



RESEARCH PAPER

Reimagining Gender Identities in *Gone Girl*: A Jungian Archetypal Analysis of the Collective Unconsciousness

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how the writer challenges as well as critiques gender stereotypes in the novel *Gone Girl* written by Gillian Flynn. Departing from the stereotypical characterization, the novel presents characters that constantly sway between the traditional masculine and feminine traits. A qualitative research design was employed to map the characters' actions from a psychological perspective. The findings of the study suggest that the traditional male and female stereotypes that have been glorified in the American society for a long time do not have any scientific basis. Instead they are just over-generalizations of ascribed traits associated with men and women within the institution of marriage. The future researches may extend the Jungian theoretical framework to non-Western narratives in order to reshape the socio-cultural perceptions of gender and identity. Furthermore, the comparative analysis of male and female archetypes within different contemporary novels can uncover new dimensions of gender representations.

KEYWORDS Gender Stereotypes, Masculinity, Femininity, Psyche, Archetypes

Introduction

Gender has become a significant debate worldwide with the rise of feminism in the twentieth century. Feminists are of the view that the conventional norms and attributes associated with women are inspired by the patriarchal ideology that leads to strengthening of male domination in a patriarchal society. Simon de Beauvoir, a famous feminist critic, is of the view that men have created the idealized notion of femininity for their own physical and economic needs. For a long period of time in the history of literature, male authors were dominant in the genre of fiction, and they generally focused on the stereotypical portrayal of the female characters. According to Beauvoir, "One is not born but becomes a woman" (Butler, 1986, p. 35). One can interpret from Beauvoir's statement that womanhood is not determined solely by her sex, rather it is determined by the acquisition of the beliefs and norms associated with the female gender.

Gone Girl presents America as a patriarchal society. Patriarchal ideology advocates the dominance of men over women. In the second edition of her book titled *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, Tyson (2006) discusses about how patriarchy ascribes socially defined gender norms and roles to both men and women. Both in domestic as well as public sphere, men are supposed to be strong and independent. Women on the other hand are considered as weak and are supposed to obey and surrender. Heterosexual marriages are celebrated and cherished in such a patriarchal system where men are supposed to be the breadwinners and women are supposed to be the homemakers. Being an American native, Tyson talks about how tiresome it becomes for both men and women to follow the ascribed

gender roles at times. She says that the patriarchal ideology programs both men and women to behave in a certain manner. What is considered appropriate for men is considered to be inappropriate for women and vice versa. According to her, this aspect of the patriarchal gender norms become detrimental at times for both men as well as women who follow them blindly.

The dual narrative technique used in the novel allows the readers to understand male and female perspective simultaneously. It becomes clear from the narrative of Amy and Dunne that they are taught to behave according to the old gender norms, traditional gender roles and social expectations in a process that we know as gender socialization, since childhood. Sociologists believe that gender socialization gives rise to stereotypes about male and female genders which can be simply described as the preconceived beliefs and ideas about the characteristics, traits, and even the domestic and social roles that are ascribed to men and women in any specific culture or society. Gender stereotypes also shape the ideals associated with masculinity and femininity. Throughout the world, individuals are expected to internalize these stereotypes from an early age and conform to them in order to gain social acceptance.

As a writer, Flynn is famous for presenting dark side of female characters and female brutality in her novels and is often accused of being a misogynist for this peculiar style of her writing. A feature article titled "Gillian Flynn On Her Best Seller *Gone Girl* and Accusations of Misogyny" discusses that Flynn is extremely annoyed with the generalizations about women that they are only good and kind-hearted by nature. In an interview, she argues that although there are evil and monstrous female characters in literature, yet they are very limited (Burkeman, 2013). Writers generally avoid portraying females as villains and most significantly as brutal characters as these depictions do not match with the gendered expectations associated with females. In an essay titled, "I Was Not a Nice Little Girl", Flynn talks about her personal life. She writes that she did not behave like a typical genteel or kind-hearted girl in her childhood, instead she was dedicated to activities and games that are considered to be unfit for her gender. She observed that violence is a phenomenon that is associated with the male gender only. She states, "Libraries are filled with stories on generations of brutal men, trapped in a circle of aggression. I wanted to write about the violence of women" (Flynn, 2015, para. 3). Flynn achieves this purpose through the portrayal of a female psychopath in the novel *Gone Girl*.

Literature Review

It reviews the existing body of literature available on the novel *Gone Girl* to critically analyze the former researches and to find out about the research gap as well. Some of the studies are discussed as follows:

A research article titled "From Enchantress to Murderess: The Portrayal of Amy Dunne as 'Femme Fatale' in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*" analyzes the character of Amy as femme fatale, an archetype used for those females who are vicious and become a threat for their lovers and spouses (Widya et al., 2016).

A paper titled "Distortion of Reality in *Gone Girl*" highlights the role of media in a post modern world and draws contrasts between the fictional Amazing Amy and the hyper real Amy by employing the postmodern theory of Jean Baudrillard (Hamed et al., 2020).

Kane (2019) in the dissertation titled *This is a (Wo)man's world – Subverting Gender and Femininity in Gillian Flynn's Gone Girl* talks about how Amy rebels and overcomes the

subordination imposed upon her by the society. The researcher presents Amy's actions from a feminist perspective.

It was observed that all the studies that were reviewed for this research dealt with different aspects of Amy's personality. However, none of them talked in length about the different gender stereotypes and their impact on the lives of both male and female characters in the novel. It was a gap in the existing body of literature that this research intends to fulfill.

Material and Methods

This research is structured on qualitative methodology for an in-depth analysis of the novel under discussion i.e., *Gone Girl*. The aim of this study is to find out how the gender behaviors and the psychic inclinations of the main characters are exposed through the lens of Jungian Archetypal theory, with its particular emphasis on how this psychological framework not only challenges but also dismantles the established gender stereotypes. The objectives of this research are as follows:

Results and Discussion

Gender and sex are two distinct terms that are often perceived to be the same but in actual are different. Diamond (2002) in the research article titled "Sex and Gender are Different: Sexual Identity and Gender Identity are Different" states that the term *sex* is related to anatomical structure whereas the term *gender* is related to an imposed or adopted social and psychological condition. From his arguments, it can be inferred that the time of birth, *sex* determines whether the newborn is a male or a female and creates differentiation on the basis of biological differences. On the other hand, *gender* shapes the perception about how males and females should conduct themselves in a society and distinguishes between the two sexes in view of specific socio-cultural beliefs.

Gone Girl emphasizes the role of gender in the lives of male as well as female characters. It highlights the fact that an individual, whether a man or a woman, is made to fit in the society in a process known as gender socialization. This process is crucial in the development of a human being, from being an infant to an adult social being. Children gradually develop identity about their gender through keen observation and imitation of gender related norms and attitudes. From the narratives of the two main characters, Amy and her husband Nick, it becomes clear that there are certain factors that are responsible for the inculcation of stereotypical norms and beliefs about gender in men as well as the men discussed in detail as follows:

Parents as agents of gender socialization

Parents play a vital role in the training and upbringing of a child. They are not only responsible for fulfilling the basic needs of the children but also for preparing them to adjust in the social circle. Both mother and father are expected to raise their kids based on the norms and customs of their assigned gender. This aspect is relevant in the case of Amy in the novel. As she is the only offspring of two child psychologists named Marybeth Elliott and Rand Elliott. Amy's parents are shown to be an optimal version of their own gender. Amy's mother has all the desired qualities of a good woman. Similarly, Rand is shown to be a gentleman in every sense. Unlike Amy, Nick gets a chance to spend only twelve years of his age in a nuclear family system. His parents Bill Dunne and Maureen are presented as an incompatible couple deprived of the usual feelings of love and empathy in a marital relationship. Bill is portrayed as a misogynist who loathed women throughout his life. On

the other hand, Maureen's character seems quite relatable to that of a Victorian wife. She tries hard to make her marriage work through her submissive and obedient nature but realizes that she could not keep up with her husband and their marriage eventually ends up in divorce.

Under the influence of patriarchal mindset, Nick's father highly supports the sexist belief that men are better than women in every regard. He tries to instill the same beliefs in his son. He prefers Nick over his daughter Go. Even Nick's mother gives more attention to Nick than his sister and never allows her son to do any household work like cooking, washing clothes, cleaning, ironing etc. Because she believes that domestic chores are not the responsibility of men. On the other hand, she encourages Go to take full part in the household chores with her. Flynn points towards the fact that the older generation in American society supports and conforms to the traditional gender roles more conveniently and they are the ones who restrict women to the household activities and men to earning money and supporting family.

The role of children's literature in the transmission of gender stereotypes

Children's literature plays an important role in the development of beliefs related to male and female genders in the minds of the readers mainly through the portrayal of fascinating characters. Studies have shown that many of the children's storybooks and fairy tales transmit stereotypes about men and women. *Gone Girl* also highlights a book series named *Amazing Amy* written by Amy's parents which is the namesake of their own daughter. The series is based on the life of a fictional character which Amy believes is a plagiarized account of herself. Being child psychologists, Elliotts' have designed the character of amazing Amy in a way that it becomes epitome of perfection for their daughter to follow during the developmental stages of her life. Amy is well aware of the main purpose of her parents behind writing the series. She states, "I've never been more to them a symbol anyway, the walking ideal. Amazing Amy in the flesh. Don't screw up, you are Amazing Amy. Our only one" (Flynn, 2012, p.245). The pressure of being perfect and living up to the expectations of her parents deeply affects the overall personality of Amy.

Gendered expectations and the search for the 'Perfect' partner

Flynn sheds light on the fact that the members of the opposite sexes also hold stereotypical beliefs about desired qualities they want to see in their better halves. The storyline highlights that the men in the fictional American Society are fan of 'Cool Girl,' a stereotype that is believed to be inspired from a fictional female character created by a male author. Cool Girl becomes the standard for young girls and every girl is expected to adapt her personality according to it. In a party organized in Brooklyn, Amy intentionally puts on the persona of Cool Girl to attract Nick whom she meets for the first time and falls for him immediately. According to Amy, "That night in the Brooklyn, I was playing the girl who was in style, the girl a man like Nick wants: the Cool Girl. Men always say that as the defining compliment, don't they? *She's a cool girl*" (Flynn, 2012, p. 210). It is evident from the narrative of Nick that he is desperate to maintain a 'good guy' image in the society. Good guy is a stereotype used for those men who have a charming appearance and behave like real gentlemen. Nick shares the memories of his childhood in which he struggled hard to ensure his family that he is a good boy. Similarly in his adulthood, he tries to keep a refined image of himself in front of the society. He tries to give the same impression to Amy during their first meeting. After marriage, they became an example of what society calls an ideal couple.

In the first few chapters of *Gone Girl* Amy presents herself as a typical housewife who fully devotes herself in taking care of her husband. She boasts about how she likes to cook a variety of foods for Nick and manages to take care of other domestic chores in an extremely responsible manner. When Nick comes to know about his ill mother living in Missouri, he asks her to leave New York and settle in Missouri with him. She hesitates a bit at first but agrees and even lends him \$80,000 to start a bar with his sister. Through Amy's narrative, it seems as if she is trying to build an image of a Good Wife. On the other hand, Nick portrays himself as a man who takes up the role of breadwinner for his mother and sister from an immature age owing to the separation of his parents. He shares the struggles of making both ends meet not only during his bachelor days to Amy but after their marriage as well. One day while going through her husband's personal stuff, Amy finds a book proposal with the title *Double Lives: A Memoir of Ends and Beginnings*. She finds out that Nick wishes to write about the challenges and struggles faced by men and boys of all ages. She discovers that Nick feels pressurized that he has to fulfill his duty as the financial provider for so long in life. He also talks about the burden of being the Head of the family in his proposal because men are expected to hold the leading and decisive positions in their homes in patriarchal systems.

The impact of society in the maintenance of gender binary

Patriarchal societies tend to maintain rigid boundary of masculinity and femininity and the inhabitants are expected to strictly abide by it. The book *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality* states that masculinity and femininity are actually cultural constructions. The matter associated with one gender is considered as inappropriate for the other and vice versa. This point is described in the book in the following words: "Toys and clothes are not the only two things defined as in appropriate for one sex or the other.... Defined as gender inappropriate for females, for instance, the desire for autonomy and power; defined as gender inappropriate for males are feelings of vulnerability and dependency" (Bem, 1993, p.146).

Electronic media's influence in the development of stereotypical perceptions

Gone Girl highlights the role of electronic media as the key agent in the transmission of stereotypes about men and women in its narrative. In one of her dialogues, Amy states that media is particularly interested in creating and transmitting stereotypes about female gender through a variety of commercials. These stereotypes are either based on the assigned gender roles of females in the society and they are also related to their natural monthly cycle. The storyline also satirizes the role that some of the journalists play in the media industry. By calling themselves the flag bearers of truth, some of the media anchors actually manipulate the general public to believe in something that is not the part of the actual reality. Nick is forced to deal with media trial after the matter of Amy's so-called abduction. Media presents Nick as guilty in the case of his missing wife.

We can see that the lead characters Amy and Nick have different shades of personalities, and this is the consequence of the influence of gender stereotypes. It will not be wrong to say that Flynn has skillfully developed the characters of both Amy and Nick to give an impression as if both of them are part of a masquerade, where they are changing from one mask to another.

The concept of psyche and archetypes of collective unconsciousness

Carl Gustav Jung, a renowned Neo- Freudian psychologist presented the idea of collective unconscious. The book *Jungian Archetypes: Jung, Gödel, and the History of*

Archetypes further sheds light on Jung's practical contributions in the field of psychology. It states that Jung has used the term *psyche* for the overall personality of an individual, as it consists of all the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of a subject under discussion. Jung talks about archetypes which are defined as, "the archetypes are eternal principles that reside in the human psyche" (Robertson, 2016, p.201). According to him, inborn instincts, and archetypes in one's psyche combine to form the collective unconsciousness. Archetypes form a pattern in the mind of an individual which is exhibited in his/her behavior later. The first archetype is 'persona' which is a kind of social mask and a role one assumes in front of public and which is different from his/her real self (Robertson 2016). By keeping in mind this theory, it can be undoubtedly said that the fictional stereotype *Amazing Amy* and Good Guy are actually personas of Amy and Nick, that are different from their real selves.

Symbolism plays an important role in the fiction as it allows the writer to present abstract ideas through the usage of objects or characters. From Amy's narrative, it is revealed that for twenty years, her parents have succeeded in achieving immense financial success and popularity through *Amazing Amy* series. However, after the marriage of Amy, the series began to decline resulting in the bankruptcy of the Elliotts'. The dismantling of the series symbolizes disintegration of the imaginary perfect girl stereotype.

The so-called perfect marriage of Amy and Nick is shattered when Amy finds out about the mistress of her husband. Nick also confesses his illegitimate affair in his narrative and says that he was having a steamy affair with a young girl Andie before the disappearance of his wife. Nick tries his best to hide his affair from the outside world in order to prevent his Good Guy image from tarnishing because good men do not have illicit relationship out of wedlock. One day at Andie's house, Nick Rebukes himself for his infidelity in the following words, "*You're there. You have failed one of the most basic mail tests. You are not a good man*" (Flynn, 2012, p.141).

Being the follower of Freud, Jung also focused on the interpretation of his subjects' dreams in order to find out more about the unconscious mind. He discovered that the majority of them were having nightmares filled with frightening images. After research, he reached to the conclusion that there is a negative side within the unconscious mind that exhibits itself in the form of horrible figures in an individual's dreams. This discovery led to the development of shadow archetype which is defined as follows, "all those parts of our personal life which have been deemed unsuitable and denied collect around a single archetype apple core. Everything we regard as bad, as "not us", accumulates around this center" (Robertson, 2016, p.181). From Nick's narrative, it is revealed that the shadow of his psyche is debauchery. On the other hand, the shadow of Amy's psyche is her psychopathic behavior due to which she likes to control and manipulate those people who are part of her life.

Nick's meeting with a woman named Rebecca in his bar one evening after his Good Guy image is tarnished by media trial, is an example of the fact that not every person's thoughts are influenced by media representation. She inquires about the proceedings of the case of Amy and assures Nick that she does not consider him guilty. Rather she strongly believes that it is wrong to accuse someone in the absence of solid evidence in case of a crime. Rebecca represents the modern generation who believes in the truth supported by scientific evidence rather than anything based on mere assumptions and distorted judgments. She comments upon how media negatively affects male gender in the following words, "Well I think there is an *Evil Husband* effect. Everyone has seen too many true-crime shows where the husband is always, always the killer, so people automatically assume the husband's the bad guy" (Flynn, 2012, p.282). Flynn highlights the impact of stereotyping

on the psyche of an individual as well as on the belief system of the overall society. While reading the second part of the novel, the readers began to feel sympathy for Nick as he is being wrongfully convicted of a crime he has not even committed.

Nick's world turns upside down when he comes to know about Amy's pregnancy through their neighbors during a media trial. Through certain hints and clues, it becomes clear to him that Amy is alive and has not been kidnapped, rather she is playing a game to negatively frame him in the eye of the public just to punish him for his infidelity. Nick feels attracted towards Amy after the news of pregnancy and turns down his girl friend Andie. Out of revenge, Andie makes an appearance on media and portrays Nick as a womanizer who trapped her for his lust. After Andie's interview, Nick is left with no choice but to come forward and give an interview on media in which he apologizes for his wrongdoings and confesses that he knows that his wife is alive, and he really wants her to return back to home. The interview goes well, and it leaves a profound impact on the viewers including Amy, who feels overjoyed for achieving success in her plan. She's shown to be living with her ex- boyfriend named Desi Collings by the time Nick's interview gets on-aired.

Desi Collings is introduced to the readers as a rich guy who is equally influenced by the patriarchal mindset that men are the savior of women who are caught in some sort of potential danger. He considers himself as Amy's savior and urges her to stay with him forever. Amy begins to realize that Desi is not the guy she wants in her life as she cannot gain control, in a way she has forced Nick to subjugate before her. Amy sets up a horrific plan to get rid of Desi's control over her. She first gets physical with him and then slits his throat and covers herself in his blood. She returns to Nick covered in blood where a number of media reporters and police officers gather in a short period of time. She pins her kidnapping on Desi and narrates a false story about being raped and abused at his hands. Amy challenges feminine aspects of her gender through her violent actions. This aspect of her personality can be best illustrated through the "Anima/ Animus" archetype defined in the book *Jungian Archetypes: Jung, Gödel, and the History of Archetypes* in the following words.

Jung's studies of his patients' dreams and behavior convinced him that each of us, male or female, contains both masculine and feminine characteristics. Since neither sex normally accepts and, uses the behavior associated with the opposite sex, those behaviors remain unconscious. This female within the male Jung called the anima; the male within the female he termed the animus. (Robertson, 2016, p.187)

It can be deduced from the behavior of Amy that the animus principle within her psyche is based upon the notion of power playing, violence and supremacy. She lets the animus archetype of her unconscious mind to take control of her actions. At this point, the readers realize that Amy is not a typical, genteel woman she has portrayed herself to be in front of the American society. The brutal murder of Desi compels the readers to think that not all woman are kind-hearted and nurturing, some like Amy can be frighteningly violent and manipulative too.

On the other hand, Nick realizes the truth that Amy has actually killed Desi but nothing can be done due to the lack of evidence. Due to Amy's pregnancy, Nick realizes that he is left with no option but to stay with her for his child's sake. He realizes that Amy can never become the traditional nurturing and caring mother of his child. He recognizes the anima principle within his psyche and decides to assume the role of a *patient* and *caring* spouse and a *nurturing* parent for his unborn child. He no longer remains the masculine man he claims himself to be, rather he transforms into a man with feminine colors. Thus both husband and wife give up on their respective gender roles and each of them

transforms into an individual who thinks and acts in a manner which is totally opposite to the norms and traits associated with his/her assigned gender.

Conclusion

This study highlights the impact of gender stereotyping on the lives of both men and women in patriarchal American society of the early twentieth century. In almost all patriarchal societies around the globe, it is generally believed that power and authority lie only in the hands of men, whereas women are believed to be weak, thus lacking such strength, power and courage. This study has demonstrated that how Flynn debunks this perception through the representation of a female psychopath in *Gone Girl* whose character is opposite to that of a typical patriarchal woman. The research has thoroughly analyzed the psyche of both main female and male characters i.e., Amy and Nick respectively through the lens of Jungian archetypal theory, hence concluded that stereotypes associated with an individual's gender can never completely define a person's character nor can confine him/her to the rigid boundary of masculinity and femininity. Some men and women, like Nick and Amy, defy traditional roles and traits associated with their genders by allowing the anima/animus principle within their unconscious mind to take control of their actions thus breaking the stereotypes related to their genders in the process. The dismantling of stereotypes not only challenges the rigid gender binaries but it also leads to the reversal of gender roles within the institution of marriage. The emergence of Amy as a dominant, powerful figure and Nick as a compromising, submissive person by the end of the novel indicates the fluid and multi-faceted nature of both male and female genders which further strengthens the idea that gender identities can be reconstructed and reinforced regardless of the limitations imposed by the culture and society.

Recommendations

The future researchers can employ Jungian archetypal framework as a psychological approach to analyze the psyche of male and female characters in non-Western fiction, such as South Asian literature, to contend that how stereotypical perceptions related to male and female genders need to get dismantled, reshaped and re-experienced in a post-modern world. The studies should focus on the reinterpretation of archetypal roles and gender norms across diverse cultures of the world as it will enable a discrete and comprehensive analysis of the connections between psychology, literature and gender studies.

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