
IN SEARCH OF THE “REAL AMY”: AN ANALYSIS OF GONE GIRL

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Abstract: Stereotypes play a vital role in the formation of opinions and impressions that are both positive and negative. Gender stereotypes create a conflict between the individual and the person one pretends to be. Gillian Flynn’s novel *Gone Girl* explores this dialect and tries to search for the ‘real Amy’. This paper analyses how women are affected negatively by gender stereotypes.

Keywords: Communication Studies, Gender Stereotypes, Language, Women’s Studies

Introduction: Communication is an important aspect for social beings. People are constantly judging and being judged based on their appearance, gender, nationality, and colour based on assumptions. These assumptions are generalizations termed as stereotypes. According to Martin and Nakayama, stereotypes arise because of different world views and can also be prejudiced in nature. However, with changing times traditional gender roles and stereotypes are being challenged, yet there is a large gender gap. This is because as Matlin argues, cognitive processes lead people into groups, however, the fact that the behaviour of women and men overlap is often neglected.

The protagonist of the book is Amy Elliot is a Harvard educated writer and a native New Yorker. The story follows Amy’s life and her relationship with her husband. She was an icon from the time she was a child as her mother meticulously documented her life through the *Amazing Amy* series. As a child, she was a lovable girl and she always strived to live up to the image of *Amazing Amy*. In the book Amy states, “...regular, flawed ‘real Amy’ is jealous of the golden child perfect, brilliant, *Amazing Amy*.” Amy refers to herself as the ‘real Amy’ while ‘*Amazing Amy*’ is the stereotype that she tries to live up to.

Analysis: The title “*Gone Girl*” is significant because it symbolises being *lost* or *crazy*. Amy framed her husband, Nick Dunne, for her murder while she watched her husband plead for his life and profess his love for her to the world on national television from her motel room. While she was ‘*gone Amy*’ she had her fill of family pack Kit Kats, soda, junk food, dyed her hair, and stayed in a shady motel, which did not fit into the stereotype that defined her. Amy states, “He (Nick) loved the girl I was pretending to be cool girl. Cool girl is fun. Cool girl never gets angry at her man. She always smiles... she likes what he likes.” Judith Butler argues that stereotypes have an impact on how people are forced to behave to conform to their gender identity in order to gain acceptance in society. In this case, being cool girl helped her find and marry a man she liked.

As a wife, Amy was expected to perform certain roles which she was happy to do. When Nick’s mother was

diagnosed with breast cancer, they moved to Missouri. She didn’t mind moving but Nick never bothered to ask her for her opinion. After the move, she begins to feel invisible and she states, “Nick uses me for sex when he wants, otherwise, I don’t exist.” According to Margret W Matlin, problems arise as a result of the different expectations when it comes to the behaviour of men and women that reinforce gender stereotypes. As a woman, she was expected to make endless compromises and sacrifices just because it was a convenient option for her husband. Physical abuse faced by women is another issue that is conveniently swept under the carpet. During an argument, where Amy was being assertive and wanted to talk to Nick he forcefully pushed her to the floor. Amy states, “What scared me wasn’t that he pushed me... what scared me was how he wanted to hurt me more. What scared me was that I finally realized that I am frightened of my own husband.” She had to buy a gun to feel safe again. This incident unnerved her and her survival instincts began to kick in.

A source of grief that people face is the result of harbouring unrealistic expectations. Amy said, “I made him smarter, sharper. I inspired him to rise to my level. I forged the man of my dreams. We were the happiest couple we knew.” However, over time he got lazy and stopped trying to be the man he could be. At the same time, he expected her unconditional love. Arthur Asa Berger argues that situation like the one described arise due to the failure of the socialization process as people are taught roles, rules, and values that are reinforced by society. Only Amy is held accountable for her actions where she is expected to do all the work in the relationship while Nick was off the hook for not doing his part.

Every relationship is based on trust and understanding. Infidelity is the quickest and the most painful way to break someone’s trust. Amy saw Nick with a younger woman and knew about the affair. However, she did not confront him. Amy said, “Nick Dunn took my pride, my dignity, my hope, and my money... he took and took from me till I no longer existed, that’s murder. Let the punishment fit the crime.” Something within her snapped and decided to

teach him a lesson for taking her for granted. She said, "He doesn't get to win. Grownups suffer consequences." After all the compromises that she had made and loved him the best she could this is what she got in return, a lying, cheating, scumbag of a husband who was ready to leave her just because he didn't 'want' her anymore.

The fact that Amy was intelligent, educated, and wealthy threatened Nick. It is because men as a rule like to see women as a damsel in distress. Men find woman who are emotionally and financially dependent on them preferable. If the woman has the looks and the body reflecting his stereotypical preferences that he can ravish at will and show off to other men it is ideal. Amy's was less desirable to Nick over the course of their marriage because she had a mind of her own. She was a much better writer than him as well. He felt emasculated which is his problem and not hers. The best way he could get back to her was to find a naïve student who didn't know any better than having an affair with her married college professor.

After Amy was mugged at the motel she contacted Desi Collins, her ex-boyfriend. Unlike the teenage boy she had dated in the past she realized that Desi was just another man, who was exactly like Nick. She realized that he was controlling, manipulative, and was in love with Amazing Amy. He asked her to colour her hair and wear makeup. Amy has to kill a man to win her freedom back. She had enough of compromising and living at the mercy of the men in her life just because she was a woman.

Each of the men in her life had controlled her, expected her to be perfect, and abused her in different ways, just because she was a woman. When 'gone Amy' could not stand being taken by a rise by yet another man Amy kills Desi. In a pivotal moment in the story, she slit his throat and allowed him bleed to death, which was brutal. Amy was pushed to the brink and was numb to feel any remorse for taking the life of the man who had controlled and manipulated her. Another significant thing is that this act helped her release the pent up anger that grew within because of every man who had hurt her. Amy tells Nick "I am a fighter. I fought my way back to you. I've killed for you. Who else can say that?"

Amy returns home wearing a white dress drenched in Desi's blood. She collapsed in Nick's arms, taking him by surprise and in return he doesn't whisper "I love you" instead he says "fucking bitch." She is back because she now has the upper hand as she is no

more the subdued victim, she is in a position to call the shots. She has put him where he really belongs. She fought her way back to Nick because she was willing to give the relationship another chance. Now, Nick had to stay because he was scared of what Amy would do to him. He learnt his lesson that it is never a good idea to cheat an intelligent woman. A tough lesson is forcefully rammed down his 'manly' throat, which he truly deserved.

Conclusion: The story of Amy does not belong to a particular country or society. There are thousands of Amazing Amy's in every strata of society quietly toiling away at the workplace, coming back home to toil in the kitchen, finishing up a deluge of household chores, while her husband watches TV or socializes with drinking buddies. He holds her ATM card, draws her salary, and decides what to do with her money. She quietly obeys, no questions asked. Amy was invisible till her face was splashed across the front page of newspapers or hyped on TV news channels where she metamorphoses into *gone Amy*. She does something drastic, shaking the very foundation that society and societal norms are built on the blood, pain, and tears of thousands of Amie's through the ages cutting across cultural cross connections.

In a day and age when crimes against women are on the rise, 'real Amy' is a source of inspiration for women. It is because she dared to confront the people who abused, cheated, and controlled her. Every woman can relate to the trials and tribulations that Amy has experienced at some level or the other. Amy was able to rebel successfully because of her courage, determination, intelligence, and resourcefulness. She did what most women actually want to do to their husbands. Additionally, women should not feel invisible again and blindly conform to gender stereotypes.

Throughout the book, one can't help but stand by Amy because she is much better than the men in her life. The main problem that the men in her life had with her is that she wasn't a doormat or a piece of furniture that they could throw away when they pleased. This leads us to a major question that women should ask themselves which is should they be defined by stereotypes in order to fit into the societal framework. No, women should challenge these biased gender stereotypes that are self-serving for men. Additionally, women should help other women realise their potential and should not feel subjugated and marginalized.

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