

Seduction, Manipulation, and Rejection in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*

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Abstract:

Gillian Schieber Flynn, is an American writer known for her psychological thriller novels. In her novels, she gives a strange and suspicious tone to her characters and to her writing. This tone makes the novel more interesting and it attracts the reader's attention. Gillian Flynn is the author of three successive novels: *Sharp Objects*, *Dark Places*, and *Gone Girl*. Flynn's novel, *Dark Places* won Dagger Award and the novels *Sharp Objects* and *Gone Girl* were the New York Times bestsellers. Gillian Flynn's third novel *Gone Girl* is a thriller, mysterious and psychological entertaining tale. The novel tells the story of a Missouri couple Nick and Amy. Amy, the central character grew up in New York with her wealthy parents. She is a beautiful, manipulative, seductive and self-centred psychopath. She could have a narcissistic personality disorder which reveals from her actions. Throughout the novel, she uses strategic calculations on how to deceive other characters and manipulates their behaviour. Amy's manipulations are repeatedly successful because she is very seductive and charming. This paper tends to analyse the narcissistic traits: seduction, manipulation, and rejection of the central character in the novel.

Keywords: narcissism, manipulation, rejection, seduction.

Narcissists are lovers of power and control. To attain power, they use several traits. The narcissistic traits include three levels: seduction, manipulation, and rejection. At first, psychopaths carefully select their prey. Then present them as more likable and charming. They carefully estimate the positives and negatives of their prey. Secondly, they identify their victims and start to manipulate them using their seductive mask. Gradually they gain the trust of their victim. They attach very quickly and create a loving bond using false emotions. Finally, when they find the prey as useless, they will reject them with false accusations. Self-love is often considered as unhealthy and termed as narcissism. But self-love is healthy, adaptive and positive. It promotes the individual to lead a successful life. In contrast, unhealthy narcissism loves the reflected image of self. In *Narcissism and Character Transformation*, it is stated as,

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)

The result of verbal, physical, sexual and psychological abuses is unhealthy narcissism. Using reflected image, they successfully seduce their prey to meet their own desires.

Through *Gone Girl*, Gillian Flynn exposes the narcissistic traits of a pathological psychopath. The central character Amy Dunne's actions show the signs of unhealthy narcissism. From her childhood, she experiences several humiliations and abuses. To protect her from possible humiliations, she takes control over others. Amy seems like a good girl, but she is an expert manipulator. She indulges in criminal acts for realizing what she desires. Amy's parents play an important role in Amy's narcissistic behaviour.

Rand and Marybeth are Amy's parents. They grew up Amy in New York. They both are child psychologists. Before Amy's birth, they undergo five miscarriages and two stillbirths. Amy is their only surviving child, and they set high expectations on her. Valuing high and idolizing the child is the worst forms in parental abuse. The book, *Personality Disorders in Modern in Modern Life*, states: "Some psychopaths receive defective parenting and maltreatment from infancy, like the sociopath, whereas others coming from loving homes" (Millon et al. 154). Amy's parents abused her by idealizing her. Her parents' expectation is to be perfect all the times. When Amy mismatches their expectations, they together created a fictional Amy. They co-author a popular series of children books named *Amazing Amy*. She attains a celebrity status through this fictional character. Amy's parents met her physical needs and failed to satisfy her psychological needs. Amy becomes just a symbol for her parents to enhance their business. Amy feels she is incompetent and started to compete with *Amazing Amy* to prove her competency. Amy expresses her grief by following words:

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)

Amy's parent's expectations motivated her to act as *Amazing Amy* all the time. Her concentration on perfectionism turns herself into a victim of pathological narcissism. She uses her reflected image to prove her self-worth. She is intelligent enough to guess how people will behave in certain situations. Throughout the novel, she uses different strategies to seduce and manipulate the characters for her needs.

Amy's narcissistic behaviour began from her adolescence. Hilary Handy is Amy's Memphis high school friend. Amy befriended Hilary by introducing herself as *Amazing Amy*, a fictional character created by her parents. She uses her popularity and fame to seduce Hilary. For a few months, their friendship goes well. Trouble starts when everyone prefers Hilary than Amy. A boy met Amy and Hilary at a dance, called Hilary next day instead of Amy. Hilary got better marks than Amy on their term exams. Hilary's friend invites her for Thanksgiving, not Amy. Amy feels she is secondary to Hilary. As a

narcissist, she needs the centre of attraction. But Amy feels it is given to Hilary by others. So she plans to prove her as insane in front of others. In the book *Individuation and Narcissism*, it is explained as,

... 'If you are not able to satisfy my demands for absolute perfection, you are absolutely worthless'. These attacks from within are normally feared by the individual who experiences them as threatening to his feeling of self-worth; they may be provoked by the slightest event. (Jacoby 91)

At first, Amy wins the trust of Hilary by creating a loving bond. She convinces Hilary to do hair colour on the shade of the blonde as Amy does. She asks Hilary to give prank calls to Amy's parents. Hilary did everything like a puppet. She feels Amy is enjoying it. When Hilary realise that Amy is indifferent and dangerous, she keeps her away. One day, headmistress calls Hilary, for pushing Amy from the stairs and cracking her ribs. Amy had a lot of evidence to prove Hilary as an insane. Hilary was expelled from the school for bullying Amy. After a month, Hilary received a letter from Amy that lists some petty reasons, which caused disappointment to Amy. But Hilary knows the real reason for Amy's actions is not listed. As a Narcissist, she has no for concern others pain. She blames Hilary for provoking her to do unjust actions.

Amy's another victim is Tommy O'Hara. Like Hilary, Amy frames Tommy as a rapist. Amy meets Tommy at a party. She feels Tommy a handsome man. She uses her cool girl image to win his attention. Their relationship goes well for a few months. Suddenly, Amy gets distant and seems not interested. Her association with Tommy ends after she met Nick at a party. In the book, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, it is stated as, "Narcissists' approach to relationships, is simple: it's all about them. They want to look and feel good, and if the relationship is a way to do this, great; if not, it's time to find another one" (Twenge and Campbell 78). Amy may find Tommy less attractive than Nick. To hold the hands of Nick, she plans to vacate Tommy from her life. To execute her plan, one night, she met Tommy. They go to a movie and have dinner. She seduces him to have sex. The next day police come to Tommy's apartment to arrest him. Amy wounds her wrists like she is tied and informs the police, she is raped by Tommy. Two weeks later, Tommy got a note in the mail, "*Maybe next time you'll think twice*" (312). Still, Tommy can't find what it means.

Amy's next victim is her husband, Nick. Their first meet is at a writer's party in New York. Amy seems like a cool girl, which makes Nick fall in love. Nick feels loving Amy makes him a superhero. In his words: "I'd fallen in love with Amy because I was the ultimate Nick with her, Loving her made me superhuman, it made me feel alive" (241). To win Nick's attraction Amy shows her as the type of girl, Nick wants. Amy says, Nick "didn't love me, me. Nick loved a girl who doesn't exist" (250). Amy's cool girl drama goes well for a few days. When she finds Nick as a manipulative liar and also having an affair with his student Andie, she gives up. To manipulate Nick, Amy plans to frame him for murdering her. She says:

So I began to think of a different story, a better story that would destroy Nick for doing this to me. A story that would restore my perfection. It would make me the hero, flawless and adored.

Because everyone loves the Dead Girl.

It's rather extreme, framing your husband for your murder. I want you to know I know that. (263)

Amy creates evidence against Nick for past one year and executes her plan. On their fifth wedding anniversary, Nick finds Amy had disappeared. As the investigation proceeds, the evidence turns against Nick. Everyone suspects Nick might have kill his wife. Nick tries to prove his innocence, but things go wild. Amy's case is very famous in the media because of her parents' famous fiction book, *Amazing Amy*. Everyone starts to worship and believes Amy as an ideal wife. Andie, Nick's affair suspect Nick might have killed his wife and left him. People and the media begin to hate Nick. The Police arrests Nick for killing his wife.

During her disappearance, she contacts her high school boyfriend, Desi Collings. He is one of her boyfriends in school. He falls deeply in love with Amy. As usual, after some days, Amy avoids him. They didn't get life together yet but Amy maintained contact with Desi. She believes he will be useful to her if she is in trouble. Amy knows Desi's weakness in rescuing women like the white knight when they are in trouble. She is confident enough to seduce Desi Collings easily with her sob story. She narrates that she escapes from her abusive husband and hiding. Desi invites her to his Lakehouse and hope for the reunion. Desi's possessive action makes Amy uncomfortable. Amy searches for ways to escape from him. She seduces Desi by wearing an attractive dress and drives him towards sex. She cuts his throat while having sex and escapes from the place. "Narcissists use others to power their status and esteem, and when the other person no longer provides that, they are dumped in the trash bin" (Twenge and Campbell 58).

Forty days after disappearing, Amy comes to see Nick with a lot of injuries. She announces to everyone that; Desi kidnaped and raped her repeatedly and that she killed him in self-defence and escaped from him. Amy plans to make sure Nick should never open her secret. She receives Nick's frozen sperm from the fertility centre, given for fertility treatments before. Amy inseminates the sperm to make her pregnant. She knows Nick will never betray her if she has his child. She reveals her pregnancy to Nick. Nick realised he is in the trap of a narcissist. Nick says:

I was a prisoner after all. Amy had me forever, or as long as she wanted because I needed to save my son, to try to unhook, unlatch, debarb, undo everything that Amy did. I would literally lay down my life for my child, and do it happily. I would raise my son to be a good man. (459-60)

To protect his baby from Amy, he withdraws his plan on revealing Amy's secret. The novel ends with the awaiting birth of their child, on their sixth wedding anniversary. However, the end shows Amy

gets everything she wants through her narcissistic traits. Amy achieves success in the struggle to maintain power and control. But her victory is considered as nothing.

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