

Gender Performativity and Fluctuating Hierarchies: A Postmodern Feminist Study of

Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*

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Abstract



The postmodern feminist discourse relies essentially on disrupting structured stereotypical gendered roles and maintaining a fluidity which is natural to both men and women. Gillian Flynn, in her novel, *Gone Girl*, has portrayed Woman as a state of existence where characteristics attributed to both male and female sexuality coexist. Amy displays her emotional feminine vulnerability leading to actions of revenge based on clever and manipulative designs- characteristics which are considered masculine in nature. Nick falls prey to the trap laid by Amy and becomes a metaphorical victim of traditional 'female elimination' (where females were eliminated conveniently if they deviated from their accorded traditional roles). Helen Cixous, Christine Delphy, Luce Irigaray and Judith Baxter study the feminist discourse and they formulate an idea where femininity exists in both men and women, and vice versa. They discourage the simplicity of male/female binary and create a creative complexity which provides more room for theoretical critique. The paper studies major and minor characters from Flynn's novel utilizing studies provided by these commended feminist theorists. Their studies provide the theoretical underpinning based on which, a conclusion will be drawn upon, relating women as economically, sexually, and socially independent beings. The male/female hierarchies, as accepted by the society, will be disrupted; consequentially, new horizontal hierarchies will be formulated. Economic, social, and sexual superiority by women will lead them into dominating the male characters from the novel, breaking the norm of male/female stereotypes.

Keywords: Postmodern; Feminist; Hierarchy; Masculinity; Fluctuating

Introduction

Postmodern feminist discourse is a result of the evolution and slight deviation from the traditional feminist narrative that took its roots in the mid to the late 19th century. While the earlier dealt with "access and equal opportunities for women", postmodern feminists deconstruct conventional feminist discourse that fails to see women's role other than an inferior sex exploited by men (Anne, 2006, p. 1). With the onset of deconstruction and the notion that there are no fixed meanings, a need was felt to create an understanding of the complexities hidden behind genders and their hierarchies. The shift from the traditional to the postmodern feminism can be better understood if one removes the two genders from a vertical line of existence to an order which progresses horizontally: co-existing on the same societal, religious and legal level (Charles, 2003, p. 2).

With the change in the understanding of gender hierarchies, a fluidity was acknowledged—the archetypes dissolved and the conflicts were studied keenly. The gender qualities subjected particularly to one gender group were no longer specific while the female gender could now be seen violent, vocal and more confident. The difference in physical making of the bodies does not coincide with how an individual acts out. Manon Hedenborg White, while studying this concept in one of her works (2021), writes that stereotypical representation of certain gender roles compelled feminist theorists to find the causes that are often rooted in how either of the sex is associated with certain essential traits. This supposed 'natural' or by birth distinction position men and women poles apart (1). Postmodern feminism is more "self-assertive-even aggressive-but also more playful", providing a psychological and an emotional platform where female subjectivity is heard and accepted (Sorensen, 2006, p. 15). Thus, the notion of violence initiated by an individual, which is relevant to the study

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being made, is no longer gender specific in postmodern feminism. Females avenge and oppress as fiercely as men do.

In addition to exploring the duality of individual action, postmodern feminism also deals with the conflicting relationship between feminist discourse and domestic economy. Christine Delphy, being a Marxist feminist, explores the politics of “domestic economy” that becomes a site of female oppression and slavery. (Macintosh, 1979, p. 1) Getting the rights for economic independence is no longer a conflicting subject while studying postmodern feminism. Issues of women undergoing oppression through unemployment and economic exploitation by their male spouses are some of the contemporary conflicts under Marxist Feminist study.

Helene Cixous, a French feminist, presented studies (2002) based on subjects differentiated on the basis of cultural and sexual differences. She deeply studied the fluidity of gender attributes and challenged the pre-existing notion of gender archetypes. Cixous formulated a theoretical concept (1975) which she called *écriture féminine* (“focusing on the bisexual nature of not only writings, but also genders and individuals”) (Suleiman, 1937). According to Cixous, each individual has an impulsive appetite for both the genders within him/herself, and can act on impulses, which could either be masculine or feminine, regardless of the individual’s own gender. This bisexuality is not of a Platonic nature, but rather, a recognition of the presence of both the sexes with all its desires and longings in one individual.

Gillian Flynn (1971) is known for creating paranoid, obnoxious and despicable female villains thus creating a foundation where postmodern feminist discourse helps the reader create a better understanding of such characters. She specializes in carving out unreliable narrators for her plots that hooks readers to the story. The plot of the novel under study, *Gone Girl*, revolves around Amy Dunne is a beauty with evil brains. She frames her husband upon finding his love affair with a young student in a way that he becomes the prime suspect behind his wife’s false abduction from their house. With a series of traps set to make Nick look like a bad husband, Amy turns the whole media in favor of the neglected wife who is often beaten and tortured by her own husband.

Research Objectives

- To analyze the major and minor female characters of *Gone Girl* through the lens of postmodern feminist discourse
- To examine the extent of shift or reversal of the gender stereotypes in the novel
- To attain a better understanding of postmodern feminist critique using the novel as an illustration

Research Questions

1. How do major and minor female characters resist stereotypical female representation in the novel *Gone Girl*?
2. How can the portrayal of female characters in multi-dimensional and performative gender roles be explained through post-modern feminism?
3. How does Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl* throw light upon fluctuating economic hierarchies on domestic level?

Research Methodology

The paper adopts a qualitative mode of research to analyze female characters of the novel, and their relationships with patriarchal society at large. The interpretive paradigm will involve investigation from the level of character analysis. Close examination of how and why the characters are behaving in a certain pattern will aid in reaching the objectives of the study.

This study explores the action of various characters of Flynn’s novel through a postmodern lens while drawing on the propositions made by Judith Baxter, Helene Cixous, Christine Delphy, Luce Irigaray and other postmodern thinkers. The focus would be to study genders as they exist - not biologically - but as socially constructed (White, 2021, p. 2). The role of the chosen discourse would be studied critically especially in terms of how it encourages “performativity” of the genders in their social arenas (Baxter, 2008, n.pg.). Studying the influence of Marxism on postmodern feminism would help one understand the monetary conflicts that give rise to domestic exploitation. This explains why Elisabeth Armstrong argues that in domestic spaces, patriarchy replaces what capitalism does to fuel the differences among different classes (Armstrong, 2020, p. 7).

Literature Review

Female emancipation in the post-feminist discourse is often projected in a negative way, especially within the context of gender performativity. Flynn's *Gone Girl* stands as an example of one of those contemporary literary works where the innocent, naïve and virtuous persona of the female self is continuously replaced by contemptuous, vile and criminal female identities. McDermott draws upon a similar idea: post-feminism discourse is increasingly becoming a "feel-bad genre" (McDermott, 2018, p. 26). In her analysis of the novel, McDermott deconstructs the motif of "Cool Girl" (Flynn, 2012, p. 250) as a socially viable female personality who complies with traditional gender roles. The outcome of this is the exhaustion of "Cool Girl" as a category and the emergence of new dimensions of female self. However, this gender flexibility does not ensure any "growth or change" (McDermott, 2018, p. 26). Rather it pushes the protagonist to an "unhappy place" and the novel to a "feel-bad genre" (McDermott, 2018, p. 26).

Gender fluid characters have been existing in literature since almost always, though the interpretation of such characters was limited for instance Jane Austen's female characters like Emma or Elizabeth Bennett. Dybas' compares Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Flynn's *Gone Girl* to highlight the trajectory of a female revenger in the history of English Literature. Her examination of female revenger as a recurrent motif in literature unfolds the social and economic dynamics on which woman status operates. A female revenger is a product of male insecurities, anxieties and oppression displaced on women. It is reciprocation of historical, cultural, and ideological atrocities targeting women to the point that while turning the tables, a female revenger exploits and oppresses the very men who caused her pain. There is a prominent shift in early modern literature that challenges stereotypical female representation, however, it would be wrong to say there were no such characters in older literature. A case in point is Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* that deviates from conventional female representation of that time. It would not be surprising that Tamora's character stand parallel to Amy's from *Gone Girl*. Both of them show "aggressive sexuality" and "subjectivity" in their behaviors. (Dybas, 2017, p. 12)

Amy doesn't shy away in challenging the normative behavior expected from her as a daughter and a wife. She harbors negative feelings as a form of resistance to her exploitation. Gwin explores this political resistance in the light of Ngai's theory of "negative affect" (2005) by comparing three contemporary works: Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*, Paula Hawkins's *The Girl on the Train* (2015) and Jennifer Kent's horror film *The Babadook* (2015). What Gwin finds interesting in all of these plots is defiance of conventional feminist ideology for resolving the plot. Instead, each of the story suggests a rebirth of its female characters who fail at controlling their darker feelings. These negative feelings reshape these women in a way that it not only challenges masculine power but also threatens its very existence. For Gwin, Amy's character is a quintessential example of 'female fatale' whose hatred against Nick is fueled by her "hyper-competitive" nature. Not only this, she takes it as a threat whenever her abilities are in question then whether it be by her husband or her ex-boyfriends whom she brutally murders (Gwin, 2017, p. 12).

From the above-given discussion, it becomes evident that Flynn's *Gone Girl* has been addressed from perspectives as diverse as a feel-bad genre, female revenge, the cultural, social and economic shifts in the statuses of women, the politics of resistance against patriarchy, and the *femme fatale*. The current study exclusively deals with a postmodern feminist analysis of *Gone Girl* by drawing on the propositions made by Judith Baxter, Helene Cixous, Christine Delphy, Luce Irigaray and other postmodern thinkers. The aim is to highlight the fluctuations among gender hierarchies within the novel and to explore how far the notion of gender performativity can be verified in the light of the chosen text.

Discussion

The Question of Fluctuating Economic Hierarchies in Flynn's *Gone Girl*

Prosper Canada (2013) theorizes financial empowerment as means of acquiring economic security and beating financial struggles. Amy and Nick's marriage starts falling apart when Nick loses his job and the two of them had to shift to Missouri. His lack of financial empowerment and dependence on his wife to meet the both ends meet, makes their marriage ugly and suffocating. This is also affirmed by detective Boney and Noelle (neighbor) during the case investigation.

When Nick marries Amy, she is extremely wealthy- having a trust fund of \$785,404 in her name. Certainly, this is a good amount of money but not enough to sustain a life without ever

working. During the initial years of their marriage, the couple lives in New York, an expensive city where meeting the financial requirement is tough for them. As much as Amy's parents pamper their only daughter, they are also aware of the fact that she must secure a career and work like other normal people. Contrary to Amy, Nick comes from a mediocre background with a mediocre job of writing at a magazine company. Thus, in their marital relationship, Amy resists the typified representation of women as financially inferior and forever dependent on their husbands. In fact, Amy's financial superiority establishes her as a more dominating character right from the beginning. It validates Baxter's (2013) concept of power where she "reinterprets stereotyped subject positions" of both men and women and states that powerlessness is not an attribute of all women (Baxter, 2013, p. 5).

As the novel progresses, Nick loses his job and his financial dependence upon Amy increases. At times he grows resentful of Amy's money and exclaims, "That's awful, I'm sorry. At least you have your money to fall back on" (Flynn, 2012, p. 94). To this, replies, "We have money" (Flynn, 2012). Here, Amy resists gender as an essential category. Rather, she performs it contrary to what the society stereotypes her for (Baxter, 2013, p. 5). Amy, despite being a woman, is the bread earner of the family who finances not only her husband but also her sister-in-law by lending her money to run a bar. Their time at Missouri is indeed tough and during this financial crunch, the savior of the family is Amy whose funds come handy for making both the ends meet. All this while, Nick is fully aware of what is expected of him as he says he would return every single penny along with interest. He is ashamed of borrowing from his wife and the best he thinks he can do is not prove to be a man who takes money from his wife but never returns. (Flynn, 2012, p. 9). Nick's beliefs take roots in the patriarchal system, though his actions align with Baxter's notion of gender performativity. Though he fears not to become a dependent husband yet he couldn't change this fact. The borrowed money is too much for Nick that he is never able to return.

This, nevertheless, does not put Nick in a dependent or subordinate position; rather, he starts exploiting Amy and uses her credit card for treating his colleagues. Amy's money is spent on "jobless guys" as Nick pays for their drinks and meals through Amy's credit card (Flynn, 2012, p. 73). Her credit card stands as Nick's ticket to extortion and manipulation. He also spends money lavishly on his clothes and gadgets. His inconsiderate nature while spending money doesn't align with his actual financial status that is jobless. All of these extra expenses are possible only due to Amy. She expresses how during each argument between them, Nick would "smile at me grimly, his arms crossed." (Flynn, 2012, p. 95). Thus, Baxter's (2013) notion of dynamic and fluctuating nature of binaries is verified here. In her *Positioning Gender in Discourse*, Baxter makes it clear that "power is constructed not as possession" but it flows "omnidirectionally in a net or web like fashion" (Baxter, 2013, p. 5). By this she implies that powerlessness cannot be attributed to a certain gender or class. All the binaries within a hierarchy are continuously fluctuating, meaning that statuses like wealthy or poor and wife or husband aren't fixed. It won't be wrong to say that a financially dependent husband like Nick can also exploit a financially independent wife like Amy to replace her from the privileged position in power hierarchy.

Female exploitation within marriage can also be analyzed by borrowing Delphy's notion of "marriage as a labor contract" (Macintosh, 1979, p. 95). She theorizes on how female oppression is validated through economic coercion. For Delphy, there are two major modes of production within a society: industrial mode and family mode. It is true that the major contribution comes from the industrial mode, though many of the domestic services (house chores, child rearing, home making, etc.) too cannot be ignored. Thus, Delphy politicizes money matters within the framework of marriage while also addressing how oppression on monetary grounds is made. She sees marriage in terms of an economic relationship that becomes a site of oppression and exploitation for women (Macintosh, 1979, p. 3).

Unlike industrial mode where exploitation is precisely capitalist, women's domestic services are often exploited by men to meet the patriarchal expectations. Delphy also views the exploitation of working women (both middle and labor class) wherein their husbands appropriate their services by exercising control over their wages or produced goods. For Delphy, marriage is a site of oppression common to all women whether they are home makers or working wives. Thus, the working-wife situation is applicable in case of Amy who is certainly under "domestic exploitation" (Macintosh, 1979, p. 3). Not only does Nick exploit her financially, but also cheats on her. He acknowledges the failure of their relation but cannot divorce due to his financial dependence on Amy. Amy – the more

powerful and wealthier one – has bound him to her, though she functions pretty powerless despite her privileged position in her marriage with Nick

Summing it up, Nick and Amy’s relationship proves a prototype in understanding the dynamic, fluid and performative nature of gender. Here, Nick is a damsel in distress who saves himself by marrying a wealthy woman. The marriage ensures a change in his status, however, this act of saving also places Amy into Nick’s exploiting hands. This complex amalgamation of gender roles, wealth, marriage and power proves a quintessential example in understanding post-feminist theorists like Judith Baxter and Christine Delphy.

Multidimensional and Performative Gender Roles

Looking at the character of Amy, one realizes she is a character who can express herself, has a voice, and can certainly take a stand for herself. Her rage and obsession is ‘fueled by competition: She needed to dazzle men and jealousify women’ (Flynn, 2012, p. 50). Amy is fearless, resilient and strong-headed - qualities attributed to masculinity in traditional gender roles. A study of masculine theories will reveal how men are inherently seen as violent, oppressive and dominating, since the public discourse is predominantly shaped by “men in power” to reinforce gender discrimination and avoid women climbing up the ladder of power hierarchy to avail a more privileged position. Containing access and power is their only way to sustain a gender discriminated society. [Rachel Jewkes, n.pg]. Through Amy’s character, Flynn has provided a very postmodern angle, where male and female performative abilities have been merged, and behaviors are not gender specific anymore. Amy is free to express and to plot a revenge for the exploitation Nick targeted at her.

Flynn also gives Amy an intellectual superiority over Nick that foreshadows her avenging nature. Since Nick is an average guy with an average intellect, Amy has to pretend being a “cool girl” that is likable among men of lesser intellect. On one of the occasions, Amy remarks that men saying they like strong women is basically a code for “I hate strong women” (Flynn, 2012, p. 251) She further elaborates how spending each moment with Nick was making her “shallower and dumber” (Flynn, 2012, p. 252). Nick with his mediocre interests would only take her to “dumb movies” or introduce her to his below average friends (Flynn, 2012, p. 252). As soon as they come out of their honeymoon phase, Amy realizes her personality deteriorating while pleasing Nick and making him feel dominant in their relationship. She thinks about her past only to realize that “she was so much better, more interesting and complicated and challenging” (Flynn, 2012, p. 254). She decides she has to stop pretending submissive to Nick as she is self-sufficient and doesn’t need a man to aid her intellectuality.

Luce Irigaray (1930) has rejected the notion of femininity and female sexuality as presented by Aristotle and Plato (Jones, p. 4). She expands on the point of initiation for women to start conceiving themselves outside the male dominated discourse. For her, “Contradictory words seem a little crazy to the logic of reason, and inaudible for him who listens with ready-made grits, a code prepared in advance.” (Irigaray, 1985, p. 103) The novel under discussion, *Gone Girl*, presents itself as a defiance against the phallogocentric prevalent discourse, not just through a female writer but also through the strong character of Amy. Amy’s notion of avenging Nick goes against the stereotyped gender roles.

Amy’s clever plan is not just well-thought, but perfectly executed - much to the surprise of the readers and particularly Nick, her husband. Traditionally, the role of women described in literature has been weak and mellow, secondary in physical vigor and fitness to men. Their inevitable fate of falling prey to “unnamed fatal illnesses” is how Wolff describes traditional female characters through the history of literature (Wolff, 1972, p. 4). Amy stands quite the opposite to this stereotypical meek shy girl, who proves to be a perfect wife to an abusive and careless husband. Amy schemes rationally, plots logically, and entraps Nick emotionally; employing the sensibilities attached to both the genders – an idea that takes one back to the title of Irigaray’s celebrated work *The Sex which is not One*. *Gone Girl* is all about disrupting the gender boundaries established by the mainstream culture. It is about asserting the fact that women can be as manly as men and vice versa. Both the genders are violent, vengeful, emotionally vulnerable and susceptible to the emotions of love turning into hatred.

Flynn’s ability to create a strong woman can also be attributed to Helene Cixous’s idea of “écriture féminine” (1976). Freud considered women’s unconscious as “less repressed” hence making them the “other”. Cixous uses this liberation to assert the fact that women writing is freer in expression than male centered writings. (Bloomsbury Literary Studies, n.pg.) She considers this

feminine writing not attributed to females only, but rather a state of being in which men and women can exist together: “The subversiveness of **Error! Bookmark not defined.** is the rejection of such a repressive binary logic—of man/woman,” (Nambrol, n.pg.) To understand Amy’s strength and unrepressed behavior, one may assume that she is in a phase of uninhibited performance. This conduct is fluid, moving back and forth among both the genders, and so once again, the heterogenous masculinity is disregarded.

Flynn’s *Gone Girl* is an attempt of introducing flawed and despicable female characters who the society otherwise condemn for harboring negative, dark and vengeful feelings. Flynn was quite open about her ideology on female equality that she thinks is incomplete without giving spaces to all sorts of women in literature. Thus, true emancipation can only be achieved with a realistic representation of women and consequently an acceptance both in reality and fiction of characters like Amy. Initially in the novel, Amy tries her best to save their marriage. She reassures Nick on several occasions that she is there for him and his temporary loss of job isn’t going to affect them in any case. However, upon finding Nick cheating on her and flinging away all her sacrifices for nothing, Amy starts distorting the reality for readers. During her lonely hours at Missouri, she starts penning down diary with a claim, “let me tell you a true story, so you can begin to understand” (Flynn, 2012, p. 249). However, her narrative turns out to be self-created and exaggerated to the point of framing Nick for all the reasons their marriage isn’t working.

Baxter’s theory of gender performativity can be deployed to understand Amy’s reasons for behaving deceitfully- a deceit directed both to Nick and the audience. To begin, Baxter asserts that women exhibit diverse and multi-layered identities (Baxter, 2013, p. 5). Amy is no exception in this regard as her character ranges in versions and different personality sides. “Amazing Amy” is a pawn in her parents’ business—an intellectual bright girl that sets examples for young readers (Flynn, 2012, p. 24). Her marriage to Nick transforms her to “Cool Girl Amy” where she pretends to be shallow, meek and always in need of husband’s protection (Flynn, 2012, p. 311). She becomes “Vengeful Scorned Wife” upon finding Nick’s affair with a young student that further pushes her transformation into “Diary Amy” seeking revenge and framing Nick for her own kidnapping and murder (Flynn, 2012, p. 309, 331). Furthermore, Baxter’s theory speaks of female resistance against male oppression. She asserts that seeing women as universal victims of patriarchy is an oversimplified equation, when in real they resist too through the “notions of female resistance... and a reinterpretation of, stereotyped subject positions rather than notions of struggle against the subordination of women” (Baxter, 2013, p. 5). Thus, in the light of this statement, Amy’s revenge is a form of resistance that she deploys to escape various forms of exploitation by Nick. When she invests her love, money, care and sacrifices in her marriage, she expects the same from Nick. However, his callous nature and manipulation brings to surface her vengeful side. It can be reiterated, that Flynn’s use of unconventional female characters verifies Baxter’s notion of Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA). It mirrors a postmodern sensibility of the 21st century.

Baxter, in her analysis, takes on a feminist perspective of the poststructural approach. She picks up the “poststructuralist principles of complexity, plurality, ambiguity, connection, recognition, diversity, textual playfulness, functionality and transformation...” (Baxter, 2013) and reviews it under the feminist lens. Baxter is of the view that gender discrimination is one of the most inescapable discourses in the postmodern academia and it needs to be reviewed. FPDA aids in understanding Amy’s character and how she does not correspond well to the already defined notions of female sexuality. She rebels and behaves violently, perhaps like a man, according to the traditionally demarcated behaviors of men and women.

Minor Female Characters and the Defiance to Stereotypical Gender Roles

While studying *Gone Girl* closely, the minor characters reveal themselves as the crucial hinges on which the whole plot stands erect. These characters are not merely the building blocks aiding the storyline to move ahead, but in fact they display certain idiosyncrasies which make them progressive and open to theoretical criticism. The section throws light on the characters of Boney, Margo and Andie- the three female characters that defy all the patriarchal odds. These characters are stand ins for resistance, metaphorically speaking, by breaking stereotypical gender roles.

The main characters are unreliable – a fact that dawns upon the readers after some time. The first-person narrative in the bits of Amy’s diary initially induces feelings of sympathy for Amy, though the framed entries in her diary soon result in the distrust of the narrative voice. As a matter of

fact, it is the focus on these minor characters that provides the readers the necessary hints about what the author is actually trying to achieve through the portrayal of various characters in the novel.

It is not just Amy representing the feminine strength; detective Rhonda Boney is another strong character. While working with her male co-worker Gilpin, Boney always takes lead: “Boney made for the bedroom, and we followed” (Flynn, 2012, p. 40). She knows how to confront Nick’s irresponsibility when he forgets to inform his in-laws about Amy’s suspected kidnap. Though Nick defends himself that he was waiting for detectives’ orders to make any further decisions, Boney just couldn’t stand Nick’s passivity and hence remarks, “Ah... let me guess: baby of the family. You’re a baby” (Flynn, 2012, p. 38). She asserts herself over situations and mocks Nick for his sheer lack of maturity and failure to take any responsibility.

Gone Girl’s Margo a.k.a. Go (Nick’s twin sister) is also a multilayered and complex character. Throughout the novel, Go is seen as a powerful and dominant sister who saves her brother on several instances. As Rhonda Boney says, Nick is basically a baby who cannot do anything on his own without depending on others. Financially he relies on his wife and for decisions making, his safe abode is Go. Go is Nick’s babysitter who dictates everything that Nick must do as a responsible grownup. Despite a twin, she exercises her authority as an elder sister with a “long-stymied mission to turn [Nick] into a rebel” (Flynn, 2012, p. 59). She can’t help her motherly control as Nick says, “She’d dropped me at the station, then run by The Bar to take care of bar things for thirty minutes, and now she was back, acting like she’d abandoned me for a week” (Flynn, 2012, p. 69). Similarly, upon finding that Nick is cheating on Amy for Andie, Go loses her temper and hits Nick as if he is a ten-year-old child (Ibid, p. 180). This motherly and dominating instinct of Go makes her an unconventional female character that defies stereotypical gender roles. Generally, it is expected that brothers are protective of their sisters but here it’s a reverse case that validates Baxter’s gender fluid approach.

Lastly, the most interesting female character in the novel is a twenty-three-year-old attractive Andie (Nick’s student) who exhibits female traits of postmodern age. She is the mind behind alluring Nick to cheat on his wife and scar his marriage. Her inappropriate dressing and behavior in class seduced Nick into temptation— “She leaned forward so her cleavage was leveraged against the bar, her breasts pushed upward” (Flynn, 2012, p. 168). She would say, “Whatever you give me, I’ll like” (Flynn, 2012, p. 168) to suggest her interest in Nick. In the same vein, Andie doesn’t shy away in expressing her physical desires— she would want to feel Nick’s hands for “reassurance and comfort” (Flynn, 2012, p. 162). Nick describes Andy as, “...a physical girl... a hugger, a toucher... And...she also liked sex” (Flynn, 2012, p. 162). Andie’s character is unconventional and postmodern in the sense that it challenges typified representation of women as nearly asexual for not knowing sexual pleasure. They are attributed the role of pleasers but never someone who is equally pleased in a consensual sexual act. Furthermore, according a silent role to women when it comes to expressing their sexual needs is a conventional feminist approach. Andie stands for female diversity that must be accepted and represented in literature and media.

Conclusion

Flynn’s *Gone Girl* is the quintessential example of a text that showcases fluctuating gender hierarchies through the interaction of its major and minor characters. By drawing on the propositions made by Christine Delphy, Luce Irigaray, Helen Cixous and Judith Baxter, it can be proven that the classical notion of gender as an essential category is flawed. These postmodern theorists advocate for the performativity of gender that is discursively produced and hence challenge the stereotypical representation of women as universal victims of male oppression. The novel depicts various instances on economic, domestic and social levels where women are relatively more emancipated and sometimes use their agency or voice to exploit men. Hence, *Gone Girl* can be identified as a - postmodernist text that dismantles the long-held feminist beliefs by deconstructing the binaries of gender and dismantling the stereotypical representations.

The entire notion of female representation in literature is diversified through novels like *Gone Girl* where the meek, shy and chaste woman is replaced by a strong headed, retaliating, and clever woman. Hitherto, there was no place for women who would deviate from the pre-defined social and behavioral patterns. If ever a woman would transgress, she would be eliminated from the plot to show that the natural order is restored. For Wolff, “... this hasty removal often has nothing intrinsically to do with the woman as an individual; it is behavior which does not grow easily and convincingly out of

the demands of her character; it is merely a literary convenience too often offered as realism” (Wolff, 1972, p. 5).

By creating characters like Amy, Margo, Boney and Andie, Flynn has undoubtedly broken the prototype of male/female sexuality which has been acting as the right mold for the gendered behaviors. She has made a statement through her work that the binaries separating women from men are unreliable and subject to change. The fluidity of the binaries leads to the conclusion that male and female sensibilities recur in both the genders equally. Through Nick and Amy, one may witness the collapse of the structured and neatly organized gender hierarchies. Amy takes on the role of a strong and vigilant woman who is financially independent and emotionally aloof – a role conveniently attributed to men. Nick on the other hand, crashes down, is vulnerable to Amy’s tactics, and financially castrated- a definition given by Freud and Plato regarding woman “as imperfect (castrated) man.” (Jones, 1981, p. 4)

Future Recommendations

Flynn’s writing style is known for creating gender fluid characters that cannot be positioned on either side of the binaries. They lie somewhere in the grey area where their gender identities keep on fluctuating depending upon the social practices they are engaged in. Hence, her other works that is *Sharp Objects* (2006) and *Dark Places* (2009) can also be analyzed from a postmodern feminist perspective. This can help in establishing how far contemporary fiction can be seen along the similar lines to postmodern feminism.

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