronto: MHS.
- [9]. Hare, R. D., & Neumann, C. S. (2009). Psychopathy: Assessment and forensic implications. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 54(12), 791-802.
- [10]. Harris, G. T., & Rice, M. E. (2006). Treatment of psychopathy: A review of empirical findings. In C. J. Patrick (Ed.) *Handbook of Psychopathy* (pp. 555-572). New York: Guilford Press.
- [11]. Hazelwood, L. L. (2006). Gender differences in a prototypical analysis of psychopathy. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Texas, United States.
- [12]. Hemphill, J. F., Hare, R. D., & Wong, S. (1998). Psychopathy and recidivism: A review. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 3 (1), 141-172. doi:10.1111/j.2044-8333.1998.tb0035.x
- [13]. Maibom, H. L. (2014). To treat a psychopath. *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, 35, 31-42. doi:10.1007/s11017-04-9281-9
- [14]. Perri, F. S., & Lichtenwald, T. G. (2010). The last frontier: Myths and the female psychopathic killer. *The Forensic Examiner*, 800, 592-1399.

- [15]. Ross, S. R., Bye, K., Wrobel, T. A., & Horton, R. S. (2008). Primary and secondary psychopathic characteristics and the schedule for non-adaptive and adaptive personality (SNAP). *Personality and Individual Differences*, 45 (3), 249-254. doi:org/10/1016/j.paid.2008.04.007
- [16]. Salekin, R. T., Rogers, R., & Sewell, K. W. (1997). Construct validity of psychopathy in a female offender sample: A multitrait-multimethod evaluation. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 106 (4), 576-585. doi:10.1037/0021-843X.106.4.576
- [17]. Vitale, J. E., Smith, S. S., Brinkley, C. A., & Newman, J. P. (2002). The reliability and validity of the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised in a sample of female offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, 29 (2), 202-231. doi:10.1177/0093854802029002005
- [18]. Warren, J. I., Burnette, M. L., South, S. C., Chauhan, P., Bale, R., Friend, R.,...Van Patten, I. (2003). Psychopathy in women: Structural modelling and comorbidity. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 26, 223-242. doi:10.1016/S0160-2527(03)00034-7
- [19]. Weizmann-Henelius, G., Putknonen, H., Gronroos, M., Lindberg, N., Fronen, N., & Häkkänen Nyholm, H. (2010). Examination of psychopathy in female homicide offenders: Confirmatory factor analysis of the PCL-R. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 33 (3), 177-183.
- [20]. Wynn, R., Hoiseth, M. H., & Petterson, G. (2012). Psychopathy in women: Theoretical and clinical perspectives. *International Journal of Women's Health*, 4, 247-263. doi:10.2147/IJWH.S25518
- [21]. Flynn, Gillian. *Gone Girl*. India: Manipal Technologies Ltd, 2012.
- [22]. Jacoby, Mario. *Individuation and Narcissism: The Psychology of the Self in Jung and Kohut*. New York: Routledge Group, 1990.
- [23]. Millon, T, Grossman, S, Millon, C, Meagher, S & Ramnath. *Personality Disorders in Modern Life*. Canada: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2004.
- [24]. Schwartz-Salant, Nathan. *Narcissism and Character Transformation: The Psychology of Narcissistic Character Disorders Studies in Jungian Psychology*; 9. Inner City Books, 1982.
- [25]. Twenge, Jean M, Campbell, W, Keith. *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*. New York: Free Press, Inc, 2009.
- [26]. Blackburn, R., Logan, C., Donnelly, J. P., & Renwick, S. J. D. (2008). Identifying psychopathic subtypes: Combining an empirical personality classification of offenders with the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised. *Journal of Personality Disorders*, 22, 604-622.
- [27]. Blair, R. J. R., & Cipolotti, L. (2000). Impaired social response reversal: A case of 'acquired sociopathy'. *Brain*, 123, 1122-1141.
- [28]. Blashfield, R. K., & Livesley, W. J. (1991). Metaphorical analysis of psychiatric classification as a psychological test. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 100, 262-270.
- [29]. , E. M. & Lilienfeld, S. O. (2002). Sex differences in psychopathy and antisocial personality disorder: A review and integration. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 22, 1179-1207.

- [30]. Campbell, A. (2002). *A mind of her own: The evolutionary psychology of women*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Cleckley, H. (1988). *The mask of sanity*(5th ed.). Augusta, GA: Emily Cleckler. (Original work published 1941).
- [31]. Cooke, D. J. (2010). Personality disorder and violence: Understand violence risk: An introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Personality Disorders*,24, 539–550.
- [32]. Cooke, D. J., Hart, S. D., Logan, C., & Michie, C. (2011). Towards a clinically informed and comprehensive model of psychopathic personality. Manuscript under review. Cooke,
- [33]. D. J., Hart, S. D., Logan, C., & Michie, C. (2012). Explicating the construct of psychopathy: Development and validation of a conceptual model, the Comprehensive Assessment of Psychopathic Personality (CAPP). *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*,11(4),242–252.
- [34]. Cooke, D. J., & Michie, C. (2001). Refining the construct of psychopathy: Towards a hierarchical model. *Psychological Assessment*,13, 171–188.Cooke,
- [35]. D. J., & Michie, C. (2010). Limitations of diagnostic precision and predictive utility in the individual case: A challenge for forensic practice. *Law and Human Behavior*,34, 259–274.