

**T.C.  
ISTANBUL KÜLTÜR UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**FEMALE EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DOMESTIC NOIR IN GILLIAN  
FLYNN'S *GONE GIRL* AND A.S.A. HARRISON'S *THE SILENT WIFE***

**Master of Arts Thesis by**

**Houcine Hadaoui  
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**Department: English Language and Literature  
Program: English Language and Literature**

**Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Gillian M. E. ALBAN**

**MAY 2025**

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**MAY 2025**

## **PLAGIARISM**

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Houcine Hadaoui

27.05.2025

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude and admiration for my supervisor Prof. Gillian M. E. Alban. She has been an extraordinary mentor and a generous source of support throughout my journey as her thesis advisee. I feel truly fortunate to have learned under her guidance. Her passion and integrity have deeply inspired me, and her wisdom and encouragement have shaped both my academic and personal growth. I sincerely appreciate the endless hours she has dedicated to my thesis. Thank you for everything.

Secondly, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my late Grandmother, whose generous financial support made the journey to Turkey and my education at ISTANBUL KÜLTÜR UNIVERSITY possible. Her strong belief in the value of learning and encouragement continues to inspire me. May she rest in peace, she was a source of kindness and generosity whose memory I will always carry within me, with deep respect and love.

Last but not least, I would like to give thanks to my mother for her constant support, tutoring, and encouraging my pursuit of higher education and following my dreams, no matter how difficult they may seem. Even though I struggled academically during the early stages of my education, she never gave up on my education and never shamed me for my low grades. And for my brother who motivated me through his brilliant analytic mind that can help solve any problem I encounter. And for my older sister for paving the way for us to enter the academic world inspired us to follow in her footsteps, determined to become like her and reach the level of independence she has obtained.

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Üniversite	:	İstanbul Kültür Üniversitesi
Enstitüsü	:	Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü
Dalı	:	İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı
Programı	:	İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı
Tez Danışmanı	:	Prof. Dr. Gillian M. E. ALBAN
Tez Türü ve Tarihi	:	Yüksek Lisans – Mayıs 2025

## ÖZET

### GILLIAN FLYNN'İN KAYIP KIZ VE A.S.A. HARRISON'IN SESSİZ EŞ'İNDE DOMESTİK NOIR'I İLE KADINLARIN GÜÇLENDİRİLMESİ

**Houcine Hadaoui**

Bu tez, ev domestik noir türünün ne olduğunu ve bağımsız bir tür mü yoksa suç kurgu alt türü mü olarak değerlendirilmesi gerektiğini tanıtmayı ve açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca bu yeni türün edebiyat alanına nasıl katkıda bulunduğunu ve ev içi şiddet mağdurlarını nasıl güçlendirdiğini incelemektedir. Gillian Flynn'in *Kayıp Kız* ve A.S.A. Harrison'ın *Sessiz Eş* adlı iki romanını analiz ederek, romanlardaki kadınların kocalarından gördükleri şiddete katlanmalarının, tacizci kocalarını terk edememelerinin ve sonunda şiddeti seçip onları öldürmelerinin nedenlerine bakmaktadır. Ayrıca romanlardaki erkek karakterler tarafından işlenen şiddetin ardındaki nedeni, onları eşlerine karşı şiddete ve tacize yönelten şeyi ve diğer kadınlarla ilişkilerinde neden sadakatsiz olduklarını araştırmaktadır. Bu tez, "Domestik Noir"ın, amacının onu mesajı ve yapısıyla suç kurgusundan ayırdığına kanaat getirmektedir. Domestic Noir, heyecan verici bir cinayet gizemini anlatan suç kurgusunun aksine, kendi hayatlarını kurtarmak için kocalarını öldüren, ev içi şiddete maruz kalan kadınların karşılaştığı mücadeleleri tasvir eder. Bu tez ayrıca hem erkek hem de kadın karakterlerin eylemlerini yönlendiren, onları toplumsal baskılara ve ebeveyn istismarına bağlayan gizil motivasyonları da ortaya koyar. Bu tür, istismara uğramış kadınların hayatlarına ve kapalı kapılar ardında gizlenen anlatılmamış hikayelerine ışık tutarak, bu kritik konu hakkında farkındalık yaratır ve

benzer durumdaki kadınların kurtarılmayı beklemek yerine kendileri haklarını savunmalarını sağlar.

**Anahtar Sözcükler: Domestic Noir, Kayıp Kız, Sessiz Eş, ev içi şiddet, kadın hakları, psikolojik çözümleme, evlilikte sadakatsizlik, haklı cinayet**



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**Program** : **English Language and Literature**  
**Thesis Advisor** : **Prof. Dr. Gillian M. E. ALBAN**  
**Thesis Type and Date** : **M.A. Thesis – May 2025**

## **ABSTRACT**

### **FEMALE EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DOMESTIC NOIR IN GILLIAN FLYNN'S *GONE GIRL* AND A.S.A. HARRISON'S *THE SILENT WIFE***

**Houcine Hadaoui**

This thesis aims to introduce and explain what the domestic noir genre is and whether it should be considered an independent genre or sub-genre of crime fiction. It also examines how this new genre contributes to the literary domain and the way it empowers victims of domestic abuse. Through analysing the two novels *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn and A.S.A. Harrison's *The Silent Wife*, looking at the reasons women in the novels endured the abuse from their husbands, not being able to leave their abusive husbands and ending up choosing violence and murdering them. It also explores the motive behind the abuse committed by the male characters in the novels, what made them violent and abusive towards their partners and why they were unfaithful in engaging in relations with other women. This thesis has concluded that since its aim distinguishes it from crime fiction in its message and structure, domestic Noir depicts the struggles faced by women subjected to domestic abuse, who end up killing their husbands to save their own lives, unlike crime fiction, which describes a thrilling murder mystery. This thesis also reveals the subtle motivations driving the actions of both male and female characters, attributing them to societal pressures and parental abuse. This genre sheds light on the lives of abused women and their untold stories, concealed behind closed doors, raising awareness on this critical issue and empowering women in a similar circumstance to stand up for themselves, instead of waiting to be rescued.

**Key Words: Domestic Noir, *Gone Girl*, *The Silent Wife*, Domestic Abuse, Women's rights, Psychological Analysis, Marital Infidelity, Justifiable Homicide**



## **Introduction to Domestic Noir**

Crime fiction novels often start with a mysterious murder and a detective who looks for the truth by relying on mistakes made by a murderer at the crime scene or by interviewing witnesses and suspects. Some of the most famous crime fiction novels are written by Agatha Christie, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Patricia Highsmith. Tzvetan Todorov defines crime fiction as a story made up of two stories. The first one takes place before the narrative starts, where a murder or a crime has been committed, and the second story has a character responsible for informing the reader of the first story, but with limited information. The responsibility of narrating the first story falls on one character, and it is most commonly the detective; it is done either with their investigation or through their huge net of relations. The reader and the detective share the same perspective and are introduced to new information at the same time, but sometimes the reader will have access to more details than the detective has, despite the detective generally appearing to be smarter and catching on things that the reader could not see until pointed out by the detective. The suspense is created in the clever ways the detective manages to find the clues and in the uncertainty of whether the crime will be solved or not (Bradford 13).

The crime fiction genre has a sub-genre dedicated to the household conflicts between a man and his wife which leads to murder. This genre has managed to reverse the traditional roles of the victim and the perpetrator through placing the power in the hands of women. This time they are the ones taking revenge on their abusive husbands and gaining back their lives by killing them; this genre is called Domestic Noir. This type of crime fiction tackles the hidden secrets in a marriage: things that happen behind closed doors. The women in this genre suffer from abuse, but not just physical abuse as one would imagine upon reading the title, which makes one think it is related to domestic violence. They suffer from so much more than just violence; they are neglected, unappreciated, mistreated, cheated on, manipulated, used, and not just by their husbands. The abuse that falls upon them is from their low social status as secondary citizens in society; both patriarchy and religion are trying to control them, while men are using, assaulting, sexualizing and objectifying them. Additionally, their husbands are doing all

of the above. This causes the women to be psychologically damaged and to consider killing and actually proceeding to kill their husbands.

Laura Joyce says in her book, *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction*: “Domestic noir is a capacious, flexible category that encompasses realist writing about domestic violence, intersectional feminism, religion, mental illness, and women’s rights” (Joyce 3). This genre can be traced back to the 1940s in films of (marriage thrillers) with stories of women being murdered by their mentally distressed husbands, and the deterioration of their mental health caused by World War II. The soldiers would return home having seen and done unspeakable things, making them suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anger issues, anxiety and possibly paranoia. All this led to a huge increase in their violent and aggressive behaviour, which they later unloaded on their families and particularly their wives, to the extent of murdering their wives (Joyce 2).

One of the first novels that could be considered as an initiative to this genre is *The Bride Wore Black* published in 1940, written by Cornell Woolrich. It tells the story of a woman named Julie Kohler who becomes a serial killer, killing only men. Her murders were motivated by the desire to avenge her husband’s death, as he was shot by these men, shot in the head on his wedding day right in front of her. She goes around killing them one by one. However, according to Joyce’s definition, we cannot consider this to be of the domestic noir genre, since a woman taking revenge on men who wronged her is not quite specific enough; this novel lacks domestic violence and the abuse inflicted by the men as husbands.

The term domestic noir was coined by Julia Crouch, known for her crime fiction novels based around women’s issues. Her first novel *Cuckoo* was published in 2011, telling the story of Rose and her husband Gareth who live in Wiltshire with their two young daughters, Anna and baby Flossie. They had a perfect marriage, a perfect house, and they lived peacefully, until one day Polly, Rose’s old friend came on the scene, and informed them that her husband Christos had died in a car accident. Rose being her loyal friend invites her over to stay with them. Polly’s arrival was the beginning of the end of the perfect life they had been living. Ever since she came with her two children, she has

shown no signs of a grieving widow; she seemed like a different Polly than the one Rose once knew. Polly overstays her welcome and they cannot seem to make her leave; also, Rose grows distant from Gareth and her baby falls deadly ill, in short, her life starts falling apart and she is losing control over her own home.

Crouch's former agent after reading her first novel says: "You know you've written a piece of crime fiction, don't you?" (Crouch v). Crouch was not happy with that comment; however, she does admit that her style of writing was influenced by two famous crime fiction authors, Agatha Christie and Patricia Highsmith; nevertheless, she did not have one single police officer in her novel, and did not want to be labelled, especially as a crime fiction writer:

My novel was an exploration of female friendships and the destructive power of lust. Yes, it was dark—exceptionally so in some parts—but crime? I didn't think so. And why did my agent have to stick me in a box, anyway? (Crouch v)

*Cuckoo* was eventually published as a crime novel, under the subgenre of psychological thriller. Crouch used to look down on crime fiction writers for not being as sophisticated as those of other literary genres; but after some reading and attending crime festivals such as *Bloody Scotland* and *CrimeFest*, she grew to love and appreciate the complex plotting the author does to make sure the murder they create makes sense and has complexity enough to appeal to readers. Now she is happy with being a crime fiction writer but is still uneasy with the psychological thriller label (Crouch vi-vii).

Julia Crouch's dissatisfaction with being labelled as something she is not has pushed her towards a path of creativity to find a solution. Her writing does belong to the crime fiction genre, but she does not write thrillers. She talks about women being mistreated, abused, used and objectified; this is not thrilling, it is an issue of women's rights, the right to reclaim their lives and break free from the cycle of abuse they have been subjugated to in a male-dominated society. This abuse is often committed by adult women's closest male family members, especially their husbands or life partners, who are predominantly the main perpetrators of abuse since they usually exercise the most power or influence in such circumstances. Therefore, at the 2013 *CrimeFest*, she came up with the term domestic noir and she said about it: "Domestic noir is the perfect label for it, and

I am really pleased that it also fits the work of many other brilliant writers being published today [...] Domestic noir puts the female experience at the center. The main themes are family, motherhood, children, marriage, love, sex and betrayal” (Crouch vii).

A physically assault on a man or a woman in their own home by a member of their family is considered to be domestic violence; domestic violence affects men, women and children, but it is mostly done by male members of the family against female members. Contrary to common belief, physical harm is not the only form of domestic violence, as will be further explained in the following paragraphs. The definition of domestic violence has been under constant change for decades, by different organizations and institutions; as quoted in Hilary Abraham’s book: *supporting Women After Domestic Violence: Loss, Trauma and Recovery*, the most frequently used definition is:

Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. (qtd. in Abraham 17)

This definition is not a fixed one and it is under constant change due to covering multiple acts of abuse. Abraham in her book provides us with examples of domestic abuse and she mentions that the list does not cover all types. She divides those types into four categories: mental abuse, physical violence, rape, and other. Mental forms of abuse include threats, fear, isolation from family and friends, loss of social contact, persistent criticism, denial of privacy, verbal abuse, deprivation of sleep, money, and use of the telephone, terror and intimidation. Physical violence includes throwing things, kicking, slapping, hitting, pushing, shoving, grabbing, choking, using weapons, and death. Sexual violence includes rape, sexual assault, degrading and humiliating sexual acts. Other forms of domestic abuse can be in the form of property damage and theft, threats of violence to pets, or animals and denying access to work.

The domestic noir genre is new and has not been discussed enough in the literary domain, so its goal is unclear yet. This genre is not the same as the crime fiction genre, but with a slight twist to give the audience a different form of pleasure, it does have a more defined goal. It aims at spreading awareness of domestic violence and the severity of it, and it also sheds light on what pushes a woman to who kill her husband. This genre

addresses multiple issues, which will be explained in detail in the following pages. Moreover, this genre addresses how severe domestic abuse is, and that it cannot be underestimated, how some women are justified in killing their husbands, and it manifests how anybody, even those who appear to be average men, can commit domestic abuse; it is not restricted by a person's social status, education or appearance. The purpose of this study is to discuss and prove the three above-mentioned and determine what causes the men and women under these circumstances to act this way. It will be made by analysing the works of several psychologists and psychotherapists, including Dr Charles Patrick Ewing, Dr Michael Povich, Dr Stephanie Sarkis and Dr Lenore E Walker, who are all psychologists specialising in domestic abuse and emotional abuse, and the psychotherapist Esther Perel, whose specialty is marital issues. The study will also use the work of Grayson Perry, among others, to analyse men's behaviour. The findings will be explained further when applied to the two novels, Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* and A.S.A. Harrison's *The Silent Wife*. Those are only some of the sources that will be used to prove that the genre is contributing to spreading awareness of domestic abuse, and in doing so, has liberated and empowered the women in the novels under study.

The purpose of this study is to further develop an understanding of the domestic noir genre, its contributions to the literary domain and to victims of domestic abuse. This sub-genre may either be considered a new genre, or merely a sub-genre aimed at giving crime fiction novels a fresher look. Being a new genre/sub-genre that has yet to be sufficiently explored, all the currently published literature on the novels under study only address feminist issues, gender issues, and psychological analysis of the characters; therefore, I will be exploring it using sources from psychologists, psychotherapists, domestic issues experts, and legal experts. This study will look at the genre itself and analyse the characters using both psychoanalytic and psychological methods to identify the subconscious drives and underlying motivations influencing their actions. This study will act as an introduction to this new genre, enabling future researchers to investigate it more, in the fields of literature, social science, domestic abuse, women's rights, psychology, psychoanalysis, relationship issues, marital infidelity, and behaviour issues.

Chapter one gives a brief view of the literary antecedents of domestic noir that paved the way for domestic noir to be born, this will make it easier to understand how this genre developed. Then, I explain the psychological damage that falls upon battered women and the reasons they would stay with their abuser in such horrible situations. I then discuss what kind of circumstances would push battered women to take their husbands' lives and also the tactics and tricks the abuser uses on his victims. Finally, I address what causes abusive men to act this way with their wives or partners.

In Chapter two, I explore what shaped the abused woman mentality by analysing the two women in the novels and by looking at the husband's behaviours and the damage it caused them. Also, I then expand on the psychological and sexual abuse that the two wives had undergone. Finally, I discuss the role of society in oppressing women. In Chapter three, I explain the various reasons that would make women choose to kill their husbands. I also analyse the manipulative tactics used by the men in the chosen works to further abuse and control the women. I then examine the physical abuse experienced in the novels by women and rape within marriage; furthermore, I explain the distinction between physical rape and emotional rape. Finally, I explore the bond that women have and how supporting each other is an essential part of escaping abuse.

In Chapter four, I discuss the mentality of the abusive men in the novels and what shaped their personalities, and I explain how the patriarchal society is affecting men negatively. I also take a look at the family's role in creating the abuser, focusing on the father and mother's roles separately. I also discuss the reasons men cheat on their wives, revealing that cheating is an individual experience that differs in motive from one person to another. And how a man's personality, psychological issues or disorders along with moral values, determine the reasons a man cheats on his partner. A considerable part of the bad behaviour these men have is due to Toxic Masculinity, which is worth mentioning and will be discussed in-depth as well. Finally, I explore the source of their misogynistic attitudes and biases.

This thesis depicts the role of domestic noir novels in presenting women's struggle against their abusive husbands, with the victim taking an aggressive stance, through an analysis of the marriage of Amy and Nicholas Dunne in Gillian Flynn's novel *Gone Girl*, and that of Jodi and Todd Brett in *The Silent Wife* by A. S. A. Harrison. Instead of the passive role seen in a typical crime fiction novel, this thesis discusses the central role of women in this sub-genre, not only as victims but also as their own saviours. Moreover, it portrays the justification of the victim's use of violence and murder in taking revenge and seeking liberation from their oppressors. Lastly, it takes a look at the life of the three male abusers in the selected novels and the factors in flouncing their behavior as they do. This thesis also aims to reach a deeper understanding of this new genre and whether it should be considered an independent genre or a sub-genre to crime fiction.

## **Chapter One: The Anatomy of abuse**

### **Literary Antecedents of Domestic Noir**

The domestic noir genre covers all types of domestic violence, as will be discussed in this chapter; since the development of the English novel as distinct genre, almost all of the characteristics of domestic noir can be seen in it. As the novel genre was developing in England, it contained features similar to those of crime fiction, in depicting the lives of criminals and the treatment they received from the state. These novels were similar to crime fiction novels but not quite the same. One of the first authors to write about criminals was Daniel Defoe, whose novels had some traces of crime fiction, due to his vast knowledge of criminal law, and the legal system. He knew the appropriate punishments for different degrees of crimes, Defoe spent several years in jail, during which he was introduced to the world of crime and its secrets. His novel *Moll Flanders* published in 1722, tells the story of a woman born in Newgate prison and how she struggles in a life tangled in crime, greed and a search for money and possessions, which eventually led to her imprisonment. However, that is only the tip of the iceberg; Moll Flanders is a young, intelligent beautiful young lady, an orphan who is living in the religious patriarchal society of the 18th century, where her only hope of survival is using her beauty to find a rich suitable husband. In the 18th century, women had no options other than marriage, working as seamstresses or working as prostitutes.

Like any young woman, Moll seeks a man who will love and cherish her; unfortunately, her first lover broke her heart and deserted her. She gets married five times, two of which pass away, two of them were revealed to be criminals, and the final one is later discovered to be her half-brother and so they also separate. After living for a period of seven years in poverty and barely surviving, Moll decides to establish control over her life in order to survive. Having lived all her life in a constant need of survival; She had no care for morals or principles whatsoever and so she steals as much as she can, and finds that she has no choice but to use her body to get by in life. She is later caught and sent to prison where she is reunited with one of her criminal husbands. They both eventually get released, by managing to reduce their death penalty to a banishment to the state of Virginia to work in the colonies.

Even though *Moll Flanders* does not have the typical features of a domestic noir novel, the cause of Moll's struggles in life are the same issues a woman faces in the domestic noir genre as Crouch states the genres' main themes are: "family, motherhood, children, marriage, love, sex and betrayal" (Crouch vii). *Moll Flanders* discusses marital issues, love and betrayal with Moll's first lover, who deserted her, family in its absence and how it affected her, and children, since Moll has twelve children whom she is forced to abandon in order to survive. In conclusion, the novel, *Moll Flanders* has some early aspects of domestic noir; Moll is abused, objectified and used by men, who chase after her for her body, in marrying and deserting her. As a result, she is pushed to a life of crime by necessity and forced to choose "immoral means" to survive.

Despite this novel not having any detective work as in crime fiction novels, it still holds some trace of the crime fiction genre, as it sparks the reader's curiosity about what is considered a crime in the eyes of society and law, and how is it handled and punished by them. The government in 19th-century Britain held public executions and produced lengthy biographies or narrative poems telling the stories of the people as well as a detailed description of the horrific crimes they had committed to deserve the death penalty. Public hanging was regarded as an enjoyable event for the public. It was more like a spectacle for their entertainment than a horrible site of a person's death. That's what Defoe emphasized when writing *Moll Flanders* as he painted her life as a criminal and the suspense surrounding her being under the threat of public execution (Bradford 14 -15).

The Marquis de Sade was a French nobleman, who wrote novels, plays, short stories, political tracts, and dialogues. He was known for his involvement in crimes of sexual nature and extreme sexual activities. His most famous novels are *The 120 Days of Sodom* written in 1785, *Justine*, or *The Misfortunes of Virtue* written in 1787, and *Juliette* published in 1797, which he wrote in prison, these dates are approximate and may not be entirely accurate. Due to the extremely violent sexual content of his writings and his promiscuous reputation, the German psychologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing named the psychosexual disorder of Sadism after The Marquis. His writing also constitutes as a political satire on religion, society, and the nobles, which was the reason for his imprisonment. What is unique about his writings is his female characters who emerge as

smart, cruel, and extremely sexual. Those women do not merely use their sexuality for pleasure; they use it as a weapon against the patriarchal society in which they live.

His two most controversial characters are Juliett and Justine. Justine is a virtuous young lady who never commits a sin and follows the rules of her society, which leads to her exploitation, abuse and life of suffering. She is a passive, submissive character who chooses morality over her own well-being. Sade presents us with pages of the suffering and abuse of Justine. He follows it with 1,387 pages of the adventure of Justine's sister Juliett; Juliett has no morals, and is indifferent to the sin she commits or crime she enacts to reach her goal. She desires power, wealth and social status and she attains them by committing all kinds of crimes and heinous acts without remorse. She lives in prosperity by weaponizing her body and sexuality to control the men around her.

In Angela Carter's book *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* published in 1978, she discusses how Sade gives his female characters sexual power to, as Carter says: "fuck the world" (Carter 28), using their only power over men i.e., their lust, and their desire for women. The Marquis uses his pornographic scenes not to invoke pleasure in the reader but as a tool to demonstrate how those in positions of authority dominate all aspects of the powerless, controlling all they have; their lives, along with their bodies, both men and women alike:

He creates, not an artificial paradise of gratified sexuality but a model of hell, in which the gratification of sexuality involves the infliction and the tolerance of extreme pain. He describes sexual relations in the context of an unfree society as the expression of pure tyranny, usually by men upon women, sometimes by men upon men, sometimes by women upon men. (Carter 26)

Sade's depiction of hellish orgies and extreme sexual acts is a way of showing the real power of the people in charge and how they use and abuse the lives and bodies of those who lack any power, regardless of their sex. According to Carter, he never meant his pornographic scenes to be attractive, but rather aggressive acts of domination and annihilation of the other. He emphasizes the difference between a loving caring kiss and a dominating aggressive kiss (Carter 26).

Carter attributes Juliette's lack of remorse and aggression, to her having learnt the true nature of power and how to use her body to take revenge on all those who humiliated

her and the likes of her sister Justine, Carter says: “A free woman in an unfree society will be a monster” (Carter 28). Sade encourages Juliette and Justine to use any means possible to gain their freedom and their power back, from those who wrong them, regardless of any religious, patriarchal or moral restrictions:

He urges women to fuck as actively as they are able, so that powered by their enormous and hitherto untapped sexual energy they will then be able to fuck their way into history and, in doing so, change it. (Carter 26)

*Juliette* was written directly after *Justine* as a continuation, and can be regarded as a product of the abuse and suffering that Justine underwent. Looking at the characters Justine and Juliette as archetypes of the virgin and the whore, we may consider one to be leading to the other. A woman who is abused, humiliated, objectified and pushed to her limits, may choose violent and immoral acts to regain her life, which is the essence of the domestic noir novels. This novel can be said to bear traces of early domestic noir in terms of the outcome of pushing a woman to her breaking point, where violence may be the only remaining option.

An abused woman might choose violence for various reasons, other than being physically abused. An example of emotional and verbal abuse can be seen in Oscar Wilde’s tragedy *Salome*, a one-act tragedy written in 1891. The play *Salome* is based on the biblical story of the beheading of John the Baptist by King Herod the Tetrarch of Galilee; John condemned Herod for divorcing his wife and forcibly marrying his brother’s wife Herodias, and as a result he was imprisoned. At Herod’s birthday party, Salome, daughter of Herodias, performs a dance for him and his guests, to his delight, whereupon he offers to grant anything, she wants, up to half of his kingdom. Salome asked her mother for guidance and her mother says: ask for the head of John the Baptist, which she did, as narrated in Mark’s Gospel:

But when Herod’s birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company, and she pleased Herod so much that he promised on oath to grant her whatever she might ask. Prompted by her mother, she said, ‘Give me the head: of John the Baptist here on a platter.’ The king was grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he commanded it to be given; he sent and had John beheaded in the prison. The head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, who brought it to her mother. His disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went and told Jesus. (Matthew 13.43)

What Oscar Wilde did here is to tell this story from the perspective of Salome, focusing on why she asks for John's head. Was it her mother's influence or was there another reason? In Wilde's play, we see how Salome became infatuated with Jokanaan and how she tried to make him love her, in her own way as a young child between nine to twelve years old. When she first meets John the first words he utters are: "Back! Daughter of Babylon!" (Wilde 786), and she does not respond negatively to his insult and asks him to speak again and teach her his way: "Speak again! Speak again, Jokanaan, and tell me what I must do" (Wilde 786), and his response is: "Daughter of Sodom, come not near me!" (Wilde 786). He is insulting a young child for the acts of her mother, which he considers sinful, and yet she goes on expressing her fascination with his physical appearance:

Jokanaan, I am amorous of thy body! Thy body is white like the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed. Thy body is white like the snows that lie on the mountains, like the snows that lie on the mountains of Judaea, and come down into the valleys. The roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia are not so white as thy body. Neither the roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia, nor the feet of the dawn when they light on the leaves, nor the breast of the moon when she lies on the breast of the sea... There is nothing in the world so white as thy body. Let me touch thy body. (Wilde 787)

He responds not just by insulting her or her mother, but insulting her whole sex: "Back! Daughter of Babylon! By woman came evil into the world. Speak not to me. I will not listen to thee. I listen but to the voice of the Lord God" (Wilde 787). He humiliated a child interested in what he has to say and admiring his physical appearance; her only crime was being a woman and the daughter of Herodias. This unprovoked attack from John, in addition to her mother's guidance, made Salome ask for his head, which is unjust and also immoral, but unlike John's attack, it was provoked.

### **Psychological damage on battered women and reasons she would stay**

What makes a woman kill her husband is the central question Charles Patrick Ewing attempts to answer in his book, *Battered Women Who Kill: Psychological Self-Defense as Legal Justification*. A domestic abused woman is also referred to as a battered woman. J.J. Gayford is a British physician and a pioneer in the study of battered women; he conducted a study on 100 cases of battered women and he defines a battered wife as "a woman who has received deliberate, severe and repeated demonstrable physical injury from her marital partner" (qtd. in Ewing 8). This is a valid definition by a well-respected

physician, but as Ewing discusses in his book, it is not an inclusive definition covering all types of battered women. This definition includes only women who are physically hurt by their husbands or partners. On the other hand, the American psychologist Lenore E. Walker defines a battered woman as: “One who is repeatedly subjected to any forceful physical or psychological behaviour by a man in order to coerce her to do something he wants her to do without concern for her rights” (qtd. in Ewing 9). As a psychologist Walker emphasized in her study of 435 battered women the psychological abuse those women went through and the damage it caused them, finding that all the abused women in her study had undergone all eight following forms of abuse:

(1) social isolation, (2) exhaustion due to deprivation of food and sleep, (3) monopolization of perception manifested in obsessive or possessive behavior; (4) threats (including threats of death) against the woman, her relatives, and friends; (5) humiliation, denial of power, and name calling; (6) administration of dr and alcohol; (7) induction of altered states of consciousness; and (8) “indulgences” which maintained the woman's hope that the abuse would cease. (Ewing 9)

In a domestic abuse situation, even a strong woman possessing her own independent source of income will be subjected to some of those forms. The psychological damage of such abuse cannot be overlooked or undermined; it is just as painful as physical abuse, if not even more so, the women in Walker’s study reported: “That they regard the psychological harm done them as much more significant than the physical harm” (Ewing 10).

A domestic abuse victim is often asked: “why aren’t you doing anything about it? Why did you let it get this far? Why won’t you leave him?” Such questions require a detailed explanation and will be answered below. One of the possible explanations is “learned helplessness”, a term used by psychologists to describe a response that appears in a living organism; if a living organism were to be subjected to repeated pain over and over again this organism will learn to lose hope of fighting or avoiding this pain and it will surrender to it without attempting to escape. Walker provides us with a definition of this response as quoted in Ewing’s book, *Battered Women Who Kill: Psychological Self-Defense as Legal Justification*:

Repeated batterings . . . diminish the woman's motivation to respond. She becomes passive. Secondly, her cognitive ability to perceive success is changed. She does not believe her response will result in a favorable outcome, whether or not it might. . . Next, having generalized her helplessness, the battered woman does not believe anything she does will alter any outcome. . . Finally her sense of emotional well-being becomes precarious. She is more prone to depression and anxiety. (qtd. in Ewing 11)

The repetitive nature of the abuse, coupled with the victims' awareness that the abuse will happen again makes many abused women stop resisting the abuser up or even seeking a way out of the situation. As a result, they suffer from depression, anxiety and numerous other psychological illnesses.

The process of waiting to be assaulted, raped, threatened or verbally abused is causing them to be in a state of panic, and anxiety, which prevents them from thinking of a way to escape their abusers. A study conducted by Hilberman and Munson on 60 battered women, reports that:

The women were a study in paralyzing terror . . . [T]he stress was unending and the threat of the next assault was ever present. . . Agitation and anxiety bordering on panic were almost always present . . . There was chronic apprehension of imminent doom, of something terrible always about to happen. (Ewing 12)

Living in a state of panic and fear will hinder any person from thinking logically; having the fight or flight response active 24/7 is an unbearable way of living. One key reason of why those abused women do not leave can be attributed to society's pressure to have the perfect image of the perfect family or the perfect marriage. The abused woman often strongly believes in making her marriage and her family successful, according to societal standards. Her fear of becoming a single mother or a divorcee makes her more tolerant of her husband's abuse, perceiving it as a mistake or a bad habit that will eventually be corrected. Ewing has his own list of reasons as follows:

(1) their rigid stereotypic images of marriage, family, and male-female roles and relations; (2) their predictable response to the cyclical nature of the battering relationship; (3) the traumatic bond they develop with their batterers; (4) their learned helplessness; and (5) the depression they suffer. (Ewing 17)

This bond they develop with their abuser is similar to Stockholm syndrome; this syndrome was discovered by the Swedish criminologist and psychiatrist Nils Bejerot, describing the bond the bank hostages developed with the bank robbers in the robbery that took place in Stockholm in August 1973. For domestic abuse victims, this bond is far greater than a

typical Stockholm syndrome; they spend years with their abuser sharing their lives, beds, and children with them. The most important factor that makes this bond far greater than a mere Stockholm syndrome is that the abuser was once a loving partner, before he showed his true self.

When one looks at a domestic violence situation, one sees a woman being repeatedly assaulted, yelled at and humiliated, sometimes in public, and then the same exact woman is seen with her partner or husband behaving like two newlywed couple in their honeymoon, as if nothing bad has ever happened. Walker discusses this in her study, and discovers: “That battering relationships have a clearly discernible cyclical pattern to which battered women respond in a predictable fashion” (Ewing 17). Walker calls this “The Three-phase Cycle of Violence” in which the violent attack takes three stages; “tension reduction”, an “acute battering incident”, and “loving contrition”, these stages are performed by the abuser and for each stage the woman has a different response. The first stage “tension reduction”, is where the abuser inflicts verbal abuse or minor physical abuse on the woman and she lets it go and contains her anger with, “anger reduction techniques”. The second stage is an “acute battering incident”, in which the abuser has a recurring incident where he assaults the woman, and straight afterwards he enters his “loving contrition” stage, here he starts calming down, and acts remorseful, apologizes profusely, becomes a loving husband and promises it will never happen again. This gives the woman hope for a better future and she believes him; in some relationships the “loving contrition” stage lasts for a long time, making it even more convincing to the wife, but the more this cycle is repeated the shorter this period becomes and the more intense the assaults become (Ewing 18).

The psychiatrist Martin Symonds describes the psychological effects of prolonged exposure to a violent act such as kidnap, robbery or being taken hostage as mentioned in Ewing’s book to comprise four phases. Symonds says: “Only the duration and intensity of each phase [is] influenced by the nature and quality of contact with the criminal” (Ewing 71). The nature of the crime, the intensity of the crime and the duration of the contact between the victim and the criminal determines the effect on the victim. Symonds’ phases start with “shock and disbelief”, which is described by Symonds to be the denial

phase, where the victim does not believe what is happening to be real, thinks it to be a dream or a misunderstanding. Phase two comprises of realizing what happened to them as they are filled with fear. Phase three in Symonds' own words is: "circular bouts of apathy, anger, resignation, irritability, 'constipated' rage, insomnia, startle reactions, and replay of the traumatic events through dreams, fantasies and nightmares" (Ewing 71). The case of battered women is similar to kidnapping or a hostage situation where there is a continuous connection between the criminal and the victim, making them fixed in phase two of absolute fright and horror; for this Symonds has coined a term:

If contact with the criminal is especially protracted, as in kidnapping or hostage-taking, victims come to fear for their lives, become frozen with fright, and begin to demonstrate what Symonds calls "Traumatic psychological infantilism"—a regressive psychological defence mechanism which "causes adults to set aside recently learned experience and to respond instead with the early adaptive behavior of childhood for survival [,] compels victims to cling to the very person who is endangering their lives [and] accounts for the obedient, placid, compliant and submissive behavior seen in frozen fright. (qtd. in Ewing 71)

The "Traumatic psychological infantilism" is a defence mechanism used by the domestic abuse woman, which puts her in a primal childhood survival state where all she can do is be obedient, submissive and paralyzed with fear and as a result suffers from depression, anxiety, hopelessness and numerous other psychological disorders.

Having repeatedly been beaten, raped, and humiliated will destroy a battered women's will to escape; these women are too frightened to even try to flee. Walker has given examples of 50 battered women and the kind of horrifying threats which they received from their abusers:

Most of these 50 women had also been subjected to other threats of serious injury, disfigurement, and death, especially when they made any attempt to leave their batterers. Among the non-lethal threats reported were "cutting up her face, sewing up her vagina, breaking her kneecaps, and knocking her unconscious." Like the 435 subjects in Walker's larger study of battered women in general, all of these 50 women believed that the batterer would or could kill them. Moreover, many felt that leaving the batterer would provide no escape from this danger. (Ewing 24)

Those women know better than anyone the extent of their abuser's capabilities and they fear the result of escaping; however, death will be the result if they stay as well. It is a hard choice, but it has to be taken; this fear is not an irrational fear in the battered women's head. Although it is sometimes a result of the abuse they receive, it is nevertheless a real threat:

Many of these women had tried to leave and had been badly beaten for it. Some actually had gotten away but their husbands traced and followed them, even to another state. Some . . . had been separated or divorced for up to two years before the final incident, and yet still experienced life-threatening harassment and abuse. (qtd. in Ewing 24)

These assaults occur either while the abuser visits his children or the abuser hunts down the woman to punish her for leaving. Ewing in his book *Battered Women Who Kill: Psychological Self-defense as Legal Justification*, has examined and recorded the stories of one hundred battered women who killed their abusers; the following is only one example from the hundred. Shirley Terry was convicted of manslaughter with a gun and sentenced to twenty years in prison for the murder of her boyfriend, Oscar Mercer. She testified of having a relationship with the deceased and that he often physically assaulted her through the period of four years; these assaults involved the use of bottles and wooden boards; she had to go to the hospital more than once as result of these assaults. When she could not forgive or excuse his behaviours anymore, she moved in with her mother, which aggravated Mercer; who followed her and threatened to shoot her mother. Terry moved to an apartment of her own and Mercer followed her again breaking in her apartment several times and physically assaulting her. Roughly, three weeks before the killing, Mercer tied Terry with a rope and took her to the swamps and threatening to dump her in with the alligators.

One day before the killing incident, Terry telephoned her from a bar and asked where she was; fearing his reaction, she told him the location and he picked her up and drove to her apartment; he proceeded by demanding to have intercourse with her and she refused. Terry then forced her to his car and drove off again threatening to feed her to the alligators; then she pulled out a gun from her purse and shot him dead. Her case is on appeal and she will have a new trial based on her having “The battered women syndrome” (Ewing 135), which will be discussed in detail in the section titled Reasons a Battered Woman Would Kill Her Oppressor. This is another example of how battered women are unable to leave due to the fear that doing so may worsen their situation. In conclusion, this is a legitimate fear and not just a psychological fear; and the numerous stories in Ewing’s book support this claim.

Studies in non-western countries similar to Burton's study show that 43.5 per cent of women reported going through psychological abuse in their relationship, while 40.3 per cent reported being physically abused by their partners at least once. Also, half of the death resulting from the terrorist attack of 9/11 occurs every year in the United States with an estimate 1300 women killed by their partners. As for the other end of the globe, Russia's foreign ministry reported approximately 14,000 deaths annually from domestic abuse (Sloan-Lynch 786).

### **Reasons a battered woman would kill her oppressor**

Abused women suffer from more than just being battered repeatedly, they are treated like sex slaves, raped repeatedly and forced to perform abnormal sexual acts. According to Browne's study of 42 battered women, these women have been raped more than once and forced to engage in abnormal sexual acts:

Most of the women in Browne's sample reported having been sexually abused by the men they ultimately killed or tried to kill. More than 75 percent of these women reported having been raped (that is, forced to have sexual intercourse) at least once by their batterers. Twenty-two percent said they had been raped three or more times and 39 percent claimed to have been raped "often" in the course of the battering relationship. [...] Additionally, nearly 62 percent of these 42 women said that their batterers had either forced or urged them to participate in sexual acts other than ordinary intercourse. (Ewing 26)

Battered women suffer greatly before deciding to kill their husbands. The psychological abuse they go through is not just in the previously mentioned forms; women in Walker's study reported killing to save their family members from murder threats made by the abuser; also, more than 75 per cent of the women witnessed their children being physically or sexually abused by the batterers.

Other forms of psychological abuse reported by these women who killed included social isolation enforced by threats against family and friends, the flaunting of extra-marital affairs, administration of mind-altering drugs, and the physical or sexual abuse of the woman's children. More than 75 percent of these women reported that their children had been physically or sexually abused by their batterers. (Ewing 24 - 25)

Witnessing a loved—especially one's own child—being abused in front of one's eyes, while feeling helpless, and unable to protect one's own self, let alone helping them, causes unimaginable psychological trauma. That is why a huge number of those women attempted suicide once or more, and sadly, we will never hear the stories of those who

succeeded. As Walker writes in her study, some of those battered women change their minds at the last moment from ending their lives to ending their abuser's life:

Many of these women became suicidal. Indeed, more than a third of them reported having attempted suicide. Moreover, some of them had been in the process of killing themselves when, at the last minute, they changed their minds and killed their batterers instead. (qtd. in Ewing 25)

The battered woman is scared, stressed, abused, raped and humiliated; all this leads to her desire to kill herself to end her suffering, and at the last moment she may change her mind and kill her abuser instead. Ewing in his book argues that when a woman is put under an immense amount of pressure from her batterer, she is forced to take action either to commit suicide or kill her abuser, which gives her the right of self-defence. Her life is in danger because she cannot go on living in such conditions and in this case, killing her batterer should count as self-defence and not as premeditated murder.

According to Ewing, Victimology is the study of the interaction between the victim and the criminal; a battered woman is qualified to be accounted as a victim of violent crime. Ewing argues in his book that battered women are a special case. Unlike normal victims of violent crimes, battered women suffer from this type of crime repeatedly and they also share the same house with the criminals. Ewing suggests this special circumstance supports the theory of women killing in "psychological self-defence" (Ewing 70); this psychological self-defence is labeled by psychiatrists as The Battered Women Syndrome.

Abused women are living in a hostage-like situation, where they cannot leave, they cannot live in peace and they are in a constant state of fear and pain; several behavioural scientists have labelled this as a form of terrorism. Walker has talked about abused women, describing them as being tortured. Also, Steven M. Morgan in his book *Conjugal Terrorism*, Morgan describes domestic abuse as a form of Conjugal terrorism, in which the husband commits violent behaviour on his wife or partner similar to the ones committed by a political terrorist since they use violence and threats to stop their victim's resistance and force their own will on them (in Ewing 73).

Quite a few philosophers and feminist authors have considered domestic violence to be a form of terrorism, for various reasons to be mentioned below. Sloan-Lynch

discusses in her book the views some of these philosophers and feminist authors are Claudia Card, Alison Jaggar and Sara Lee Johann. Claudia Card addresses the patrilocal aspect of domestic violence, where the abuser keeps his wife or partner in a state of dependence on him. He does that by creating an atmosphere of terror and stress, and in doing so he can adjust the level of intensity to force her to surrender to his will or reward her with lowering the intensity of abuse when she follows his demands. She is dependent on him to lower the severity of his abuse, but as Ewing clarifies, his demands will increase in difficulty and his abuse will only increase in intensity through time (Ewing 18). Jaggar accepts domestic violence to be a form of terrorism only if the abuse includes rape, and as the Browne study shows, 75 percent of the battered women in her study reported rape to be among the abuse they received. Johann describes the abuser as a terrorist living at home with his victim. The word terrorism is derived from terror which, according to *Cambridge English Dictionary* is: “extreme fear, or violent action that causes fear.” Hilberman and Munson in their study of 60 battered women describe the intensity of the terror the women in their study have underwent, saying: “The women were a study in paralyzing terror” (Ewing 12).

Sloan-Lynch argues that domestic violence is a form of terrorism and that there are certain benefits to labelling it as such. Sloan-Lynch’s argument starts by disproving the three most common counter arguments against considering domestic violence to be a form of terrorism as follows: firstly, a terrorist action should be politically motivated; secondly, the terrorist action should have the intention of creating a climate of terror; and thirdly, to expand the term of terrorism to include acts of domestic violence would have no benefits to the issue at hand and would be pointless (Sloan-Lynch 776).

Tomis Kapitan describes terrorism as: “The deliberate use of violence, or the threat of such, directed upon civilians in order to achieve political objectives” (qtd. in Sloan-Lynch 776). According to Kapitan, for an action to be labelled as terrorism it has to have some political motives behind it; the attack committed by the abusers is considered to be motivated by personal feelings and personal gain, unlike a terrorist attack.

Sloan-Lynch claims that domestic violence does have a political agenda behind it because in almost all domestic violence cases women are forbidden to go to work. In

Hilberman and Munson's study of 60 battered women, they report that almost all of the women's abusers tried to isolate them by cutting ties with friends and family and forbidding them to do any work outside the home:

Hilberman and Munson found that in nearly all of these cases, the batterers had consistently attempted to isolate the women from friends, family, and acquaintances. These women were frequently accused of infidelity, subjected to insults and other forms of verbal degradation in public, and not allowed to work outside the home. (Ewing 9 - 10)

The abuser would isolate his victim to hide the fact that he is abusing her and to prevent her from seeking help. Sloan-Lynch sees this as a tool to prevent women from competing in the workplace and to prevent them from partaking in social issues, being involved in the law-making process or participating in the process of democracy; using violence as a means to:

Prevent her [the battered woman] from participating in the broader society, and results in a public silence concerning her interests and well-being—thereby reinforcing her invisibility in the political sphere. Domestic abuse is often a private means of political oppression and exclusion. (Sloan-Lynch 778)

A patriarchy society survives by silencing women. It is accomplished secretly; away from the eyes of the authorities, who often turn a blind eye to acts of sexism and other crimes against women; away from the eyes of other women and away from the eyes of any decent person who believes in the equality of women's lives.

Many theorists refuse to consider domestic violence to be terrorism because they do not believe the abuser has any intention of terrorizing his victim; most abusers claim to have deep love and affection for their partners and that all their abuse is an attempt to protect their partners and correct their behaviour. Unfortunately, the victims themselves sometimes believe and defend their abusers, thinking that they deserved this treatment because they did something wrong and deserve to be punished (Sloan-Lynch 780). Sloan-Lynch says: "Rarely is it ever suggested that men are intentionally terrorizing their partners—whom they generally love and care for—but rather that they are acting on the basis of an outdated patriarchal worldview or have anger issue" (Sloan-Lynch 780 – 781).

James Rachels in his book, the morality of euthanasia, argues: "intention is not relevant to deciding whether the act is right or wrong, but instead it is relevant to assessing

the character of the person who does the act, which is very different. A pure heart cannot make a wrong act right; neither can an impure heart make a right act wrong” (qtd. in Sloan-Lynch 782). Even if the abusers do not intend to terrorize their victims the results are still the same; a women filled with fear and terror, which means she is terrorized by his behaviour, and therefore it is a form of terrorism. Living in a domestic violence situation can and will eventually lead to death by suicide or murder, so to labelled this as mere violence is a minimization of the true danger of the situation.

Sloan-Lynch moves on to talk about the use of rape as a weapon to control and dominate women. According to Sloan-Lynch, men who commit rape may each have their own individual motives, their actions are often driven by a desire for revenge, dominance, or sexual attraction. The main goal of rape is to terrorize women to force them to behave as men wish. Rape makes women in need of the protection of men from other men, and as a result, they lose their freedom, their independence and suffer under various inequalities imposed by a male-dominated society.

The main goal of rape is to keep women in a state of fear of men and in need of their protection to maintain their upper status in society; domestic abuse is the same as rape in its goals and results; both rape and domestic abuse result in terror for the victim and both of them spread fear in the hearts of women to keep them dependent on men, fearing men, and unable to change or resist their current social status (Sloan-Lynch 783 – 784). Sloan-Lynch considers what Claudia Card says to be also applicable to domestic violence: “The primary target is not women and girls. They are direct targets. The primary target is people. A coercive threat (message) is aimed at those who resist or might resist...” (qtd. in Sloan-Lynch 783 – 784). Living in this tough situation where one cannot even feel safe in their own home, is inhumane. Even though this is primarily a woman’s issue, every man around those women has the moral obligation to help, to the extent of his ability; a father, a brother, a friend, or a neighbour, any man is morally obligated to help those women.

The society in which those battered women live plays a big role in improving their situation by reporting on the abuser, providing shelters for abused women, and providing

lawyers for them. They can further oppress them by: undermining the whole situation and considering it as a private matter, not reporting a domestic violence situation fearing the abuser, and blaming the victim for not leaving. Richard Davis discusses the importance of the community in the fight against domestic abuse, he writes:

It is imperative that other men in the community hold abusers, who are for the most part men, accountable for their behavior. If there is no public shame or loss of public reputation in the eyes of one's peers in the local community, then there is little reason to expect that person to change his behavior. (qtd. in Sloan-Lynch 786)

For this to happen members of the community need to be educated about this matter; to realise how serious it is and that it needs to be taken seriously. Instead of blaming these women, help them or at least report. Many of these battered women are too afraid to ask for help. Sloan-Lynch adds another important reason to consider domestic violence as terrorism, is to be taken as a serious threat; for domestic violence to be taken seriously it has to be regarded as a form of terrorism, adding shame to the abuser; because no one in the community would support a or excuse a terrorist (Sloan-Lynch 786).

Another type of abuse that occur in domestic abuse situation, in a non-physical way, is Emotional Rape. The Emotional Rape Syndrome can be found in all domestic violence situations, but especially in a less physically violent abusive relationship. The emotional rape syndrome. as opposed to physical rape, is a term first introduced by Doctor Michael Povich in his book, *The Emotional Rape Syndrome: How to Survive and Avoid It*, attempts to define this syndrome, which is not recognised by the medical community as a syndrome, a disorder or illness. He argues that one's emotions can be raped through abuse, use or manipulating the victim by a second party. He compares sexual rape and emotional rape saying: "Sexual rape is the sexual use of somebody's body without that person's consent: Emotional rape is the use of somebody's higher emotions without that person's consent" (Povich 11). This is an attempt at a definition, and not quite enough to define such a complicated syndrome, as he states in his book.

As Povich wrote in his book, the emotional rapist takes advantage of their victims' emotions of love, trust, caring, generosity, honour, loyalty, innocence, patriotism, achievement and faith. An emotional rapist does not only appear in romantic relationships, those rapists also exist in the workplace, and between a government and its citizens. This

rapist can be a male or female, husband or a boyfriend, young or old, a parent, son, or a daughter, an employer, a coworker or friend, works at the government or your religious institution. Emotional rape is a violation of one's soul. In sexual rape, the body is used; trust, if any, is broken, and there is no consent. However emotional rape cannot be located on one's body; the rapist gains one's trust, love and admiration, the victim did not give consent to be emotionally raped, but they did give their love, and trust to the person who is later revealed to be an emotional rapist (Povich 12). Povich draws a comparison to further explain the difference between sexual rape and emotional rape saying: "If sexual rape is the violation of the human body, emotional rape is the violation of the human soul" (Povich 12).

We may wonder why this is described as rape, and not manipulation, or abuse. According to *Cambridge English Dictionary*, rape is: "to force someone to have sex when they are unwilling, using violence or threatening behaviour", and can also mean: "destruction of the natural world, often for profit". The damage inflicted on an emotional rape victim cannot be described in a better word than destruction of the victim's self. Emotional rape is the destruction and abuse of one's emotions. Povich references in his book the story of real victims of emotional rape without the mention of their names to preserve their privacy. The story of Shara can make the damage of emotional rape clearer. Shara a 37-year-old saleswoman became involved with Brent a psychologist, who used his psychological tactics to make her fall in love with him, claiming that the fact she could not have children was not important to him because he also did not want children. However, he used the excuse of children when he left her to remarry in order to start a family. He may have the right to divorce her for a number of different reasons, but the fact is that according to Povich he did this twice with two different women, he uses troubled women with his full knowledge as a psychologist, which led to Shara committing suicide by jumping into moving traffic (Povich 35-37).

Another example of the severity of emotional rape and hence the reason for it to be called rape is the story of Cheryl and Robert. Cheryl, a 44-year-old owner of a successful beauty salon, had a 6-year relationship with Robert. She raised his children as her own, was a sexual partner for him, a housekeeper and took him and his children on

expensive vacations. According to Povich, an emotional rapist tries to maintain the image of a morally good person and does not want his victim to know that he is a rapist, when Robert started to treat Cheryl badly and distancing himself from her, ignoring her, not replying when she addressed him, so that instead of him ending the relationship, she would separate from him, enabling him to find a wealthier woman. Eventually he failed in executing his plan and had to end the relationship himself. Cheryl locked herself in her garage and was on the verge of killing herself, but ultimately, she held onto life (Povich 10).

The symptoms a person suffering from emotional rape has are similar to the ones of sexual rape. Povich says: “Research suggests that a person can certainly experience many of the accepted symptoms of post-traumatic rape syndrome without being sexually raped” (Povich 10). He also writes in his book about the story of Steve and Ellen. Forty-one-year-old Steve met Ellen a twice divorcee thirty-four-year-old with an eleven-year-old son. Steve read her diary and found out she had been using him for his money for the past four years and was planning to leave him, even though he spent years supporting her and her child financially. He put a roof over their heads, and throughout the course of four years, she spent 40,000 dollars on drama classes with her husband’s money and never worked a day; these lessons lead to a career in acting that gave her the financial ability to leave him (Povich 6-7).

After reading in her diary that she was planning to leave him, Steve vomited, fell into depression, lost 9 kilo grams and had suicidal thoughts. Ellen had signed a prenuptial agreement, but Ellen told lies about being coerced and misled to signing it, so Steve was ultimately forced to pay her alimony (Povich 50). Steve felt dirty and had to sterilise his house, repaint the walls, change the carpets, and buy new furniture, which is the same feeling of dirtiness that a sexual rape victim feels (Povich 22). Other emotional symptoms of an emotional rape victim are denial, isolation, the feeling of being used, the inability to trust or love, having anxiety and fear, confusion, hidden or delayed reaction, loneliness, rage and obsession, and loss of self-esteem (Povich 19). According to Povich there are also, physical symptoms that appear in an emotionally raped person and they are, weight loss or gain, insomnia, irritability, headaches, impotence, and high blood pressure,

addictive behaviour on alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. Material effects on emotional rape victims are financial losses, time loss, loss of friends. In a domestic abuse situation, victims often have the emotional rape syndrome, and the two women in the selected novels indeed have this syndrome, because they exhibit all symptoms mentioned above, as will be discussed in the following chapters of the thesis (Povich 31 – 33).

No woman would marry a man knowing he would abuse her and hurt her; such abusive men are masters at manipulation. They are charismatic, ostensibly attractive, admired by others, have strong social skills can completely conceal their true selves, and are extremely polite, these are the characteristics of an emotional rapist as Povich states in his book (Povich 36 - 41). According to Dr. Scott Peck in his book *The People of The Lie*, those characteristics are largely accurate, he argues that individuals capable of evil suffer from mental illness, with narcissism being one such example. Even though they possess such evil qualities, they still have some attractive characteristics; also, they do not consider themselves capable of doing any wrong. In conclusion, emotional rapists are highly likely to have a mental illness in order to abuse people and commit such evil deeds (Povich 43 - 44).

### **Manipulative tactics used by abusers**

Another tactic that abusive men use to lure women into their trap is Gaslighting. To gaslight someone is to present false information to them as truth, to make them question their memory, their sanity, and make them believe a fabricated lie. A gaslighter can be one's boss, coworker, partner, or one's own parent; anyone can use gaslighting to manipulate and control their victims thoughts. According to the psychiatrist Doctor Stephanie Sarkis, gaslighting conforms to no definition; according to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), gaslighting can be diagnosed to be several other mental disorders. The most common one is narcissistic personality disorder, but Sarkis thinks gaslighting should have its own diagnosis (Sarkis 7).

People gaslight each other all the time, but this is not yet considered a personality disorder or a mental illness. The term gaslight was added to *Oxford English Dictionary*

in December 2004, although it had been used for years beforehand. The term was first coined by Patrick Hamilton in his 1938 play *Gas Light*, and was later made popular by the 1944 movie *Gaslight*. This is the tale of a woman named Paula and her husband's attempts to convince her she is losing her mind by hiding precious objects of hers and claiming she lost them, by making noises and claiming he does not hear them, and by turning the stove on and waiting for his wife to turn it off just so he can turn it back on and claim she forgot to turn it off again (Sarkis 7).

A gaslighter will use their own words against the victim, lie to their face, deny the truth to display assert power, and attempt to convince them of an alternate version of the truth to make them doubt their own sanity and become dependent on the gaslighter to be their only source of truth. This is done in order to have total control over them. Gaslighters can be men or women, but most gaslighters are men. The American Psychiatric Association's DMS, diagnoses a gaslighter with one or all the following disorders: histrionic personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, and borderline personality disorder. According to Doctor Sarkis, people with a personality disorder are also ego-syntonic; an ego-syntonic person does not believe they have any illness or disorder, and accuses everyone around them of being the crazy ones. Sarkis advises us to create a solid boundary between ourselves and a gaslighter or a person with a personality disorder and if possible, to get as far away from them, because according to Sarkis it is extremely difficult for a psychotherapist to treat a personality disorder (Sarkis 7). Doctor Sarkis has a long list of actions that may help identify a gaslighter if made by that person:

Their apologies are always conditional, they use Triangulation and Splitting, they use blatant attempts to curry favors, they expect special treatment, they mistreat people who have less power, they use your weaknesses against you, they compare you to others, they are obsessed with their accomplishments, they prefer to associate with people who fawn over them, they put you in a double bind, they are obsessed with their image, they are obsessed with your image, they con people, they cause fear in others, they have a bad temper, punishment doesn't affect them, they practice "Cognitive Empathy", they refuse personal responsibility, they wear you down over time, they habitually lie, they are terrible teasers, their compliments aren't Real, they project their emotions, they use "Flying Monkeys", they tell others that you are crazy, they don't keep promises, loyalty is required—but not reciprocal, they kick people when they are down, they avoid admitting problems they've caused, they bait and switch. (Sarkis 13- 20)

Most of these actions/characteristics are applicable to the men in the selected novels and will be discussed and explained in the following chapters of the thesis. A gaslighter also uses sex in a different way than a normal partner would, which would be fair to describe as abusive. A gaslighter would start as a gentle caring lover and slowly will start demanding sex to be available whenever they ask for it, and denying their partner sex if they ask for it, in order to exert power. They would withhold sex as punishment, in which oral sex is only given in exchange for another sexual favour, they will belittle their partner if they refuse a sexual request, they will ask their partner to change their appearance to be more sexually appealing to them, they will pressure them if they refuse a certain sexual act, they would not care if their partner feels any pleasure or not and they would not even care if their partner feels pain (Sarkis 24).

Other weapons in a gaslighter's arsenal are Love-Bombing, Hoovering, and Stonewalling. In love-bombing the abusive man or gaslighter would treat his partner with love and care, shower her with compliments, buy her gifts, and cater to her every need until she falls in love with him, when he can reveal his true self and start using her love for him for his own benefit. Sarkis wrote about Joise and Jamie as an example of love-bombing. Jamie bought so many gifts for Joise and told her exactly what she wanted to hear about their future together, Sarkis describes the attention given in love-bombing to be: "intoxicating [...] like nothing you have experience before" (Sarkis 28).

As for Hoovering, the term comes from the vacuum cleaner, because the gaslighter will draw his victim in again, in Sarkis own words: "If gaslighters get any inkling of perceived abandonment, they work at sucking you back in" (Sarkis 28), as a vacuum cleaner does. This happens when the victim starts to pull back and discover their true intentions. In Jamie and Joise's case, Jamie felt Joise drawing herself back when his control over her had begun to weaken, so he asked her to move in with him. The gaslighter has a need for attention that cannot be fulfilled, he will never be able to fill that void. Once he finds someone new to try to fill this void, he will abandon his partner or victim.

The gaslighter also has a fear of abandonment, and that is where hoovering comes in place, to pull the victim back with just enough attention to string them along; gaslighters are masters in knowing what attracts their victims; they: "knows [know] just how to get

you hooked back in with the promise of something you want” (Sarkis 28). Sarkis addresses sex and says Hoovering is accompanied with an improved sex life, which the victim mistakes to be an emotional connection that they lack, but it is not. Also, what makes gaslighting so deceiving is that the person is not fully a bad person. The gaslighter acts perfectly to please his victim, which makes it look like the start of a new chapter in the relationship and looks as if it will not end, but it eventually does (Sarkis 29).

Last but not least, stonewalling is done by cutting off all communication with the victim; if they do not live together, the gaslighter will end all communication with his victim for a long period of time; the gaslighter will not reply to any calls or texts from the victim until they decide to come back again for whichever reason they have. This will make the victim anxious and worried, thinking that they did something wrong to upset the gaslighter. If the victim is living together with the gaslighter, the gaslighter will not even reply when talked to and will act as if no one is there. The gaslighter thrives on the power he has over his victims, how he can upset them with his absence and make them happy with his love-bombing or hoovering (Sarkis 29).

### **What causes some men to abuse their wives**

It’s not easy to determine the cause of domestic violence, and what drives men to abuse their wives or partners; it is easy to blame it on alcohol, drugs or mental illness, but the truth is that most of those abusers are respected and successful members of society. Nevertheless, alcohol and drugs do increase the likelihood of domestic violent crimes. John Haley and Wendy Stein in their book *The Truth About Abuse* report a 2003 study made by the journal *Addictive Behaviors*, show that alcohol or drug use increases the likelihood of violence against an intimate partner. On the days the men under study used alcohol, they were six times more likely to act aggressive with their wives or partners, and men under the influence of cocaine were four times more likely to be physically aggressive with their intimate partners.

Haley and Stein also reported on a 2004 study published in *Aggression and Violent Behavior*. The study reviewed 85 other studies on the influence of alcohol and drug use on intimate partner violence. The study concluded that both significantly

contribute in increasing domestic abuse incidents (in Haley and Stein 35). Despite the role of alcohol and drugs, many would argue that alcohol or drug use do not cause the person to act violently, it is under the person's own will that guides their violent behaviours. According to a 2001 study conducted by the University of Waterloo in Ontario:

Canadian researchers have found that drinkers can sober up quickly with the right motivation. In a 2001 study conducted by the University of Waterloo in Ontario, researchers asked volunteers to press a button when prompted by the computer screen. The subjects were told not to respond if a red light also appeared. The people under the influence of alcohol were more likely to press the button, even if the red light appeared. However, when the drinkers were offered a small reward for their performance, they behaved as well as the sober subjects. This study indicates that, if properly motivated, people can exercise control over their behavior while under the influence of alcohol. (In Haley and Stein 40 - 39)

This study clearly shows that even a drunk person can control their actions if they have the right motivation. People have assaulted, raped, and killed with the excuse of alcohol; some have even received a commutation of their sentence with the excuse of alcohol. Alcohol cannot be blamed and looked at as the source of all violence; humans are fully responsible for their actions.

Beyond their abusive behaviour, all abusive men tend to offer the same justification for their actions "I'm doing this because I love you" (Hill 87). According to Jess Hill in her book *See What You Made Me Do: Power, Control and Domestic Violence*, she says that abusive men cannot be put in categories of men. They are successful man, men who are not mentally ill, men who get paid well, not men who get paid the minimum wage, men who say they love their partners, not men who think that most women want to be raped and are asking for it. There is no such thing as a stereotypically abusive man (Hill 87). Domestic violence can be committed by men and women, but it is more common with men. Why do some men tend to abuse their partners? Doctors John Gottman and Neil Jacobson try to answer this question, they did that by examining 200 couples in a laboratory they called "The Love Lab". They asked participants to argue and get mad at each other, and measured their heart rate, respiration and blood pressure. The findings were shocking to the doctors. They found that men's heart rates and blood pressure were generally very high as expected but for 20% of the men the opposite happened, their heart rates and blood pressure started dropping; they looked from the outside furious but the more they insult and verbally abuse their partners

the calmer they become from within and they kept calm for the rest of the session after they finished abusing their partners.

The researchers decided to categorise these two types, Cobras and Pit Bulls. The individuals who felt calm and at peace after abusing their partners classified as the Cobra group; they exhibited more aggression than the first group (the Pit Bulls) and also had sadistic tendencies, the Cobra group is the smaller of the two. Just like a Cobra does, they would stay calm during an argument but suddenly they would snap at their partners. A Cobra is not emotionally dependent on his partner, he does not argue or abuse their victim for specific reasons, they do it just for the power. It does not make any difference who the person is as long as the Cobra can dominate and put them under his power. He does not love or hate his partner; he just wants to control and dominate them. A Cobra has a criminal nature. Those men are a danger to the public, not just to their partner, they are the most likely of to be the ones who had a violent childhood. These men have some of the have the qualities of a sociopath, a psychopath and/or a malignant narcissist. Half of the mass shootings in the USA that occurred between the years of 2009 and 2016 started with the killing of an intimate partner or a family member (Hill 96 - 97).

The biggest category is the Pit Bulls, their anger builds up gradually and they start to be more dangerous and aggressive as the argument progresses, until they lose all control. Pit Bulls are dependent on their partners, and they claim to love their partners. Their aggression and violence are exclusive to their homes, and in public, they are outstanding citizen and good men. They are extremely jealous and they are worried over the possibility of the end of the relationship, which makes them extremely possessive and controlling. Professor Holtzworth-Munroe says about the Pit Bulls: “We don’t know if they’re using the violence because they’re trying to get control over her, or because they’re so emotionally dysregulated that they just can’t control their feelings and anger” (qtd. in Hill 97). These emotionally dependent men are the most likely to kill themselves after they murder their partners (Hill 97).

A third and similar type to the Pit Bull is identified and named by Holtzworth-Munroe, it is called the family-only batterer; it is almost the same as the Pit Bull, but they differ from the Pit Bull in that they always express remorse after an attack they commit and most of the time it is genuine. They are not interested in controlling their partner, which makes this the most mysterious type of the three. Researchers still cannot find a clear motive for their anger issues. An interesting thing that sets this type apart from the first two is that not all of them are misogynists; nevertheless, they are just as violent as the other two. The family-only batterer can with time transform into a more jealous controlling partner i.e., a Pit bull (Hill 98).

## **Chapter Two: Abused Women's Mentality in the Selected Works**

### **The Abusive Husband's Behaviours and the Damage They Causes**

The novels under analyze in this thesis revolve around the marriage of the two couples Amy and Nicholas Dunne in Gillian Flynn's novel *Gone Girl* and that of Jodi and Todd Brett in *The Silent Wife* by A. S. A. Harrison, and I will also discuss Amy's relationship with her ex-boyfriend Desi. This chapter will look into the reasons that led to the fall of those women, what made them want to stay with their abuser and society's role in oppressing those two women.

When one thinks of abused women, one would think of them as poor women with no income, little to no education, helpless and lacking confidence. Contrary to this common misbelief all kinds of women, from all levels of society and educational backgrounds can be victims of domestic abuse. In the novel *Gone Girl*, Amy Dunne grew up a straight-A student, she got her master's degree in psychology from Harvard University, so she is a considerably educated person. She has her own income working as a personality quiz writer for a magazine. She comes from quite a wealthy family of writers and likes to exercise and stay fit; she is not the stereotypical abused woman. Despite all the previously mentioned, Nick has used and abused her, cheated on her, raped her, physically assaulted her, stole from her, lied to and manipulated her.

Another example of a strong independent yet abused woman is Jodi from the novel *The Silent Wife*. Jodi Brett is a forty-four years old woman; she works as a psychotherapist, and has a "Doctorate and a couple of master's degrees" (Harrison 40), which means she is well educated and has her own income. She was brought up in a middle-class family and she also exercises daily to keep fit. She is a psychotherapist, so one would think it would not be easy to lie to her and manipulate her, but Todd has done both and more. Todd is Forty-six years old has used and abused Jodi, cheated on her, moved in with his pregnant young lover, tried to throw her out of the apartment she lived in in for the past 20 years, and tried to keep her as a mistress after deciding to divorce her and marry his pregnant mistress.

Those two women have been neglected, lied to, manipulated, and stolen from by their husbands, which led to them to suffer from some psychological damages. Jodi has been married to Todd Gilbert for 20 years, she is the perfect traditional housewife. She cooks, cleans, walks the dog, arranges his wardrobe, satisfies his sexual needs and works as a part-time therapist. Jodi is a beautiful woman, physically fit, and does not look her age; despite that, her husband Todd is having an affair with Natasha Kovacs, his best friend's orphan daughter.

Jodie was manipulated into thinking her primary role is to be the housewife in her common law marriage, Todd would often go out with his friends, mostly Dean Kovacs his best friend, and Natasha's father, and leave her home alone with the dog. She gave him so much space so that he would not feel trapped in their marriage, Harrison writes:

He calls Jodi to say that he won't be home for dinner. It's a courtesy call; she's aware that he's seeing Dean tonight. But he likes to let her know that he's thinking about her. He's a lucky man and doesn't lose sight of the fact. She's still a knockout with her slender figure and dark hair, and in spite of being a homebody herself, she understands that he can't be spending his evenings sitting around the condo. Some of his friends have to be home for dinner every night. Some can't even go for a beer after work. (Harrison 36)

Todd is well aware that he is getting special treatment from his wife. He has a much more tolerant wife than his friends; he knows how beautiful his wife is, and that is why he calls her to let her know he is thinking of her. He gives her just enough attention so that she would not lose interest in him but not too much so he can still keep his after-work and private time privileges. According to Sarkis, this is one of the manipulative tactics used by domestic abusers and gaslighters (Sarkis 28). These tactics will be further explained in the next chapter.

Jodie gave him these privileges out of love, to make sure he is happy fearing that she would be like the other wives who demand lots of attention from their husbands, even though she suffers from being home alone. She only has a dog named Freud to keep her company. Harrison describes Jodi's state after Todd left her to go on a business trip, which is in reality a romantic weekend with Natasha:

She takes refuge in a bath, a ritual that involves lowering herself into scalding water up to her neck. The clouds of steam, the cocooning heat, and the sense of weightless yet heavy immersion (the body suspended, the water pressing in) are powerful tonics that can overthrow maladies of all kinds, but even though she soaks until the skin on her finger pads is puckered and white she emerges feeling peevish, abandoned, and tired. (Harrison 36)

Even a relaxing hot bath fails to improve her mood. She feels peevish, tired and abandoned by her husband. She states that she had a gut feeling he would not call her and she was right; he did not even call once to check up on her. She later went to the fridge and ate half an apple pie and even scooped the crust with her fingers. She falls asleep on the couch and does not get dressed, as a result, she wakes up cold and shivering. This suggests that she is eating in hopes of emotional relief (Harrison 47 - 48).

Amy Dunne is thirty-eight at the time of her disappearance, she has been married to Nick for five years, he is thirty-four years old he moved to his home town to take care of his mother who is dying of cancer. He used Amy's money to open a bar and asked her to help take care of his mother and his father who is suffering from Alzheimer's, which as a loyal, loving wife she did. Instead of appreciating the time, effort and financial support time she put into his happiness, he repaid her with abusing her and having an affair with twenty-three-year-old women named Andie. Nick often neglects her and comes home late. He acts as if he is a single man with no one waiting for him at home. One example of his neglect was when Amy went with Nick's mother to donate plasma, and after she finished her donation, she called Nick, but he was nowhere to be found. He is not replying to his phone and he is not at the bar. He came back home at 11:04 and tried to slip into bed without waking her. When she asks him where has he been, he starts talking and she knows that he is not telling the truth; the author Flynn describes Amy's feelings at that moment as follows:

He pauses, and I know he is about to lie. The worst feeling: when you just have to wait and prepare yourself for the lie. [...] Nick is old-fashioned, he needs his freedom, he doesn't like to explain himself. He'll know he has plans with the guys for a week, and he'll still wait until an hour before the poker game to tell me nonchalantly, "Hey, so I thought I'd join the guys for poker tonight" (Flynn 159)

She does not want to be the kind of wife to prevent her husband from going out with his friends so she is ok with him going out, but he tells her about his plans at the last moment or never tells her, with no regard to the possibility of her having already made plans.

Nick's mother has cancer and Amy has been looking after her ever since they moved back from New York to Nick's home town. She drives her to chemotherapy appointments. She also helps with his father issue; he is suffering from Alzheimer's. She visits him in the elderly home he is staying at and drops off cookies for the staff so that they would take care of him. Nick detests his father for being an abusive drunk father and he is too spoiled to take care of his own mother:

Nick has written off his father entirely: He won't even say the man's name. I know every time we get a phone call from Comfort Hill, Nick is hoping it's the announcement that his dad is dead. As for Mo, Nick sat with his mom during a single chemo session and pronounced it unbearable. He said he hated hospitals, he hated sick people, he hated the slowly ticking time, the IV bag dripping molasses-slow. He just couldn't do it. And when I tried to talk him back into it, when I tried to stiffen his spine with some gotta do what you gotta do, he told me to do it. So I did. (Flynn 140)

His mother has stated before that she spoiled him a lot and that is why he cannot handle tough situations. Those two men have also stolen from their wives in various aspects of their lives. Jodie has dedicated her life to this marriage. She loves taking care of her husband and she has been doing this for the past 20 years. After Todd moved out of the house, Jodie did not miss his physical absence as much as the routine she had of taking care of him and his needs; the author Harrison describes it as follows:

What bothers her most is the blow to her routine. She misses the hours spent poring over cookbooks, composing a menu, shopping for ingredients, putting a twist on his favorite foods. [...] The daily paper poses another problem. Having quit her practice of carefully refolding it and leaving it for him on the coffee table, she finds that its absence can take her by surprise. At times she stands in his wardrobe, rearranging his jackets. One day she took all the T-shirts out of his drawers, shook them out, refolded them, and put them back again. (Harrison 113)

Todd had stolen 20 years of Jodie's life—her daily routine, and also stole the home they built together—by asking her to leave the home she is living in, which he can do since he owns the apartment. Amy comes from a wealthy family; her parents made quite a lot of money from writing children's stories based on Amy, called *Amazing Amy*. Nick has always been envious of the fact that Amy and her family are rich. Even though she helped him open a bar with her own money, inevitably he is still resentful of being the recipient of her money. One time Amy was trying to comfort him about their financial situation and it went as follows:

“I know it feels dire right now, Nick. But—” “It’s not dire for you, Amy. Not for you, it never will be dire. But for the rest of us? It’s very different.” The same old. Nick resents that I’ve never had to worry about money and I never will. (Flynn 140)

He resents her for having more money than him, even though she never made him feel like she got the upper hand for having more. She told him regarding their financial problems, since he lost his job: “I’m on your side here. We’ll be okay no matter what. My money is your money” (Flynn 72). Nick stole her money with the bar she financed for him and stole five years of her life. She moved to another city for him, gave him her money, and took care of his mother and father; however, he repaid her generosity and sacrifices for him with infidelity, with having an affair with a younger woman.

According to Walker, abused women who suffer for a long period under abuse become suicidal and many of them attempt suicide more than once. Walker wrote in her study: “Many of these women became suicidal. Indeed, more than a third of them reported having attempted suicide” (qtd. in Ewing 25). Amy and Jodie similarly start to lose the will to live. Amy had an elaborate, ingenious scheme to fake her death and frame her husband as the killer. She spent a whole year plotting and planting evidence in order to frame him for her murder, ensuring he faces the death penalty or a life sentence in prison. She is an extremely clever and strong woman to possess the patience and resilience to execute her plan for a whole year. She faked being pregnant to provide a motive for her husband to be framed as her killer and she was planning to commit suicide and for her body to be found in order to guarantee Nick’s doom. Nick raped her, assaulted her physically and stole her money, she wanted him dead, but she wanted to soil his reputation too, as the man who killed his pregnant wife and stole her money. She wanted revenge more than anything and that is why she is willing to kill herself just to make sure he will be executed.

Jodie does not have a good relationship with her family, they only call once every other month, she is unable to have kids and she has her income, but she only works part-time, which is not enough for her to live on. She chose to work part-time after she lost one of her patients to suicide. He was a young fifteen-year-old, and what broke her trust in herself was the fact that she did not see any sign of suicide in this kid; she only diagnosed him with bipolar disorder. He is described in the novel thus:

One day a client of hers a young man of fifteen who'd been diagnosed as bipolar, a good boy who did well in school and seemed perfectly fine Sebastian was his name dark hair, dark eyes, curious, engaged, liked to ask rhetorical questions (Why is there something rather than nothing? How can we know anything for sure?) this client of hers, young Sebastian, was found dead on the pavement underneath the tenth-floor balcony of his apartment, the apartment where he lived with his parents. (Harrison 25)

She found out about his death five days after the fact and it turned out that this child took his own life on the same day of their last session, twelve hours after his session with Jodie he jumped out of the window. What makes her blame herself as his doctor is that she was just as surprised as his family and did not notice anything in their last session.

Even though she is well educated in her field of study, the loss of her young patient to suicide caused her to lose confidence in herself and only take patients with less complicated illnesses. She does not take on patients with eating disorders, depression, schizophrenia, addiction, having suicidal ideation, or a history of suicide attempts, instead, she would refer such cases to other doctors, for whom she has a pre-prepared list. Now her schedule only allows her to see two patients a day. Another important reason for choosing to work part-time is her desire to get more time to be able to take care of her husband Todd. Todd suffered from Depression for several years and it comes and goes. As a psychotherapist, Jodie tried so many times to take him to therapy but he refused so she was burdened with trying to treat him on her own. They have been husband and wife before the world for the past 20 years, but unfortunately, they were not married in the eyes of the law. They were in a common-law marriage which is not recognised by law in many U.S. states, including the one in which they reside: Illinois. Consequently, she would get nothing after they separate, no alimony, nor a share of the apartment.

Following the phone call that she received from Todd's lawyer, she lived in immense fear of being dragged out by the police in front of the whole building. She could not sleep anymore so she resorted to drinking to calm herself down and still she could not fall asleep. She would then start her sessions with patients, half-drunk and with no sleep. Harrison wrote describing her fears as such:

In her solitude she's taken to playing out possible future events in her mind, scenarios that frighten her more the more she dwells on them. She contemplates a raid of the kind she's seen in war movies, with thugs in uniform breaking down the door and dragging her off in the night. She imagines an act of betrayal by one of the people she habitually opens the door to: a client, the doorman, the boy who delivers her groceries. In lucid moments she understands that these worries are irrational. If they're going to come for her, they'll come during the day, and Todd will let them in with his key. But it's at night that she feels most afraid. Between sunset and dawn there is no period of time when she feels safe. (Harrison 165)

She never felt safe especially at night this fear, lack of sleep, and alcohol abuse, are highly likely to lead to a suicide attempt if continued for long. Her friend Alison is the only one who was capable of lifting her out of this paralyzing fear and depression. she helps Jodie out of her depressive state by proposing a solution to help her exterminate the problem once for: by hiring someone to murder Todd.

### **The psychological and sexual abuse of the family**

Those two abused women lived with their husbands for years, even with their abuse, although the abuse was mild at first, starting from the beginning of their relationship. Jodie stayed with Todd for 20 years, and Amy for 5 years. Those two women had normal childhoods with normal loving families, but then there are no such things as a normal childhood or a normal family. Parents are humans and humans are flawed, and they make mistakes in raising their children, however unintentionally, which may lead to some psychological problems in the life of the children as they grow to be adults.

Amy was brought up in a rich and educated family of writers. Her parents co-wrote a series of children's books called *Amazing Amy*. They placed *Amazing Amy* in various moral dilemmas and made her choose the right answer to make her a good example for the children reading their work. *Amazing Amy* got straight As, is smart, beautiful, kind and loved by everyone; as her name implies, she is amazing in everything she does. Yet stories of *Amazing Amy* have put tremendous pressure on Amy to be perfect, it made her associate her parents' love with how similar she can be to *Amazing Amy*, which made her a perfectionist. Amy clearly expresses the pressure she feels from living like *Amazing Amy*.

Amy's mother had five miscarriages and two stillborn children, all seven of them were girls, and they were all named Hope. Her parents were so determined to have a child that they ignored the doctor's warning of the dangers in trying more, but they are perfectionists and as Amy calls them "They are not quitters" (Flynn 218). Amy's dissatisfaction with this pressure she suffered from her parents made her jealous of her seven dead sisters, ever since she was a young girl. Her mother used to sit in a chair in silence on the days when she gave birth or lost those seven babies and Amy used to throw a tantrum and climb on her mother's lap seeking attention, whereupon she would be pulled away by her father. Even as an adult, Amy says she is indeed jealous of the dead babies and that is because they are perfect in her mother's eyes and are loved unconditionally without any pressure on them to be perfect, she says:

I've always been better than the Hopes, I was the one who made it. But I've always been jealous too, always—seven dead dancing princesses. They get to be perfect without even trying, without even facing one moment of existence, while I am stuck here on earth, and every day I must try, and every day is a chance to be less than perfect. It's an exhausting way to live. (Flynn 219)

This pressure to become Amazing Amy had made her desperate to be the best at everything, which led to her not knowing when to stop, not knowing when to admit defeat, and this reason among others kept her from leaving Nick. She cannot admit the failure of her marriage. She explains her lack of empathy towards her parents when watching them on the television screen crying and asking her kidnappers to let her go. She does not feel bad for making her parents suffer from her fake disappearance, saying:

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. (Flynn 257)

She is so severely affected by her parents' constant comparison of her and Amazing Amy that she does not feel bad about causing her parents' pain. This obsession to turn Amy into Amazing Amy might stem from her parents' pent-up desire to have a child, raise it well and their fear to fail again following their failure with seven dead babies. One of the most problematic flaws that Amy has is her lack of a personality; for no fault of her own, Amy was not given the chance to develop a personality. she uses different personas depending on the person she is with, as will be further explained in this chapter. These different

personas are means to get the love and validation from the people around her. This is due to the lack of love and affection she had as a child from her parents, especially her mother.

As for Jodi, she stayed with Todd for 20 years, four times more than Amy. She was brought up in a middle-class family and she had two brothers; a younger one called Ryan and an older one Darrell. Ryan was closer to her and Darrell was older with a bigger age gap between them, he was too old for them to be a rival or a peer; he was more like a mentor than a brother. Jodie had to take care of her younger brother when he had horrible nightmares and woke up screaming, also they used to find self-inflicted wounds on his body. The elder Darrell was the favourite, and so Jodie and Ryan were at the bottom. Being a girl made Jodi's parents pay less attention to her compared to the two boys.

As a kid Ryan used to be a rebel, disobeying his parents, by pulling off pranks; he was never a part of the family. Darrell used to do community service, organise food drives, volunteer at the soup kitchen, and read to the elderly. While Ryan as an adult is distant; he has cut ties with the whole family except for a phone call to Jodi every two or three months. He does not have a stable life; after finishing university, he spent his twenties travelling in India and South Asia, never spending a full year at the same place. He works as an English teacher and a waiter in different places. He is only three years younger than Jodi, which makes him forty-one years old and still unsettled. This makes Jodi worry about his lifestyle. Darrel has followed his father's footsteps by becoming a pharmacist. After university, he remained in his hometown and married his high school sweetheart; he is now the heir of the family's drugstore and the director of a pharmacy at a large teaching hospital in Canada.

As a part of her training to become a psychotherapist Jodi took therapy sessions and in doing so, she unlocked hidden memories from her childhood. She has always felt guilty and responsible towards Ryan; she felt like she could have helped him more and she was correct. Darrel has sexually abused both Jodi and Ryan, but his main and most frequent target was Ryan. She knew what Ryan was going through, but she loved Darrel too much and could not expose him. With time she buried the memories of Ryan's and her own sexual abuse away from her family and herself. She buried her memories so deeply that she could not remember it anymore. We can attribute her desire to take care

of Todd's food, clothes and happiness to a subconscious need to compensate for the care and protection she was not able to give Ryan. This is one of the main reasons Jodi was tolerant of Todd's abusive behaviour.

According to John Haley and Wendy Stein in their book *The Truth about Abuse*, sexual abuse is: "The use of sexual behavior as a way to control the actions or behaviors of a child. [...] Sexual activity includes both physical touching and acts that do not involve contact with the child" (Haley et al 60). Jodi does not clarify what the adolescent Darrel did exactly, probably because her memories are not fully restored yet, but Harrison the author clearly states:

The memory had borne its burial well, had returned to her intact, untarnished, fully dimensional, part of her living history, complete with visceral analogues—tastes, smells, sensations—actual voltage. It was a sightless memory, however, clothed in darkness, which she took to mean that the remembered events had taken place at night. Either that or the girl she had been was resolutely shut-eyed, had decided from the outset to curtail the offensive sensory input. Initially, the explosion within had been all pain and alarm, but later on she learned the trick of surrender, came to understand that capitulation was her means of disengaging, her ticket out. Her only hope now was that she might have been complicit, played a part in making it happen, because if so then maybe she could love him still and nothing would have to change. But she was only six when Darrell was twelve, and she didn't see how it could have been her fault. (Harrison 191)

This is a critical moment in the novel where we can see how Jodi is finally addressing her blocked memories and her guilt towards Ryan. She was only six years old and Darrell was twelve, which makes Ryan three years old. We have no information about the duration of this abuse or the severity of it, we only know that he stopped abusing Jodi but kept abusing Ryan since he was younger and the safest option.

Sexual abuse between children and adolescents is more common than is generally thought. An American study conducted in 1997 and published in the journal *Pediatrics* found that 4.8 per cent of male adolescents revealed having forced someone into a sexual act and 1.3 per cent of female adolescents said the same. Children may make a mistake and inappropriately touch each other; however, not every mistake a child makes is considered sexual abuse. According to Haley for a sexual encounter or incident to be labelled as sexual abuse, several factors have to be examined. These factors include, the age gap between the two parties, and the force used whether emotional or physical force. If one of the children can overpower the other with strength, size or threats it is considered

abuse. Also, whether one of the two children understands what is happening then it is considered abuse (Haley et al 63).

In the case of Jodi and her older brother Darrell, there is no doubt that he abused both her and her younger brother Ryan. Darrell was twelve years old, Jodi six years old and Ryan three years old, so Darrell was definitely bigger in size and could overpower both of them. As for whether he knew what he was doing or not, if what he did to Jodi, which is not specified in the novel, was an accident, then his continuous abuse of Ryan confirms that he must have been aware of what he did with both of them. It does not make sense to regard the abuse he inflicted upon his two siblings as an accident, he was well aware of his actions. Sexual abuse of children by adults or adolescents is not exclusive to rape. As Haley wrote, sexual abuse can be with or without physically touching the child. Some of the nonphysical types of abuse he mentioned include, stripping a child for spanking, taking pornographic pictures of a child, showing pornography to a child, talking to a child in a sexual manner, exposing oneself to a child, verbal abuse or emotional abuse of a sexual nature, touching oneself in front of a child and “Peeping” on a child who is dressing or showering (Haley et al 60).

According to Haley, there are external factors that might affect a child or an adolescent and make them more likely to commit a sexual offence against others. Exposure to domestic violence as a child has a strong relation to adolescents committing such crimes. A child or an adolescent who is exposed to violence in the household, having been through the physical abuse themselves or even just witnessing it, are twice as likely to commit sexual crimes compared to others who have been not exposed to violence or abuse. A 1996 study on adolescents examined 1600 male youths convicted of sexual crimes discovering that 42 per cent of them had been physically abused, 39 per cent had been sexually abused, and 63 per cent had witnessed family violence, but the most interesting part of this study is that for female teens being physically abused or sexually abused before had no effect on the likelihood of them sexually abusing anyone in the future. Male sexually abused children have an increased chance of abusing someone in the future; however, female sexually abused children do not have any increase in the

likelihood of becoming abusers in the future, this interesting point has no known explanation yet (Haley et al 63 - 64).

A person who is sexually abused as a child can suffer tremendously as an adult with several behavioural and psychological problems. The severity of these issues can vary depending on the force of the abuse, its duration, the age of the child, the frequency of the abuse and lastly, whether the abuser is a stranger or a family member. These long-term effects include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, self-mutilation, attempted suicide, poor self-esteem, inappropriate and/or promiscuous behaviour, and several other behavioural problems. In the novel *The Silent Wife*, both Jodi and Ryan have been abused by their older brother Darrell and the novel clearly shows the long-term psychological damage this abuse has on them. Ryan has suffered more from the sexual abuse of Darrell, and has psychological effects that damage his life and even shape it into the form it has now. Sexually abused children suffer from several psychological effects that may remain for the rest of their lives if not treated. Ryan had PTSD, which caused him to have repeated nightmares as a child. According to Pacheco, PTSD in most cases can cause nightmares and night terrors affecting the quality of sleep of the person suffering from them:

Nightmares and Night Terrors: Nightmares and night terrors plague a majority of people with PTSD, leading to nighttime awakenings and making it difficult to get back to sleep. The content of these vivid dreams is sometimes related to past trauma, with many PTSD sufferers reporting repetitive nightmares. (Pacheco and Dimitriu, "PTSD and Sleep")

These nightmares were accompanied by self-inflicted wounds caused by biting himself. This lasted for years with Ryan and then he turned into an ill-mannered teenager, which is another effect of sexual abuse. As Jodi describes him: "obnoxious prankster, contrary know-it-all, paranoid loner" (Harrison 125). The abuse he underwent at the hands of his brother led him to act out as a child causing his relationship with his family to deteriorate until he cut all ties with them and went on his own. This can be seen in his life choices. He does not have a stable job and he never stays in one place; he keeps moving from one country to the other. He seems to isolate himself and refuses to make any bonds with anyone, hence the constant moving between countries and jobs.

As for Jodi, she was affected less than Ryan considering her sexual abuse did not last as long as Rayn's did; nevertheless, she was also deeply scarred by it. Jodi suffered from low self-esteem and denial. After being sexually used by her older brother; she pushed down those memories and denied they ever existed. This is also the same denial she had with her brother Rayn; she tended to him with his night terrors and even though she knew their cause, she subconsciously denied ever knowing the cause and forgot it all. In her situation with Todd, she denied knowing about his affair with Natasha and his intentions to move out even though both Natasha and her father phoned her and confirmed it. She lacks self-esteem, it is clear in the way she holds on to Todd even though he cheated on her and got another woman pregnant. She keeps telling herself he will not leave her and he is just making mistakes one after the other, but she forgives him. This is not the attitude of a person who has self-esteem; these reactions are of a psychologically damaged person.

### **The Role of Society in Oppressing Women**

Society as a whole has been oppressing women for thousands of years, and even in our modern days they are still oppressed all around the world, but in subtle, hidden ways especially the patriarchy in the USA. They are forced to look a certain way, behave in a certain way and dress in a certain way. Some women are pushed into portraying weak submissive, shallow characters in society and especially younger women. Naomi Wolf explains in her book what it means to be a product of a male-dominated society that is pushing women to behave this way. According to Wolf's book *The Beauty Myth*, modern society is objectifying women and reducing them to beautiful creatures, good for nothing if they are not beautiful. Instead of pursuing their own interests and desires in life, all women are fixated on looking young and beautiful for as long as possible. This patriarchal society treats a beautiful woman kinder, they hire them more, they value them more, and they even talk to them in a nicer way, just because they look better. Smart, strong, ambitious, and independent women, even if beautiful, are treated just as badly as the less attractive women if not worse. As a consequence, society's fixation on beautiful women made them prioritize physical appearance limiting the development of their character and reducing their chances of academic and intellectual achievements. This reduces the quality

of a woman's life because now she spends her hours and money on her looks instead of being invested in what she is truly interested in, her ambitions and aspirations. Another serious and intentional act the male-dominated society does is excluding women from serious conversations and from participating in decision-making since they are only seen as beautiful breeding objects (Wolf 59).

Jodie and Amy are both beautiful women who spend lots of time on their appearance, they work out regularly, they dress and act in the stereotypical feminine way, and they do that to please their partners, Todd and Nick. This is the same kind of pressure that Wolf is speaking about, this pressure is not made directly by Todd and Nick, but by all the men in society. Jodie works out, makes sure to stay young, thin and beautiful for her partner Todd, the effort she makes is clear in her daily routine, her workouts, her daily walks with the dog and her cooking. As for Amy, her case is so much more extreme compared to Jodie's. As mentioned previously, Amy had immense pressure from her family to be Amazing Amy from her parents' children's story books and she keeps trying to uphold this persona, but on top that Amy had a second persona she was using to please Nick to make him like her and that is the cool girl. Amy describes what it is like to be a cool girl she says:

Being the Cool Girl means I am a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping, who plays video games, drinks cheap beer, loves threesomes and anal sex, and jams hot dogs and hamburgers into her mouth like she's hosting the world's biggest culinary gang bang while somehow maintaining a size 2, because Cool Girls are above all hot. Hot and understanding. Cool Girls never get angry; they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner and let their men do whatever they want. Go ahead, shit on me, I don't mind, I'm the Cool Girl. (Flynn 220)

In order for a woman to become a cool girl, she must like whatever her partner likes, she must like his jokes, his favourite foods and be open to any sexual activity he desires. She must eat like him while staying thin and beautiful. Most importantly she must give him all the time he needs to spend with his friends and on his hobbies even if he is neglecting his her. Society has forced Amy to behave this way, in order to find love or to find a life partner. She had to change her own identity, which had greatly affected her mental state to the extent that she cannot remember her real personality.

Amy also used other personas to reach her other goals. She wrote *Diary Amy*, which is the scared abused pregnant wife persona to frame Nick with her murder, and she added this diary to the evidence of her murder. She wrote a full diary throughout the year of her plotting just to make up this new persona and make sure her husband would be blamed for her murder. Between all these personas the real Amy was lost.

The above-mentioned is modern society's pressure on women, but some societies abuse women in a far worse manner than that. According to Simone de Beauvoir, some societies punish women for dishonouring them via dressing a different way or behaving in a certain way or the most "dishonouring crime" of a woman losing her virginity. These societies allow the father, brother or husband to kill his wife, sister, or daughter as punishment for her crimes. Some even more extreme societies would act out the punishment of the woman even if her family did not want to punish her, because they believe that the crime committed is an insult and dishonor on all the men of the society, not just her family or husband (De Beauvoir 237). De Beauvoir covers some of these punishments:

If the husband cannot keep his wife virtuous, he shares her fault; his misfortune is, in society's eyes, a dishonor, and there are civilizations so strict that it is necessary to kill the criminal to dissociate him from her crime. In others, the complaisant husband will be punished by noisy demonstrations or led around naked on a donkey. And the community will take it upon itself to punish the guilty woman in his place: because she offended the group as a whole and not only her husband. (De Beauvoir 237).

They see it as an insult to all of them because it is a direct threat to their authority, it is more of a fear of these women and what they are capable of than a dishonour or an insult.

It is naïve to expect that a society that uses, abuses and objectifies women would be of any help to abused women. Friends, neighbors and even police officers often respond to a domestic violence situation as a family matter that should be contained within the family, this response is often made by men, but sometimes even women would regard it as a family issue that should be resolved within the family.

Jodie and Amy have both suffered in their lives long before meeting their abusers. Even if they had a good childhood or not, children are greatly susceptible to psychological damage, since their minds are still fragile. Being exposed to violence, stress, bullying,

pressure from parents, or abuse, numerous external factors can inflict serious damage to a child's psyche.

Amy's main issues were a product of her upbringing, being raised in a family of perfectionists made her suffer from the pressure to become the perfect child and it was not even a subtle pressure. Having a fictional character written by one's parents in one's name to dictate how to behave and live one's life, can be seen as extreme parenting. Amy had to take the role of Amazing Amy throughout most of her life preventing her from developing her own personality. Her parents' love is dependent on how close she can be to Amazing Amy. She also had to live with an emotionally unavailable mother; her mother had five miscarriages and two stillborn children, which is a horrible experience for any mother to go through. Having to mourn for seven dead babies had a huge effect on her mother, she could not get over it even after she had Amy. She would annually sit in her chair motionless mourning her dead children on seven different dates of the seven dead babies. Throughout these seven days, she would not talk to Amy, touch Amy, or even look at her. This treatment from her parents has created Amy; a perfectionist, with no personality of her own and in constant need of love and validation from the people around her. For the previously mentioned reasons, Amy had to create different personas for different people around her. She is Amazing Amy for her parents' love, cool Amy for Nick's love, Diary Amy to frame her husband of her fake murder, and weak abused Amy to use her ex-boyfriend Desi Collings while hiding. This perfectionism is what enabled her to plot for a full year her fake murder and fake pregnancy to frame her husband for her own murder.

Jodie was also neglected by her parents for being the middle child and mostly for being female, but this did not have any apparent negative effect on her. What affected her was her guilt towards her younger brother Ryan. She has always felt an ambiguous guilt towards him, she feels as if she could have done more to help him, did not, she always feels that something is missing. With the help of her therapist, she unlocked hidden memories of her and her younger brother's sexual abuse by Darrell their older brother. The guilt she had was due to the inability to stop the abuse or report it to her parents, keeping in mind that she was only 6 years old at the time. Consequently, she compensated

for that by caring for her husband as one would take care of a child. She also endured his bad treatment because she felt that she deserved it, as punishment for not helping Ryan.

Both Amy and Jodie along with all women have suffered under a male-dominated society; a society in which a woman's value is only measured by her beauty, age, weight and certain accepted behaviours. Women must be modest, quiet, feminine, polite, remain virgins, and be open to anything in bed. She must like all her partner's interests, laugh at his jokes, and eat junk food with him while simultaneously keeping her slim figure. As a perfectionist, Amy acted precisely as described in the sentence above, as unrealistic and unobtainable as it is, she managed to do this with her cool girl persona. Jodie on the other hand had maintained only some of these characteristics which spared her a lot of psychological damage.

Both Amy and Jodi have endured a lot of abuse from their husbands, they have been, neglected, lied to, manipulated, stolen from by their husbands, raped and humiliated, which add to their already existing psychological damage and pushed them to lose the will to live. To conclude, Amy and Jodie have endured society's oppression, their families' emotional abuse and in Jodie's case sexual abuse, which made them an easier target for their husbands and made them tolerate their husbands abuse longer than they should have. The emotional and physical abuse of their husbands pushed them to consider ending their lives, but they decided to stop being the victims and become the aggressors to take revenge on their husbands and reclaim their own lives back.

## **Chapter Three: Choosing to Kill: Abused Women's Responses to Violence**

### **Manipulative Tactics Used by the Abusers in the Chosen Works**

Amy and Jodie are two smart and highly educated women, despite having been deceived and manipulated by their husbands. To build a healthy relationship one needs trust, but this trust has no real ground to stand on; it is just based on one's own opinion and judgement of character, and with that trust comes the risk of being tricked. It has nothing to do with a person's intelligence; it only has to do with whether one's trust has been put in the right person or not.

Amy has been the subject of abuse of another male abuser other than her husband Nick, and this is her ex-boyfriend Desi, Amy has sought help from Desi whilst hiding to frame Nick for killing her. Desi took advantage of that and kept her as a prisoner in his lake house. Seeking to make her his future wife, he gaslighted her, manipulated her, took advantage of her situation and tried to change her, and so she killed him and framed him with kidnapping her.

All three men Nick, Todd and Desi are gaslighters and that resulted in them living in a state of fear of abandonment. A gaslighter is in a constant fear of abandonment, they are self-centred and in need of constant attention, if they do not find this attention with their partner, they will always look for it elsewhere, which is one of the reasons that made Todd and Nick cheat on Jodie and Amy. Their partners will never be able to provide this attention because the gaslighter's need for attention will never be fulfilled, and no matter how much Jodie, Amy and Natasha try to fill this void Nick and Todd cheated on all of them. Desi's fears abandonment can only be seen by him slightly stalking Amy after she broke up with him in college. Gaslighters have no official definition but they have certain characteristics, and according to Doctor Sarkis, one does not need to have all of them to be a gaslighter; just a few will be enough to identify one:

Their apologies are always conditional, they use Triangulation and Splitting, they use blatant attempts to curry favors, they expect special treatment, they mistreat people who have less power, they use your weaknesses against you, they compare you to others, they are obsessed with their accomplishments, they prefer to associate with people who fawn over them, they put you in a double bind, they are obsessed with their image, they are obsessed with your image, they con

people, they cause fear in others, they have a bad temper, punishment doesn't affect them, they practice "Cognitive Empathy", they refuse personal responsibility, they wear you down over time, they habitually lie, they are terrible teasers, their compliments aren't Real, they project their emotions, they use "Flying Monkeys", they tell others that you are crazy, they don't keep promises, loyalty is required—but not reciprocal, they kick people when they are down, they avoid admitting problems they've caused, they bait and switch. (Sarkis 13- 20)

Nick, Todd and Desi have some of these characteristics as will be explained in detail in the following pages.

Nick has used Triangulation so many times; Triangulation is the use of a third party to further strengthen your side in the argument or the conflict. Nick has Amy surrounded by his sister and his mother, which makes Amy outnumbered in all conversations or arguments. He does not ask for their help directly but they defend him all the time and take his side. Todd did not need to use Triangulation with Jodie because she is already taking care of all his needs and rarely argues or disagrees with him. Desi did not use Triangulation because in his situation he was the only one present with her in the lake house.

Both Nick, Todd and Desi expect to be treated in a special manner because they think highly of themselves. Nick, and Todd believe they are good husbands who deserve to be treated differently. Every day Todd spends time out after work with his friends leaving Jodie all alone at home and Nick also spends too much time outside his home leaving Amy alone and neglected. Nick tends to tell Amy about his nights out with his friends at the last minute so she cannot ask him to change his plans or spend some time with her; also, he has a strong excuse to spend time outside since he runs a bar with his sister. Both men think they are entitled to significant free time, even if it is at the expense of neglecting their wives. Desi thinks of himself to be as Amy puts it a "white knight", she says describing his savior complex:

Desi is a white-knight type. He loves troubled women. Over the years, after Wickshire, when we'd talk, I'd ask after his latest girlfriend, and no matter the girl, he would always say: "Oh, she's not doing very well, unfortunately." But I know it is fortunate for Desi —the eating disorders, the painkiller addictions, the crippling depressions. He is never happier than when he's at a bedside. Not in bed, just perched nearby with broth and juice and a gently starched voice. Poor darling. (Flynn 317)

Desi likes to play the role of the hero—the savior—which is why Amy knew he was the right person to ask for help. Desi has a savior complex which is according to the

psychotherapist Sarah A. Benton: “A psychological construct which makes a person feel the need to save other people. This person has a strong tendency to seek people who desperately need help and to assist them, often sacrificing their own needs for these people” (Benton). Having a savior complex will only hurt the person who has it, and will be of no benefit to anyone.

Nick and Desi have both successfully maintained the nice guy image in front of people, they are both polite and respectable, they never show their negative characteristics to others. Todd, on the other hand, treats people badly when things do not go as he pleases. Todd once lost his keys to the front door of the company which made him an hour and a half late to his daily work day. The janitor who has a copy of the keys was only 12 minutes late to the start of his work day. Todd having waited an hour and a half because he likes to come early to work lashed out at the janitor and took all his frustration out on him, to the extent that the janitor quit his job on the spot and left without opening the door:

Starting time for the janitor is supposedly eight o'clock. At five to eight Todd is back at the building with a takeout coffee, but it's another twelve minutes before the janitor shows up. The twelve-minute wait finishes off what was left of his patience, and the entire responsibility for his wasted hour and a half comes down on the janitor's head. A quiet, mostly reliable man who's held his position for some years, the janitor quits on the spot and leaves without producing any keys. (Harrison 56)

Most domestic abusers hide their abusive sides and act like model citizens in public but some like Todd do not care enough to hide it and they just find excuses for their behaviour like the janitor being 12 minutes late.

Both Nick and Todd lie, compare their wives with their mistresses, and are obsessed with their own image, which can be seen in their attention to clothes and their attention on staying fit. Both ask for loyalty when they are cheating on their partners, they are both habitual liars and have a temper. These men use compliments to convince their wives to do what they want and it is mostly used to get sex. They refuse personal responsibility, which can be seen in Nick's refusal to take care of his sick mother and Todd's refusal to tell Jodie about Natasha's pregnancy and that he will move out. As for Desi, he is far more obsessed with his own image, he picks out his suit's colors according to the season. He is also obsessed with Amy's image. He gave her a dye to

change her hair colour to its original before she disappeared, since she had it changed previously as a disguise. He also changed her diet plan to make her lose weight because she gained weight in her hiding period, he is the only one who can leave the house, as a result he was in control of the food.

Finally, both Nick and Todd use Flying Monkeys. A Flying Monkey is described by the psychotherapist Doctor Claire Jack to be the person who carries out the dirty work of a narcissist and they were named after the Flying Monkeys that served the wicked witch in the novel, *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum. Doctor Claire Jack further explains the characteristics of a Flying monkey saying:

The flying monkey may use gaslighting tactics, open aggression, and guilt-tripping in order to make another person feel bad and weak, whilst shoring up the narcissist. And they're often involved in pleading the case of the narcissist. Narcissists love having at least one flying monkey, as it makes them feel important and means they can appear to be above the people below them (on both sides) who are caught up in the messy parts of the drama. (Jack)

The Flying monkey is a person used by the gaslighter, who may also use some of the gaslighter's tricks to help the gaslighter in his dirty work. Nick and Todd both used Flying monkeys to help them. Nick had his sister and mother to defend him whenever he argued with Amy, he would go to his mother so she would put on a good word for him with Amy and he would go to his sister so she would emotionally support him and take his side. He is not strong enough to face Amy on his own. Todd had his lawyer do all this dirty work to get Jodie out of the house and tried to make his female secretary a Flying monkey but she refused to stoop this low; on the other hand, his mistress Natasha took this part voluntarily, she acted like a Flying monkey in trying to push Jodie out of her house and in telling her about their affair without the need for Todd to recruit her. We can conclude that both Todd and Nick are gaslighters, as they have so many of the characteristics of the gaslighter's personality, and according to Sarkis: "When enough of these qualities are present and persistent in a person, chances are you are dealing with a gaslighter" (Sarkis 10), which means that one does not need to have all the characteristics mentioned above to be a gaslighter.

A gaslighter, along with gaslighting, uses other manipulative tactics, such as Love-Bombing, Hoovering, and Stonewalling. Love-bombing is to shower a person with

love and affection until they fall in love with them or become emotionally dependent on them, Sarkis says that with the use of Love-Bombing:

Gaslighters erode your perception of reality until you feel you cannot function normally without them. Love-bombing is a way that gaslighters get you hooked. [...] When a gaslighter love-bombs you, it is hard to get away. The attention you receive is intoxicating. It's like nothing you have experienced before. Finally, you think, someone is treating you the way you want to be treated. That pedestal he puts you on feels damn good. But eventually you will always fall off it, and it is a long way down. (Sarkis 13- 20)

Todd has used Love-bombing with Jodie to make her fall for him and as Sarkis says in her description of this act, Todd did exactly that by reducing the attention and love he gives Jodie to keep Jodie in a state of shock and confusion thinking that she might have done something wrong to upset him, which leads her to try everything in her power to get that love and attention back. His fake act of Love-bombing can be seen from the first time they met, they met in a car accident, and even though he treated her badly and yet he still called her for a date two days later. The accident took place on a rainy day which takes a huge part of the blame on both drivers since driving in the rain is much harder:

You crazy bitch. What in God's name do you think you're doing? Are you some kind of maniac? Where did you learn to drive? People like you should stay off the road. Are you going to get out of your car or are you just going to sit there like an imbecile?" His tirade that day in the rain did not give a favorable impression, but a man who's been in a car crash is going to be irate even if it's his own fault, which in this instance it was not, so when he called a few days later to ask her to dinner, she graciously accepted. (Harrison 16-17)

Is it possible for this rage turn into a date unless he was doing his usual act of love-bombing that he does when approaching women he likes. His whole demeanour changed and he is now charming, kind and flirtatious, one example of his 180-degrees change he went through is seen here in the way he touches Jodie on the stairs: "Guiding her up the crumbling walk he lightly held her elbow. "Careful now. Watch your step" (Harrison 17) he adopted this character of a nice, caring, kind man to get her to feel safe with him, so he can make her fall for him or do what pleases him.

Some might argue that Todd became emotionally distant from Jodie after 20 years because he no longer had feelings for her. However, if that were the case, this does not explain why he lose his interest in Natasha for whom he left Jodie. After a couple of months of living with the pregnant Natasha, he finds his next victim a waitress named

Ilona, ever since he saw her, he started going to her bar every day. He was planning to Love-bomb her by taking her to a fancy restaurant and impresses her with how much money he has got, but seeing her lack of attention to him, he manipulated her with a sad story from his childhood. He told her about how his dad abused his mother and how he vowed to never be like him and he also told her how he took care of his mother until the day she died. He said all that to get some sympathy to appear vulnerable and to show how much he is dying to get her attention:

He hates himself for this speech. It's nothing but a craven bid for sympathy, a shameless ploy. This is not the first time he's told a woman this story or some version of it. Not that it isn't fundamentally true; there's emotional truth in it anyway. [...] And even before he's done she's moved a half step closer and a light has come into her eyes. It's hard to tell if it's her sympathy that's been aroused or her contempt. [...] "I don't know why I'm telling you this," he says [...] "I'm desperately trying to get your attention," he tells her. "But I'm sorry. I'm sure you hear sob stories all day long, and you deserve so much better—a man who can forget about himself and focus on you. Pamper you. Bring you flowers and gifts. Massage your feet when you get off work." (Harrison 195)

He showed her that he trusts her and that he is a sensitive man, a good son, and then he flirted with her. All this sudden attention and amount of trust he gave her would make any woman get drawn to this man, if not charmed by him then interested in his story or maybe out of sympathy for his hard childhood. This passage shows that he is using Love-bombing with Ilona and has used it before with all his previous victims.

Desi with his savior complex does not do Love-bombing on purpose, but due to his complex he takes care of Amy and all her needs; he gives all the attention he can and more which will lead to burnout, and then he will stop all that good treatment and neglect her. Then, once he is recharged, he will go back to Love-bombing. This was not in the novel because she did not spend enough time in his house for the burnout phase to start, but it is an inevitable result for a person with a savior complex.

Another tactic a gaslighter would use is Hoovering. According to Sarkis Hoovering is the way a gaslighter would suck his victim back again to his grasp just like a vacuum cleaner would. When a gaslighter feels that they are losing their control over their victim, they would increase their interest and care to lure them back, but they would give them just enough to get them back in; then they will go back to neglecting them. To quote Sarkis: "With Hoovering, gaslighters give you just enough to

string you along” (Sarkis 28), Todd has constantly used Hoovering with Jodie because he is well aware that he has a beautiful desirable wife who could easily find another man. He gives her a small amount of attention to let her know he is thinking about out her, but not too much attention, so he would be able to enjoy his time with his friends. Sarkis writes about that:

He calls Jodi to say that he won't be home for dinner. It's a courtesy call; she's aware that he's seeing Dean tonight. But he likes to let her know that he's thinking about her. He's a lucky man and doesn't lose sight of the fact. She's still a knockout with her slender figure and dark hair, and in spite of being a homebody herself, she understands that he can't be spending his evenings sitting around the condo. Some of his friends have to be home for dinner every night. Some can't even go for a beer after work. Luckily, his buddies are vast in number—including virtually everyone he's ever worked with—and many of them are single or divorced, so he can nearly always find a drinking partner. Not that he minds an evening on his own, when it comes to that. (Harrison 36)

Almost every day Todd takes this private time after work leaving Jodie all alone in the house, which can be considered neglect. One might argue that he is just meeting an old friend from college, but the fact that he would go to the bar almost every day without any concern for Jodie. He would go drinking after work whether he has someone to drink with or not, and even if he fails to find someone, he would gladly spend the night alone rather than going back and spending it with Jodie.

Another example of Todd's use of hoovering is the use of sex. Sex with Hoovering is much better than the normal sex that the gaslighter has with his victims; the gaslighter does that in order to make them not only emotionally dependent on them but also sexually dependent as well. The gaslighter would make sure that the sexual encounter is extra enjoyable for the victim, Sarkis explains it:

Hoovering also involves gaslighters' wanting physical contact. Don't be surprised if the sex is better than ever. It appears your gaslighter is actually connecting with you emotionally. Giving you the physical contact, you have craved is another way the gaslighter strings you along and gets you hooked again. (Sarkis 29)

After Todd moved in with Natasha, he did not terminate his contact with Jodie as Natasha requested. He visited her once for dinner and after dinner, he told her that he loves her and they ended up having sex. The fact that they had been apart for a while and that he told her that he still loves her made Jodie under the impression that they have made up

and might go back together, which makes this love making more enjoyable for her, as Sarkis explains it above, this is clearly Hoovering (Harrison 136).

Todd has also used Stonewalling with Jodie which is another tactic the gaslighter uses with his victims. Stonewalling is a way for the gaslighter to avoid conflict or blame when they have done something wrong or just do not want to discuss a certain topic or issue. In Stonewalling the gaslighter would avoid being seen, or talking with his victim. If they are not living together, they would not call or text them for a while (Sarkis 29). When Todd found out Natasha was pregnant, he decided then to leave Jodie and move in with Natasha; even though he promised Natasha he would tell Jodie about their affair and the pregnancy, he did not. After Dean his best friend and Natasha's father called Jodie and told her about it, he still acted normal and never said a word to Jodie. Meanwhile, Natasha lost her patience and calls Jodie to tell her everything, she even tells her about him moving out, and still after Nick learns of this call, he acts like nothing is happening and does not confront Jodie. On his last day, he takes her for a walk and sobs while holding her, and that is his version of confrontation. He says nothing and wants to end it like this, until she pulls the words out of his mouth forcible and it goes as follows:

“What is it?” she asks. “What did you want to tell me?” [...] “I thought you knew,” he says. “I thought you talked to Dean.” Her expression doesn't change. The look she's giving him is narrow and flinty. He feels as if he's shrinking, withering from within. “Don't,” he says. “Don't make it hard for me. It's not like I planned this. It's just the roll of the dice. We don't decide everything that happens to us. You know that.” [...] “Listen. I'm sorry. I won't be coming home tonight.” “What do you mean you won't be coming home? Where will you be?” “I'm moving out,” he says. “You really didn't know?” “You're moving out? Where are you going?” [...] “What were you thinking, Todd? Just tell me that. What was going through your mind? Why would you wait until the second you're walking out the door to share the news with me?” “I told you. I didn't know what I wanted. It's complicated. The situation is complicated.” “You signed a lease on an apartment over a week ago. You signed a lease! How complicated is that?” “So you did know. You knew all along.” “I didn't believe it. I didn't think you would go through with it.” (Harrison 110-111)

He was relying on Dean and Natashas' call and he wanted to leave without saying anything on the matter. This cowardly behaviour of avoiding conflict is exactly what Stonewalling is.

To conclude Nick, Todd and Desi exhibited characteristics of a gaslighter, such as Triangulation, the use of Flying monkeys, expecting special treatment, thinking highly of themselves, obsessing over their image and their partners' image, comparing their partners

with other women, treating weaker people badly. Both Nick and Todd ask for loyalty when they are cheating on their partners, they are both habitual liars and they both have a temper, as will be discussed in details in the following chapter. All three—Nick, Todd and Desi—use compliments to convince their partners to do what they want. Finally, they refuse personal responsibility. Todd indeed has more of these characteristics than Nick and Desi do, but this does not mean that Nick and Desi are not gaslighters because according to Sarkis one does not need to have all the traits and characteristics of a gaslighter to be one, and they possess many of them. As for Todd, he has all of those traits. He also uses other manipulative tactics, which are Love-Bombing, Hoovering, and Stonewalling, so he is undoubtedly a gaslighter.

### **Physical abuse and rape within marriage**

Amy and Jodie were both abused by their husbands but in different ways. Amy was physically assaulted by her husband Nick. Nick has been extremely depressed after his mother's death, and as Amy says, he has been looking at her with so much disgust with no apparent reason, except his shame of not being financially stable and failing to be a good provider for his wife. Amy grows impatient with his nasty looks at her and she suggests she gets an extra part-time job on top of her part-time job at the paper, so that they can finally start a family and have a child of their own. That is when he shoves her, she falls back and bangs her head, and loses her sight for three seconds; when she opened her eyes, he was standing over her furious with a clenched fist barely restraining himself from punching her:

He shoved me, and I fell and banged my head against the kitchen island and I couldn't see for three seconds. I don't really know what to say about it. It was more shocking than painful. I was telling him I could get a job, something freelance, so we could start a family, have a real life ... "What do you call this?" he said. Purgatory [...] What do you call this, Amy? Huh? [...] This isn't life, according to Miss Amazing?" "It's not my idea of life," I said, and he took three big steps toward me, and I thought: He looks like he's going to ... And then he was slamming against me and I was falling. [...] He held his fist in the other hand and looked like he might cry. He was beyond sorry, he was aghast. [...] What scared me was the look on his face as I lay on the floor blinking, my head ringing. It was the look on his face as he restrained himself from taking another jab. (Flynn 195 - 196)

He felt a mixture of guilt and disgust towards Amy afterwards. The evidence suggest that the cause of that feeling is what most abusers feel, which is scapegoating; they blame the

victim for their aggressive behavior, claiming that the victim provoked them. That might be the cause of the disgust he feels. Another possibility is he hates that their income was all coming from Amy. Their income comes from the bar she paid for and her job at the paper, and still it was not enough to start a family. He hates that he needs his wife financially, sexually and emotionally and that is what makes him react in this way. Angela Browne speaks about these feelings that abusive men have in her book *When battered women kill* and she says:

[They, the abusing husbands] put the blame on others—e.g., their woman partner—for “making” them feel uncomfortable, or simply for making them feel too much. Women in the homicide group reported the irony of being attacked because the man cared. Just the perception that another person mattered so, seemed so vital to his daily existence and happiness, became something to defend against: The man’s need for the woman seemed to him a power in her hands, and he would lash out to balance the equation. (Browne 91)

According to Browne, abusive men find excuses for their behaviours by saying that they do it because they care and that it comes from a place of love. They hate that the woman has an emotional hold on them making them in need of her. This feeling according to them is a weakness, and to make things even or to convince themselves that they have the upper hand in this relationship, they resort to violence.

The assault committed by Nick on Amy is a result of his frustration of not being the provider, as well as a way of showing that he has the upper hand in this relationship and that he is the man of the house. Whether he knew what he was doing or he was acting in a fit of anger, does not change the fact that he did it to show his dominance. This is the beginning of every battered relationship. At first it starts with a shove, and with each incident, the severity of the battering would increase and the feeling of remorse the husband would have after the incident would gradually decrease after each incident (Ewing 18). If Amy had not started her revenge fake death plan, sooner or later Nick would have repeated his assault and this time it would have been more intense. As for Jodie she was never physically assaulted by her husband Todd.

Another form of physical assault that both Amy and Jodie suffered from is Marital rape. In a random sample of 930 women in San Francisco, Diana Russell asked them questions to determine which of them had been sexually abused by a member of their

families, strangers or their husbands. She found out that 1 out of 7 women who had been married before were raped by their husbands or ex-husband and the number of women who reported having been raped by their husbands was higher than the ones raped by a stranger. Diana Russell is a leading feminist activist, who shed light on the term Femicide, the killing of women by misogynists, distinguishing it from other forms of homicide. Another study made by Finkelhor and Yllo had similar results with a sample of 326 women from Boston, more than double the number of women reported having been raped by their husbands as opposed to by a stranger (Browne 110).

Conducting a study on rape within marriage is not an easy task; this topic is highly uncovered and that is due to the sense of shame and degradation that the victims feel. The victims refuse to define the assault they went through as being rape. Mildred Pagelow reported in her 1980 study that women who had undergone rape in marriage would not call it rape even when it is obvious and extremely violent; for example, many of them said that they agreed to have sexual relations with their husbands in fear of battering or agreeing to certain sexual demands to prevent being battered and still did not consider it as rape. Those women were more willing to talk about any other type of abuse to avoid talking about their partners' sexual assaults (Browne 110 - 111).

Sexual abuse is the safest form of abuse that an abusive husband can do, since the psychological effect on the victim is more traumatic than other forms of abuse, also the shame and humiliation is much greater, which would prevent the victim from reporting it. Even if the woman would report this crime, there are almost no sanctions on marital rape in most of the countries of the world. By 1982 in the USA 13 states have exempted marital rape from prosecution and they also included cohabiting couples in this exemption, which give a free ticket for the abusers to do as they please.

Todd and Nick are more subtle with their rape, they are not as violent or obvious as other abusive men mentioned earlier. Todd has tricked Jodie to have sex with him and Nick has forced Amy multiple times to have sex with him but with no threats, verbal, or physical abuse only with the use of his physical force and without any form of consent from Amy. One would argue that tricking people to have sex is not rape because

they got the consent beforehand, but legally and morally it is rape. In the judicial system, and in the eyes of the public, not every type of sex with deceit counts as a crime. According to a study conducted by Doctor David Bryden et al. the subjects were given eight hypothetical cases of sex with deception and they were asked to decide which of them should be treated as a criminal act, however, they did not ask them to decide which is considered rape. The majority of the participants chose five cases to be criminalized, (1) intercourse as a part of a gynecological examination, (2) impersonating the victim's husband, (3) lying about venereal disease, or (4) failing to reveal a venereal disease, (5) involved cases of coercion, exploitation in addition to deception. All the other cases including infidelity, faking wealth, marital status, intention to marry, not paying prostitutes, and the misuse of birth control by women, were not considered criminal acts by them. The majority of the people's votes were aligned with most of the modern judicial laws (Green 139).

Green in his book *Criminalizing Sex: A Unified Liberal Theory*, argues that the reason for not considering every act of deceit aimed at intercourse as rape—as the participants in the study did, by overlooking all the acts of deceit and selecting only five—is a fear of overcriminalization. He explains it with the example of Albert and Betty. If Albert had sex with Betty knowing that she thinks he is a rich man, which he is not, then the consent she would give him would be invalid because it was based on him being rich and that would potentially make Albrt liable for rape. However; if him being rich was only Betty's misapprehension and not Albert's lie then Albert will be convicted of rape for her misunderstanding and only for failing to correct her miscomprehension (Green 137).

While some may disagree that the promise of love, marriage, or concealing one's marital status aimed to gain intercourse is not rape. One can argue that such promise or deceit can cloud one's judgment and result in false consent because the consent was built on a lie, then it is not valid and it should be considered as rape, morally speaking and in the eyes of the law. We can see that clearly in Jodie and Todd's case. Todd has convinced Jodie to have sex with him on the false pretence that they will be getting back together or at least that they are moving towards it. He did that by acting

jealous and verbally affirming his love for her. This took place on a dinner visit at Todd's and Jodie's home. From the moment Todd set foot inside the house he had sex on his mind: "As he chews and swallows, and as she moves around the kitchen in her prim white shirt buttoned to the clavicle, he tries to remember what she looks like naked (Harrison 132). They start eating and act as if nothing has ever changed. He then precedes with an absurd act of jealousy because some women like their men to be jealous and protective of them, and apparently Jodie is one of them. First, he asks if she has been involved with any men after he moved in with Natasha. Subsequently after failing to find a man in her life to act jealous and protective over her from him; he accuses her of having relations with their 15-year-old Neighbor, knowing that Jodie would never do such a thing:

"You've been friendly with the Carson kid from down the hall," he says. "Joel Carson? He's only fifteen." "I've seen the way he looks at you." "He's a nice boy. Very sweet and innocent." "Teenage boys are not innocent." "Well, maybe not. But I'm old enough to be his mother." "You may be old enough to be his mother, but you're not his mother. And I bet he can tell the difference." "Todd, you're being ridiculous." (Harrison 134)

He is trying her to show her that he still cares for her and then does say it: "I've missed you," he says. "I've missed coming home and I've missed getting into bed with you and I've missed waking up beside you—and all I can say is that I must have been out of my mind to think I could give you up" (Harrison 136). He verbally admits that he regrets leaving her. After dinner is over while she is washing the dishes: "he approaches her from behind, slides his arms around her waist, and rests his chin on the top of her head. "I love you," he says." (Harrison 136). They have sex afterwards and Jodie is fully convinced that they will be getting back together now or that they may date for a while before he moves back in with her:

She didn't like it when, afterward, he got up and left, but she could take it in stride knowing that nothing worthwhile happens overnight, that things coalesce in their own way and in their own time. It could be that they'll date for a while before he moves back home, that's what she's been thinking, and she can resign herself to that. But she doesn't understand why he hasn't called. (Harrison 138)

She then receives a call from Todd's lawyer's office Harry asking for her lawyer's information so they can proceed with the separation, so she can leave her house. Todd did not ask her to move out or even discuss the possibility of it before. As evidence suggests Jodie gave her consent to sex under the impression that they would be

getting back together, but it was not the case. Todd expressed his regret for leaving her and confirmed his love for her which led her to believe they were getting back together, and that is why she gave her consent; with the absence of the cause of the consent, her consent is not given and it is rape.

As for Amy, she was raped under the name of conjugal rights. Nick has been stressed and dissatisfied with life because of not having the job he wanted as a writer like he used to, before he was laid off from work, and his mother passing away. Nick used her for sex several times in the months prior to his mother's passing. He forces himself on her without saying a word and she does not fight back because he is her husband, she does not want to cause a fight with him when she knows he is grieving over his mother Amy talks about it and says:

He uses me for sex when he needs to. He presses me against a table or over the back of the bed and fucks me, silent until the last few moments, those few quick grunts, and then he releases me, he puts a palm on the small of my back, his one gesture of intimacy, and he says something that is supposed to make it seem like a game: "You're so sexy, sometimes I can't control myself." But he says it in a dead voice. (Flynn 187)

There was no consent in the action he did, other than the idea that she is his wife so he can do whenever he pleases. Other than the excuse of his grief, Nick has a fragile masculinity in that he associates his worth with his money and how much power he has in his household. This act is nothing but an act of dominance to show that he is the man of the house and that he has the upper hand in this marriage. He does not have the upper hand financially because he lost his job a year previously and co-owning and managing the bar does not give him any power since his share of the bar was bought with his wife's money. This power struggle is an old patriarchal idea that should not exist in a healthy marriage and it is not an excuse for rape. These rape incidents started to get more aggressive with time Amy talks here about another more violent incident:

Nick comes home and finds me in the bedroom, fresh from a shower, and pretty soon he is pushing me against the wall, pushing himself inside me. When he is done and releases me, I can see the wet kiss of my mouth against the blue paint. As he sits on the edge of the bed, panting, he says, "Sorry about that. I just needed you." Not looking at me. I go to him and put my arms around him, pretending what we'd just done was normal, a pleasant marital ritual, (Flynn 187)

This lack of care for her is another reason to confirm his as rape. He did not just force sex on her he also shoved her face to the wall. Abused women tend to give the abuser excuses and endure the abuse thinking it is just a phase, but it only gets worse with time. Amy did not fight him back and she did not complain after he was done, and she had her own reasons for that. She wants to be an understanding wife of his grief, or maybe she does not want to cause a fight that will make their relationship even worse. Regardless of the reason, forcing her to have sex without verbal consent is rape. Another reason that Amy did not fight back is that she was in a state of Traumatic psychological infantilism; she did not realize her face was pressed against the wall until she saw her lip print. The “Traumatic psychological infantilism” is a defence mechanism used by the domestic abuse woman, which puts her in a primal childhood survival state where all she can do is be obedient, submissive and paralyzed with fear.

### **The Emotional Rape Syndrome**

The two abused victims Amy and Jodie are not only physically raped, but also emotionally raped. Doctor Michael Povich in his book *The Emotional Rape Syndrome: How to Survive and Avoid It*, explains in detail the difference between emotional rape and physical rape. He says that there is not an official definition to it but the distinction is clear he says: “Sexual rape is the sexual use of somebody’s body without that person’s consent: Emotional rape is the use of somebody’s higher emotions without that person’s consent” (Povich 11). Povich’s research suggests that many of the symptoms of post-traumatic rape syndrome appear with the victims of the emotional rape (Povich 10). According to Povich, emotional rape victims exhibit several emotional and physical symptoms. They feel dirty, they also have denial, isolation, the feeling of being used, the inability to trust or love, have anxiety and fear, confusion, hidden or delayed emotional reactions, loneliness, rage and obsession, and loss of self-esteem (Povich 19).

As for the physical symptoms that an emotionally rape victim has, they are: weight loss or gain, insomnia, irritability, headaches, impotence, and high blood pressure. Also, addictive behaviour involving to alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. Material effects on emotional rape victims are financial losses, time loss, and loss of friends (Povich 31 – 33).

Both Jodie and Amy have some of those physical and emotional symptoms as will be explained below.

Jodie exhibits denial all through the novel, she is told by Dean her husband's best friend and by Natasha Todd's new partner about their affair, yet she stays with Todd and acts like nothing is happening and is shocked when Todd tells her he will not be coming home that night even though she knows he already signed the lease for Natasha's new home:

"Listen. I'm sorry. I won't be coming home tonight." "What do you mean you won't be coming home? Where will you be?" "I'm moving out," he says. "You really didn't know?" "You're moving out? Where are you going?" (Harrison 111)

She acts surprised even though she knows everything. She did not think he would go through with it: "I didn't believe it. I didn't think you would go through with it" (Harrison 111). This is a denial of her current situation; he already signed the lease and she knows about it and refuses to believe it. She also shows signs of this denial when she invites Todd for dinner to try to persuade him to come back to her after having lived with Natasha for almost a month. Jodie even justifies his actions, and attributes it to her being infertile and cannot give him the child he wants. She imagines a scenario where he will leave Natasha and comes back to her and will only be a co-parent to the child:

What's knocking around in her head is that people act on impulse, make mistakes, and regret them later. Maybe he needs to know that he's forgiven. Maybe he's waiting for a sign. And really, when you think about it, no actual harm has been done. Even the baby is not a major complication, doesn't need to be. He won't be spending a lot of time with it while it's an infant. Infants need their mothers. And when it's older—well, it might be nice having a youngster around to liven things up. (Harrison 116)

She is trying to think of any solution to get Todd back and deny the current reality of her situation. Jodie also feels quite lonely. Todd used to leave her to go on trips, which were not always work trips, but a romantic getaway with Natasha. Jodie would stay alone with nothing but food as a companion. She eats half an apple pie all on her own and then picks up the crust with her fingers to finish it all which is a sign of Anxiety; according to Jennifer Pells, a PhD licensed clinical psychologist: "Anxiety was the most frequently cited among a list of emotions that trigger binge eating". She is in a constant state of fear; she fears that she will be kicked out of her home and dragged down in front of the neighbours. This will take place with the help of the grocery boy or one of her patients knocking on the

door; she will go to open and the police will be waiting for her. This is another emotional symptom of the emotional rape syndrome, the inability to trust anymore. Also, a hidden or delayed reaction, Jodie lost the ability to cry and let out her pent-up feelings, only with the help of her friend Alison she was able to feel better, but still could not cry and let her feelings out. This inability to express emotions, and the eventual release of such emotions is considered a hidden or delayed reaction. Crying is known to be a good relief of one's feelings:

When Jodi finally understood what was on offer, she felt grateful and relieved, so much so that she nearly broke down and cried. It was the perfect moment for the floodgates to open and all the grief and sorrow to come pouring out. But tears rarely fall in Jodi's personal biosphere. The benefits of a good cry are known to her—the release of pent-up emotions, the clearing of static from the system—but as the years go by she finds herself less and less able to let go, becomes more and more accustomed to the brittleness that goes with endurance. (Harrison 174)

As for the physical symptoms, she cannot sleep without pills, but she does not have a prescription for sleeping pills so she chose not to sleep at all. Instead, she decides to numb herself with vodka to feel nothing which is an addictive behaviour:

In her former life she used to read herself to sleep, but these days she lacks the concentration to read. It helps to keep a tumbler of vodka beside her and sip from it as the hours creep by. She likes its bitter, raw taste and the way it makes her feel, like a rag doll that's lost its stuffing. But come morning she's exhausted and still half drunk. To get herself ready for clients she spends a long time in the shower and drinks a full pot of coffee followed by a swill of Listerine. (Harrison 166)

To conclude Jodie suffers from several symptoms of the emotional rape syndrome, which are denial, loneliness, anxiety, fear, hidden or delayed reactions, and abusing substances, in her case alcohol; all of which are a result of the abusive treatment and the betrayal she received from Todd.

Amy also has symptoms of the emotional rape syndrome, but she has less symptoms than Jodie does. She has a hidden emotional reaction; Amy plotted for a full year to frame Nick with her murder, she wrote a full fake diary to add as evidence, and she took quite a lot of her own blood and poured it all over the carpet in her manufactured fake crime scene. She wrote love letters to make Nick go to specific locations to make it seem as if he is trying to dispose of some evidence. This whole scheme of keeping her true feelings hidden and working hard for a whole year to get her plan in motion can be

seen as a hidden emotional reaction and obsessive behaviour, which are both symptoms of the emotional rape syndrome.

Other symptoms that she has are delayed emotional reactions, weight gain, anger, low self-esteem, anxiety, rage and addictive behaviours. All of Amy's reactions are delayed since she had to wait for her plan to be in motion. She developed an addictive relationship with food. After Amy left her home and disappeared, she started eating a lot and gaining weight. According to Jennifer Pells: "Anxiety was the most frequently cited among a list of emotions that trigger binge eating" (Pells). Finally, all her revenge plan is based on rage and the desire to see Nick in the electric chair. Amy has a stronger, more resilient personality than Jodie's, which is why she does not have a lot of symptoms of the emotional rape syndrome; nevertheless, she does suffer from this syndrome.

### **Women's mutual support for each other**

The men who abuse their women try to control all aspects of their lives and they try to keep them under their control all the time, they do so by isolating them. They forbid them to see their friends or visit their families. They would make any excuse they think of to forbid them from working or having a social life. Their main goal is to prevent them from getting any support from outside or any means of escaping. According to Hilberman and Munson's study of 60 battered women, almost all of them were forced not to see their families, friends or work and the abusers were making allegations of infidelity or claims of being jealous and protective over them as their reasons for keeping them home:

Hilberman and Munson found that in nearly all of these cases, the batterers had consistently attempted to isolate the women from friends, family, and acquaintances. These women were frequently accused of infidelity, subjected to insults and other forms of verbal degradation in public, and not allowed to work outside the home. (Ewing 9 - 10)

The two novels under study are different in that Nick and Todd did not try to isolate Amy and Jodie, which was a big advantage for the two women. Amy used her friendship with her neighbor Noelle Hawthorne to make Nick look even more guilty with her as a witness of Diary Amy, the persona of the woman fearing for her life and the life of her fake unborn child. Noelle was a housewife; she was pregnant at the time and had triplet babies. Amy used Noelle's urine to make herself appear pregnant in her medical records, also she told her about how Nick was treating her and convinced her that she was afraid to tell Nick

about her pregnancy because he might kill her. Noelle went to the press on Nick's first press conference and did as follows:

Noelle Hawthorne began moving forward, her triplets affixed, one on a hip, the other two clinging to her skirt, all looking ludicrously tiny to a man who spent no time around children. Noelle forced the crowd to part for her and the children, marching right to the edge of the podium, where she looked up at me. [...] "Hey, Nick." Her voice caught in the half-raised microphone and boomed out to the audience. I started to fumble with the mike, but couldn't find the off switch. "I just wanted to see your face," she said, and burst into tears. A wet sob rolled out over the audience, everyone rapt. "Where is she? What have you done with Amy? What have you done with your wife!" Wife, wife, her voice echoed. [...] "His pregnant wife!" (Flynn 194)

Noelle was the one who revealed the pregnancy to everyone and accused Nick of murdering pregnant Amy. She also talks to the press, more than once confirming that Nick is a killer. She told the press: "I think he killed her. No one will say it, but I will. He abused her, and he bullied her, and he finally killed her" (Flynn 264).

Abused women need support in their lives from the people around them, and most likely those people will be women. Jodie also had the support of women in her life. Todd's secretary after receiving instructions from Todd to cancel all Jodie's bank cards, called Jodie to inform her of Todd's decision, thereby putting her job at risk. The biggest support Jodie had was from her friend Alison, who was the only person able to get Jodie out of that dark mental state she suffered from. Jodie was drinking all day and not sleeping at all, which would lead to a suicide attempt or death by an accident or from alcohol poisoning. Jodie could open up to Alison and tell her about her problems, free of shame or judgment. Finally, Alison solved Jodie's problem by proposing the plan to kill Todd, and even hired the hit man herself to have Jodie as far as possible from the killer, thus ensuring that Jodie could provide an alibi.

Jodie and Amy are able to regain their lives because they are strong-willed women. Jodie decided to kill Todd because he took 20 years of her life, abused her, manipulated her, cheated on her, raped her, emotionally raped her and finally he wants to throw her out on the streets. Jodie was on her way to ending her life by abusing alcohol and not sleeping at all. Killing is not the best choice to resolve one's problems, when one is pushed to the point of choosing their own life or another person's, most people will do anything to save their lives, including taking another person's life.

Amy's money was stolen by Nick, along with seven years of her life; she was abused, manipulated, cheated on, raped, and emotionally, but she did not kill Nick or send him to the electric chair after framing him, but she went back to him and decided to start a family with him. This surprising turn of events has two possible explanations. She was not going to stoop to his level and soil her hands with his blood. Instead, she showed him what she was capable of—saving him from possibly being executed and as a punishment she will make him start a family with her like she always wanted and he always refused. We can see at the end of the novel how Nick is living in fear with Amy, knowing how powerful she is and that she might kill him whenever she wants to. The other possibility is Gillian Flynn's desire to end the novel with an unforeseen turn of events that would make it more enjoyable for the reader.

Having support for friends and family is essential to escape abused households, and as mentioned above, the abuser works towards isolating his victim, so that she could not find help and support in resistance to him. Female support here is the best and only option, because the abuser is a very jealous individual and would not let her have male friends. The abuser primarily isolates the victim from her family because they are the most powerful people in her life, and the most willing to help if asked to. Therefore, the only option left was finding support in a female friend.

## **Chapter Four: The Making of the Abusive Man**

### **The Effect of the Patriarchal Society**

The abusers in the novels under study are respectful members of society, they have jobs, friends, and are all college graduates; they all appear from the outside to be civil men. Nick, Todd and Desi all had different childhoods and different parents; however, several factors made these men either choose to be or turn into abusive men. They all had bad relationships with their fathers and an unhealthy relationship with their mothers. They also share an obsession with women. The factors that contributed to the making of those abusive men are their parents, the patriarchal society, and their obsession with women.

The environment concerning where a young boy is brought up can have a huge effect on the development of his character and might determine what kind of a man he will become in the future. To quote bell hooks: “Patriarchy is the single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation.” (hooks 30). Patriarchy affects all men around the world, but for the sake of my argument, I will only be focusing on its effects on men living in the United States of America. Nick, Todd and Desi are USA citizens and have suffered from patriarchy there. The patriarchal society pushes men to be dominant, superior, and violent, to force their control on other weak creatures, weaker men and all females. To do that, men must be violent, strong and dominant to maintain their superior status. Hooks discusses this in her book saying:

Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (hooks 31)

It all started with religion, as The Bible tells men they are created to rule over all creatures and use them as they please and that women have the role of helping men do that; they are to obey men and be subordinate. They were also told that God was male. This is a literal interpretation of the Bible used by men to serve their own agenda. It says in *The Holy Bible New Standard Revised Version: NRSV Anglicized Edition*:

Then God said, 'Let us make human kind' in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. (Genesis 1.26)

As it says here, men are to rule over everything and everyone. As for women:

Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. (Ephesians 5.22)

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (Timothy 2.11)

According to the interpretation they follow, religion tells men they are at the top of the power chain over all creatures, even ones from their own species, then it would be very hard to convince them otherwise. Men are taught not to express their feelings at all, the only feeling a man is allowed to have is anger. Aggression, anger and violence are society's tools to push men to act as soldiers to protect the system and to maintain control over women, money, land and all aspects of life.

Even male babies are treated differently than female babies. It is commonly known between patriarchal families that comforting a crying male baby should not be done often in order not to make him weak and then he will grow up to be a weak man, and that there is no harm in comforting or spoiling a baby girl. Thankfully this idea is beginning to disappear (hooks 44).

When any male acts differently they will be shamed for it by the other members, both men and women, who support this patriarchal society. Family therapist Terrence Real tells a story of his sons as an example of this shame. Even though they were brought up in an accepting household, society around them can still affect them. His younger boy used to like dressing up as a Barbie and playing until one time he was seen by his older brother's friends and without saying any word, just by their gaze, he felt their collective shaming for the way he dressed and he never played like this again. Dr. Real calls it "the normal 'traumatization' of boys". He does not undermine it by saying it is normal, but he emphasises how commonly this happens to the extent it has become normal (in hooks 31). This shame is the main weapon patriarchy uses to force boys to join this system that

oppresses both men and women. First society shames young boys and makes them feel pain, then they use this pain and direct it towards maintaining the patriarchal system.

This anger is the last resort for males in society to feel like humans. After being denied all other emotions, they only have two emotional outlets left, which is anger and libido. Men in all patriarchal societies are praised for being strong, aggressive, angry and sexually active. The more women they have or the more sex they have with women, the more manly they are perceived; sex is for them the ultimate show of dominance upon the women around them. This leads men to have multiple sexual partners and no real connection with any of them or a higher rate of infidelity. Men are seeking to appear and feel more manly and in order to do that they need a bigger number of sexual partners; their wives or girlfriends are in the way of fulfilling this goal. This applies to men who absorbed this hierarchical ideology, which is unfortunately the majority.

According to hooks, males choose anger because it is the only way to express the pain and pressure they have from having been forced to suppress all other human emotions. She says that pain is better than numbness and it's a way to express their fear, pain, anxiety, stress, etc. Men who were raised away from these sexist ideas, who hate and stand against them, will eventually cave in to the temptation and pressure of males around them. The feminist men in society are looked down on as traitors to their kind and hated among men. The minute they laugh at sexist jokes or agree with a sexist comment they will be part of the club, they will have more friends and will get more opportunities at work and will even see a difference in their daily lives. The book *The Heart of the Soul: Emotional Awareness* by Gary Zukav and Linda Francis explores anger and its effects on one's life, as follows:

Anger prevents love and isolates the one who is angry. It is an attempt, often successful, to push away what is most longed for—companionship and understanding. It is a denial of the humanness of others, as well as a denial of your own humanness. Anger is the agony of believing that you are not capable of being understood, and that you are not worthy of being understood. It is a wall that separates you from others as effectively as if it were concrete, thick, and very high. There is no way through it, under it, or over it. (hooks 51)

This is the main reason why most men lack intimacy with their wives or partners and one of the main reasons why men cheat on their wives. Having no real emotional connection with their wives makes the idea of having sex with another woman appear easy, because

the man will not have any emotional connection with any of the women, they are only looking for stress relief. They are living with all these suppressed emotions, and they only have two options to relieve themselves: either violence or through sexual activities; not only do these two options provide stress relief, but they will also be praised by society and their peers for choosing the manly option. This only applies to men who are a part of the patriarchal system and who cannot express their emotions.

## **The family's Role in Creating the Abuser**

### **The father's effect**

As men are growing up, they will require a male role model to look up to and learn from. Nick, Todd and Desi did not have very healthy role models in their lives. Todd grew up with an alcoholic abusive father and Nick had a very misogynist father; as for Desi there was no mention of his father in the novel, which suggests that his father is either deceased or was no longer in Desi's life; which means Desi had no male role model.

Living with an alcoholic father has so many side effects on the children present in the house as young children and adults. As mentioned in the book *Adult Children of Alcoholics* by the American psychologist Janet Geringer Woititz, adult children of alcoholics suffer from a number of behaviours that are different from those of a healthy adult. She mentions twelve behaviours, of which I will only be discussing the ones relevant to the adult child of an alcoholic father, Todd. They are: (1) Adult children of alcoholics have difficulty having fun; (2) Adult children of alcoholics have difficulty with intimate relationships; (3) Adult children of alcoholics speculate on what normal behaviour is; (4) Adult children of alcoholics take themselves very seriously; (5) Adult children of alcoholics are impulsive; (6) Adult children of alcoholics are super responsible or super irresponsible; (7) Adult children of alcoholics usually feel that they are different from other people; (8) Adult children of alcoholics constantly seek approval and affirmation; (9) Adult children of alcoholics judge themselves without mercy (Woititz 17); all these behaviours are present in Todd.

Todd has lived with an alcoholic father who used to abuse him and his mother. This has affected him and influenced his behaviours as an adult. According to Woititz, all

children living with alcoholic parents suffer from different life events but develop the same psychological effects due to the tension and stress they live in; they internalize it all and it affects their behaviour as adults. Woitiz says:

The undercurrent of tension and anxiety is ever present. What happens with it in particular may vary, but the resulting pain and remorse predictably follow. The differences exist more in the way you reacted to your experiences than to the experiences themselves. You internalized what happened differently and, as a result, behaved differently. But most of you felt pretty much the same inside. (Woitiz 21)

One of these behaviours or characteristics of adult children of alcoholics is to have difficulty having fun. Some people take drinking as a hobby to change their mood; similarly, Todd cannot have fun unless he is drinking. He goes drinking every day after work and he always has a glass of wine with dinner. Drinking wine with meals does not mean a person is in need of alcohol, but spending every night in the bar instead of going home can be early evidence of Todd developing an alcohol addiction, even though he stated more than once that he will never be like his father. Erica Slaughter in her article “Genetics and Alcoholism: Is Alcoholism Genetic or Hereditary?” concluded that the scientists have found that there is a 50% increased chance of becoming an alcoholic if one of your parents is an alcoholic, “A family history of alcohol use disorders may increase the risk of a genetic predisposition to developing an alcohol use disorder, with risks heightened for parent-child transmission” (Slaughter).

Another behaviour adult children of alcoholics have is difficulty with forming intimate relationships. Todd has difficulties in forming intimate relationships and is only after women for his own pleasure. He does not have any intimate connection with Jodie, otherwise he would not spend his time in bars and with Natasha. He also does not have an intimate connection with Natasha; he slept with Jodie behind her back after moving in with her and pursued the waitress Ilona to go on a date with her. Dating someone, sleeping with them or even marrying them does not mean there is an intimate connection between them.

Adult children of alcoholics speculate on what is considered normal behaviour. This can be applied to so many of Todd’s actions. For example, expecting his friend to forgive him after having an affair with his daughter, and expecting to leave the house and

move out without saying a word to Jodie, as he says “I thought you knew”; as if she already knows about it, so there is no need to talk about it. Also, assuming Jodie would agree to carry on being his lover after leaving her for Natasha and asking her to leave her home.

Also, Todd’s behaviour implies that he takes himself seriously. This can be seen in the rude way he treats his doorman in the office and the aggressive way he confronts Jodie the first time they meet over a car accident. Instead of asking if she was alright, he says: “You crazy bitch. What in God’s name do you think you’re doing? Are you some kind of maniac? Where did you learn to drive? People like you should stay off the road. Are you going to get out of your car or are you just going to sit there like an imbecile?” (Harrison 16-17). In addition to that he believes himself to be different from other people, a special person. He thinks he is so special that his best friend Dean would get just a little bit angry over the fact that he is sleeping with his daughter and has impregnated her, but he will calm down eventually and accept it. Harrison describes Todd’s feelings saying:

The main thing is that he’s willing to be humble, willing to give Dean plenty of space and take a certain amount of flak. Dean can be a little wild and a little unruly, and Dean can be stubborn, but he’s not a blockhead. He may not like what’s happening, but given time he’s going to adapt because if Dean is anything he’s loyal, and Todd is Dean’s oldest friend. (Harrison 61)

Todd is so entitled and thinks he is a such a special person to Dean that he will forgive him for such an act of betrayal. Another act that indicates that he believes himself to be special is that he expects Jodie to agree to be his mistress, despite having left her for Natasha and asking her to leave her home. Todd lives this life without thinking of the consequences of his actions, he lives as a child not thinking of anyone but himself.

Adult children of alcoholics are impulsive and either responsible or extremely irresponsible; in Todd’s case the latter applies. He broke a relationship of 20 years for an affair and he destroyed a friendship with his childhood friend just to have an affair with a young woman. This is an irresponsible impulsive act that he committed following his desire for pleasure and gratification from a young woman.

Adult children of alcoholics also constantly seek approval and affirmation. Todd does that by telling Ilona the waitress that he wishes to cheat on Natasha and as an attempt to get her attention or sympathy, he tells her this story which is real:

“Ilona,” he calls. She turns and comes back. He’s broken into a sweat. A prickly heat is spreading across his chest and burnishing his forehead. “When I was ten,” he says, “I watched my father break my mother’s arm. He held it behind her back and twisted till it snapped. It was her left arm. ‘So you can still work,’ he told her. When he did it he was looking straight at me. I’ll never forget the expression on his face. Like he was showing me something, giving a demonstration. Teaching me.” (Harrison 195)

He later expresses his self-hatred for the pathetic story he is using even if it’s true; as he says it is pathetic to use it to get a woman’s attention. We can associate this story with adult children of alcoholics’ desire to seek approval and affirmation from others and that they judge themselves without mercy. Todd has always sought the approval of all the women around him he calls Judie to ask for permission to hang out with his friends, he does whatever Natasha says and spends lots of money on her and he even tolerates sarcastic comments from his secretary because he finds her attractive and seeks her approval. He is bothered by the way she commented on Natasha the single time she visited him in the office, he is bothered about how late she comes in the morning and also, he does not like the way she always comes into the office without knocking, knowing he is on the phone with his lover Natasha, and yet he never confronts her.

As for Nick, he had a sexist abusive father who was not involved in his life and when he was involved, he was not a good role model. Desi did not suffer from a bad role model; he suffers from the lack of one. His father is either not involved in his life, or dead, hence we have no mention of him in the novel whatsoever. As a result, neither Nick nor Desi had healthy male role models to hold themselves to, which had negative effects on them.

Having an uninvolved father or absent one can affect various aspects of a man’s life; Greg Duncan from Northwestern University with colleagues from the University of Michigan conducted a study on more than a thousand families in the United States and they concluded that the boys who had involved fathers had higher IQs, higher education levels and a higher income by the age of twenty-seven. By involved they mean involved in family activities with their time and effort; for example, taking them out for fun, attending PTA meetings, going to church with them, helping with the house work (Kindlon et al 115).

Another very impressive study looks at the emotional education and empathy over the period of twenty-six years, following boys and girls from the age of five years old to thirty-one. The research looked at both the mother and father of the children under study. How much involvement did the father have in the children's lives and how much did the mother try to keep their children from acting aggressively. The study found that the mother's attempts did have a big impact on the children's levels of empathy, but the father's involvement had a greater role. Children with involved, caring fathers had far higher levels of empathy than others. Also, the effect of a noninvolved, absent father was the highest on pubescent boys; the research shows that boys at this period of their lives are lacking in empathy compared with the girls their age. Their emotional development is highly demanding on their fathers at pubescent, and when it is underdeveloped, it could lead to them engaging in delinquent activities (Kindlon et al 116).

This effect can be seen on Todd, while is not evidence for Nick, or Desi being delinquents but it is still highly likely since one had an absent father and the other an abusive sexist father. Todd mentions in the novel that at his pubescent period from as young as 12 or 13 he started to steal cars. He says:

“Oh, till I was twelve or thirteen. That's when I started stealing cars.” “You stole cars?” “Maybe I shouldn't have mentioned it.” “But you didn't really steal them.” “How do you mean?” “You put them back when you were done.” “Hardly.” “But you didn't, you know, strip them and sell the parts or anything like that.” “No, no. Nothing like that. I'd just play the stereo and drive around. Pick up a friend, pick up girls. Pretend for a while that I was some rich bastard who had it all.” (Harrison 49).

This shows how important having a healthy relationship with the father is an essential part in the development of young boys and how much it contributed in the making of the three abusive men Todd, Nick and Desi.

### **The mother's effect**

Women can also have patriarchal ideas and will support them by oppressing other women and the young boys of society. These women are the mothers of the young boys of society. Desi's mother is extremely involved in his life and spoiling him. This could be a result of the absence of the father, which is not mentioned in the novel, whether he was deceased or just was not involved in Desi's life. Also, Nick is very spoiled by his mother,

she took care of him and spoiled him until the day she died. As a result of the abuse, they received from their husbands and the men in society, they unknowingly contribute to oppressing their young sons, to be explained in the following paragraphs.

Many women stand by doing nothing while their sons are being emotionally abused or physically abused by their fathers. There are two kinds of such women; those who look the other way to show their loyalty to the patriarchal system, believing that little boys should be treated roughly to make strong men out of them. The second type are victims who are also being abused and cannot protect themselves or their children.

Todd's mom falls into the second category because as he stated his alcoholic father broke her arm in front of him at the dinner table. Even though he witnessed the abuse of his mother firsthand, nevertheless children will not understand why their mothers are too weak to help them and they might even resent her for it. They would prefer their fathers over their mothers, because drunk fathers have two moods, either being loving and fun fathers, or abusive and violent. In contrast mothers who suffer abuse are always irritable and angry from the living situation they are struggle with (Woititz 22).

Nick's mom lived with her abusive sexist husband until he got dementia. We have no evidence of Nick's mom having patriarchal ideas, but certainly, she stood by as he was abused by his father. She was a victim as well and could not do anything about it. This abuse was less severe than Todd's and his mother's, but still they were greatly affected by it.

With his father out of the picture, dead or not involved, Desi got full exposure to patriarchal ideas from his mother. His mother as seen in the novel is always involved in his life at university, during his meeting with Nick, when he met with the police, and they live in the same house. I would argue that he was raised by a single mother. Single mothers according to hooks can be even more cruel to their young boys than men, to compensate for the absence of the father. Also, these women sometimes subconsciously seek to belittle and shame their young boys to show them who is in charge, and that being a male does not mean he is in charge. This attitude according to hooks stems from their hatred of the men in the society around them. My reason for assuming Desi was raised by a single mother is that he has the same side effects of having a patriarchal single mother which

hooks labels “Maternal sadism” (hooks 65). The effect of the before-mentioned treatment is as hooks says:

“In single-parent families, it’s common to see boys who have become their mother’s ‘little man.’ Often these boys are very bossy children who patronize their mothers, who in fact do uncanny imitations of a certain kind of husband, being alternately possessive, protective, and seductive.” (hooks 65).

Not only do they treat them extra harshly and sometimes unconsciously abusively, but they also prepare them at a very young age to play the role of the father of the family. If it is the older child then they would also take the role of a co-parent, which is a very big burden for a child to take. Some mothers force their male child to be in an inappropriate relationship with them as an emotional supporter for all their problems, as if he was the husband. Desi has these side effects, being possessive, protective, and seductive, which is seen in his attitude towards Amy, as mentioned above.

The patriarchal society we live in has a direct effect on male violence. It shames and humiliates men and then forces them to block all those feelings of pain and hurt, transforming them to feelings of anger and sexuality. To maintain the superiority of men over the weak and over women, the system promises them power, a feeling of dominance, power, and fulfilment in life. Only a few of the men in society, the rich and the men in positions of political power, are gaining these advantages. The rest of the men are only suffering from emotional abuse and psychological problems from suppressing all their emotions and the abuse they received as young boys. Hooks discusses how the rise of feminism has nothing to do with the increase of male violence in society, but rather the dissatisfaction of men not gaining what they were promised from the patriarchy. She says:

Male violence in general has intensified not because feminist gains offer women greater freedom but rather because men who endorse patriarchy discovered along the way that the patriarchal promise of power and dominion is not easy to fulfill [...] they cannot go back and reclaim a past happiness or joy, nor can they go forward. To go forward they would need to repudiate the patriarchal thinking that their identity has been based on. Rage is the easy way back to a realm of feeling. It can serve as the perfect cover, masking feelings of fear and failure. (hooks 72)

Men have based their whole personalities and their way of thinking on this unjust system, and now they take all their anger and frustration out on the women in their lives, for two reasons. (1) they think they are not manly enough and that is why they have not reaped the benefits of their sexism and violent behaviour, so they become extra violent in an

attempt to be more manly. (2) They have realized they were victims as well, but they have not learned any other way to express their pain and sadness and so their violence also increases.

### **Toxic Masculinity**

Many men believe that being Masculine is a part of them, it is what they were born with; they believe it to be a biological thing that gives them their masculine behaviour. I will be arguing against that in the following pages. Masculine behaviour is a set of rules and acts that are enforced on men by society, history and tradition. Traditions are a part of old societies' values that traditional people hold on to; they are part of history that people still use today. One example against biology being the source of masculine behaviour is that wearing high heels and make-up was predominately for men in the 17th century. Also, ancient Babylonian warriors used to wear nail polish in 1800 BCE. The Babylonian men wore nail polish before battle, using different colours to signify differences in rank and social hierarchy. Painting their nails was associated with masculinity, prestige, and power, and the darker the colour, the higher status the person had. If any modern man wore make-up, high heels, or nail polish in today's world, he would immediately be considered homosexual and less of a man. The argument stated above concludes that society, history and traditions decide what is masculine and what is not. Before puberty, males and females are biologically the same aside from their reproductive organs, yet society assigns us to a gender from birth, and treats male babies and female babies differently. People always say: "Look at the strong boy; he will become an athlete when he grows up" and "Look at the beautiful little girl, she is so pretty", both are babies but society's expectations of them and the predetermined futures set for them are different.

Men are responsible for the majority of crimes and violence committed in the world, but what is making men so much more violent than women. I will attempt to answer this question in the following pages. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, criminal justice information, crimes in the United States, "Males accounted for 80.1 per cent of persons arrested for violent crimes and for 62.6 per cent of persons arrested for property crimes. Males comprised 88.7". Perry in his book *The*

*Descent of Man*; discusses how masculinity is the source of all this violence, but not all masculinity mirrors the deformed version of it that we have. He considers masculinity to be a cage that imprisons men for being their true selves. In 1876 traditional masculinity was defined by the psychologists Robert Brannon and Deborah David as a set with four basic components, (1) “No Sissy Stuff”, forbidding men to act too nice or like women, (2) “the Big Wheel”, describing the quest of a man through life to reach his goals, (3) “the Sturdy Oak” describing men’s toughness and self-reliance, (4) “Give’ Em Hell” addressing men violence, and aggression (Perry 10). Despite these ideas being more than a century old, they still exist and are applied in modern days.

Perry argues that men are not just following what their tradition and environment taught them, but they are prisoners in their minds and he calls their prison guard “the governor”. This prison guard works for “the Department of Masculinity”. This governor is the inner voice in a man's head that tells him how to dress, how to speak, how to behave, what books to read, or what movies to watch; it controls every aspect of his life to ensure that he is behaving according to the ideal man that is accepted by his society and peers. Most men are not aware of the existence of this governor and they believe it is their personality or male biology that guides them (Perry 11). As a man, I agree with Perry and I am aware of that governor in my head; similarly, Nick, Todd and Desi have this governor to keep them in check and make sure they are masculine enough. This governor can have slightly different values and rules depending on one's society, upbringing and environment. The ideal man that Perry discusses in his book is rational, logical, and goal-oriented, aiming to gain as much money, status, and power as possible. The most toxic trait of the ideal man is being entitled; men believe themselves to have inherited the earth; they believe they built civilisation and therefore it belongs to them. Perry talks only about white men, but all men all over the world have these same ideas.

Perry considers the Default Man in his book to be the middle-class white man. The Default Man is logical, prioritizes profit, ambition, and social status. These men are well aware of the privileges they have as males, but they cannot see other people's disadvantages created as a result. They think their success in their jobs, education and goals is due to their honest hard work and God-given talent, while the truth is that they

are being favoured over all the other qualified females or feminine men. He gives examples of how the behaviour of a default man is overlooked by society and law. If they raise their voice or assault somebody, it is always blamed on the victim and not on the perpetrator. Unlike women, any bad attitude is blamed on the whole sex. If a man gets emotional, it is because he is a passionate individual, but when a woman does it, it is blamed on all women for being over-sensitive. The most dangerous part of the Default Man is that he considers himself normal and neutral. The use of these two words is the basis on which all prejudice is based, and the alienation of anyone different from their standard (Perry 14 -16 -19). Men have been the leaders of the world for thousands of years, and that makes the call for equality a direct attack on their core belief that they deserve their status. To stop using their masculinity as an excuse for all their behaviour, they need to let go of the old sexist beliefs of their ancestry and open the door for women and other races to add the variety that society needs in order to change the default man's worldview.

Perry in his book is calling for men to descend from their high horse and make room for woman to take their equal share of society, which will result in some men losing their advantages. This will not only benefit women but also set men free from their obligation to behave in this toxic manner. Equality will open doors for variety in men's lives, where they can express different aspects of their personality and character without the fear of being shamed and attacked by the men around them. This pressure on men to be masculine and suppress their other emotions creates all sorts of destructive behaviours by men on themselves and the women around them. Todd Brett's destructive behaviour can be seen in his constant drinking; he drinks every day after work, his inability to commit to one woman, he left Jodie to be with Natasha, and then tried to have relations with Ilona. His seeks validation through the women in his life, even from his female secretary, and also his obsession with money.

All the previously mentioned behaviours are lowering the quality of his life and affecting his mental and physical health, yet they are considered highly masculine traits and are applauded by the men in society. Nick Dunne is also destroying his life with his toxic masculine behaviour. He put his job on the line when he took Andie, one of his students, as a secret lover. He also associated his self-worth with the kind of job he has,

which is typical behaviour of masculine men; to put the amount of money they make and how much power they have at the core of their being. He destroyed his relationship with Amy because he could not accept that she makes more money than him; his male pride could not handle her having the upper hand financially. As for Desi, his self-distractive behaviour manifests itself in his obsession to gain the woman he wants, i.e. Amy; he kept stalking, thinking and working towards getting her back. He decorated his cabin according to her taste in hopes that one day she would visit it. This obsession led to his death at the hands of Amy. Being obsessed with women is one of the masculine behaviours approved by society, but obsessing over only one woman is a whole different level of mental illness.

Another reason that contributes to the making of abusive men is Hypermasculinity, which is the exaggeration of one's masculine attributes and basing one's whole personality on being male and masculine, which leads to hating, and degrading the other; females and femininity. Hypermasculinity is defined In *A Dictionary of Gender Studies* as: "Hypermasculinity refers to the amplification of traditional male stereotypes, emphasizing traits such as aggression, dominance, strength, and physical prowess." Having a hyper-masculine man or a toxically masculine man does not just affect women and men themselves, it also affects society as a whole. Patriarchy is built on the backs of Hyper-masculine men, those men enforce patricidal ideas, control women, oppress the weak, and support only their fellow masculine men. Those violent and aggressive men, work as soldiers for the patriarchy. However, when they establish their order and have a lesser need for hyper-masculine men, that is when their weapon turns against them. Moulton discusses this issue in his article: "'A Monster Great Deformed': The Unruly Masculinity of Richard III" saying:

One of the greatest structural problems facing any patriarchal society is the control of the masculine aggressivity, violence, and self-assertion that constitute patriarchy's base. Although patriarchy depends on male homosocial ties and masculine aggressivity for its organization and enforcement, the masculine values inculcated by patriarchal societies can themselves pose a threat to patriarchal order" (Moulton 251)

Aggressive men, if not given an outlet to channel their aggression, such as through war, law enforcement, or the subjugation of women and feminine men, otherwise they would turn against society and wreak havoc, and anarchy would prevail.

The subtle yet recurrent sexist implication in Nick and Desi's statements regarding Amy in the novel *Gone Girl* demonstrate their hypermasculine traits. This is evident in the way Nick speaks about Amy expressing his frustration with her and how she left him saying: "My bitch wife had left me with nothing but my sorry dick in my hand, begging her to come home... Come home to me (you fucking cunt). Come home so I can kill you" (Flynn 351). His words are may be excusable since she is framing him with her murder, but as mentioned above, he abused Amy, raped her, physically assaulted her, emotionally raped her, and finally after her retaliation, now he wants to draw her in with this fake apology he is making on a live TV interview so he can kill her. Nick had plotted to make a sincere fake apology to his wife knowing that she would be listening, to try to convince her to come back, so that he could take his revenge. If this example is not enough to show his hypermasculinity, it is expressed in his cold reaction towards Amy's father crying over his missing daughter.

While witnessing the interview, his father's words came to his mind "He put a hand on my shoulder, wiped his eyes, and I involuntarily turned to steel. My father again: Men don't cry." (68), which reflects his internal hypermasculinity because the idea of men who do not cry is an ancient-toxic idea that has no basis of truth in our modern world. Also, in the same incident, Nick had a compulsive urge to smile while his father-in-law was crying, "So there it came, out of nowhere, as Rand begged for his daughter's return: a killer smile" (68). This is due to suppressing all his emotions of empathy, sympathy or sadness towards the situation he is in or the stress and sadness his father-in-law is displaying.

Dr Oriana R. Aragón has coined the term Dimorphous Expressions in her study "Dimorphous Expressions of Positive Emotion: Displays of Both Care and Aggression in Response to Cute Stimuli", in which she defines it as displaying both negative and positive expressions to express happiness or sadness, for example crying when feeling extremely happy or smiling or laughing in a serious situation. The result of her study concluded that the function of Dimorphous Expressions is to regulate emotions and it varies depending on the situation. It can stabilise one's emotions by making one cry while feeling intense happiness and smile or laugh in sad or stressful situations (Aragón 259 - 260). This article

supports my claim that Nick is suffering from hypermasculinity; the effect of his toxic masculine upbringing made him lose the ability to sympathise with other men when they display emotions of “weakness” like crying to the extent of putting himself under great stress to be able to suppress his feelings, leading him to display Dimorphous Expressions and smile.

As for Desi, he has his fair share of hypermasculinity which can be seen in his habits, attitude, and comments towards Amy. Desi has a habit of collecting physical materials to satisfy his ego and inflate his masculinity, displaying his money as his power. Amy tells us about it and says: “Desi was a collector: He had four cars, three houses, suites of suits and shoes” (Flynn 321). He looks at Amy as another object to add to his collection. Amy says: “He would like knowing I was stowed away under glass” (321). He also considers her as a damsel in distress, he wants to prove his masculinity to himself and others by reducing Amy from the strong independent woman she is, who is capable of protecting herself, to a princess in need of a white knight to save her. This was expressed by Amy herself in the novel: “The ultimate white-knight fantasy: He steals the abused princess from her squalid circumstances and places her under his gilded protection in a castle that no one can breach but him” (321), He wants to keep Amy under his control in a safe place away from anyone; this desire to control and obtain others is an exaggeration of the old-fashioned masculine role of men as the protectors of their women. Another example of his Hypermasculinity can be seen in his desire to change Amy, transforming her back to Amy of 1978, which is the year they dated back in university. He does that by changing her clothes, hair colour and the food she eats so that she can lose weight.

He brings me something nice to eat, but not as nice as what he’s had: He’s thinning me up, he always preferred his women waify. So he brings me lovely green star fruit and spiky artichokes and spiny crab, anything that takes elaborate preparation and yields little in return. I am almost my normal weight again, and my hair is growing out. I wear it back in a headband he brought me, and I have colored it back to my blond, thanks to hair dye he also brought me: “I think you will feel better about yourself when you start looking more like yourself, sweetheart,” he says. Yes, it’s all about my well-being, not the fact that he wants me to look exactly like I did before. Amy circa 1987. (Flynn 353)

This behaviour by Desi is seen by hypermasculine men as loving and caring, nurturing and providing for their woman and that is the lie they tell themselves to rationalise their controlling personalities.

Todd Brett from *The Silent Wife* is such a master in the way he disguises his hatred for women and his hypermasculinity to the extent that there is no trace of any direct verbal remarks of his hatred towards women in the novel except one complaint about women's selfishness and control on when to have children and how men are not included in the decision making, he says:

Women have babies or not according to their whims—and what some guy wants, even the guy responsible, is completely beside the point. There's no recourse for the men of this world. Men are a race of suckers who don't realize that having sex is the biggest risk they'll ever take. His whole world changes as of now, and there isn't a damn thing he can do about it. He ought to have a voice here, but things don't work like that. In spite of what anyone says it's women who make the rules. In this case it's Natasha who makes the rules.

Nonetheless, this remark is not enough to label him as a hypermasculine misogynist, or women hater, taking into consideration that it was said after the shocking news of Natasha's pregnancy. On the other hand, there is more nonverbal evidence of his hypermasculinity which leads to hatred of women. This can be seen in his contentious infidelity, obsession with women and his use of a horrific memory about his mother's abuse to make women pity him, the previously mentioned is more than enough evidence to expose his true feelings towards women.

### **The Source of Misogyny**

Misogyny is the hatred of women; it is the Greek word for “woman hater”: *miso* means “to hate” and *gyne*, means “women”; Dr Susan Forward in her book: *Men Who Hate Women and the Women Who Love Them* tries to define men with misogynistic tendencies. She stresses her amazement at how the word misogynistic (typically used to describe mass murderers, rapists, and other horrible acts) is now used to define everyday men. She adds that although these men have not committed all the horrendous crimes mentioned above, they nonetheless are also Misogynists, but they use different weapons to reach their goals (Forward 20 - 21). It had been established in the previous chapters that Nick, Todd and Desi are abusive towards women, but does that mean they are automatically labelled as misogynists. According to Jess Hill's study published in her book: *See What You Made Me Do: Power, Control and Domestic Violence*, not all abusive men are misogynists (Hill 98), however; I would argue against that. All the abusive men discussed in the novels under study are misogynists, even though they show quite a strong

obsession with women. In her book, Forward addresses this apparent contradiction of being in constant pursuit of women while simultaneously hating them,.

According to Forward: men need and want to be with women, but beyond all their desire and obsession they hide a deep sense of fear towards women. A man is inherently dependent on the love, care, and compassion of a woman; however, this dependence leaves him vulnerable, as the woman in his life may withhold or withdraw her love and supportive actions at any moment, triggering a sense of abandonment. To lessen the power that a woman has over him, he usually unconsciously seeks to destroy the woman's sense of self, destroying her confidence and her self-esteem, to make her as dependent on him as possible, aiming to make her less likely to abandon him. Having all those conflicted emotions of love and passion, fear, panic and anxiety is an inevitable cause of hatred of the person causing it (Forward 165 - 166).

One's mother and father have a tremendous effect on one's character development and the way one interacts with others as adults. Forward talks about this and says: "Mother is the nurturer and the boy's primary source of comfort, while Father helps him to pull away from Mother so that he does not become overly dependent on her" (167). Therefore, any imbalance in the father-mother dynamic will result in some psychological problems in the child's life and his adult life; Forward claims that it may lead a male child to become a misogynist in adulthood. She discusses several scenarios; the first scenario, the father is either too frightening and the child cannot connect with him, or the father is too passive to pull the boy away from the mother; as a result, the child would rely mainly on his mother. Thus, the child puts his mother on a pedestal and makes her the centre of his universe. The second scenario is caused by the mother; here, the mother is in a troubled marriage or a single mother, and instead of caring about her child's emotional needs, she tries to fix her own emotional needs by smothering and controlling her son, overwhelming him with demands, or depending on him to comfort her. This makes the child dependent on his mother and unable to function without her. As an adult, this child shifts his reliance on his mother to the women in his life. After witnessing his mother's ability to hurt him by withholding love to force him to comply with her demands, he comes to believe that the women in his life have the same power. As a result, he develops hatred and anger

towards them (168). Losing the father figure in one's life will keep young boys dependent on their mother and won't be able to separate from them; without the help of the father, young boys will remain in fear of being abandoned by their mothers and they will transfer this fear to the women in their lives and eventually this fear will become hate.

The above-mentioned scenario of having a single mother or an overbearing mother who controls the life of her son and keeps him close to her making him an emotional regulator of her own, playing the missing role of the partner or husband she lacks, this can be applied to Desi, Amy's ex-boyfriend. As I have argued above, Desi is raised by an overbearing single mother, because there is no mention of his father in the novel and because of the way his mother is acting. His mother first appeared to intrude on the meeting he was having with Nick, Amy's husband. The description of his mother as told by Nick serves as the first indication that Desi was raised by an overbearing mother, he describes her as follows:

The woman was a blurry vision of Amy, Amy in a steam-fogged mirror —exact coloring, extremely similar features, but a quarter century older, the flesh, the features, all let out a bit like a fine fabric. She was still gorgeous, a woman who chose to age gracefully. She was shaped like some sort of origami creation: elbows in extreme points, a clothes-hanger collarbone. She wore a china-blue sheath dress and had the same pull Amy did: When she was in a room, you kept turning your head back her way. She gave me a rather predatory smile. (Flynn - 168)

The description itself has many indications of her overbearing personality. Her shape was like an "origami creation" with pointed elbows and a "clothes-hanger collarbone", which reflects her strict personality. She gave Nick a "predatory smile" which is another indication. Desi is dresses formal in a suit and has a different wardrobe for every month as Amy reports, which indicates that his mother used to dress him up and has influenced his outfits quite a bit, this is a popular belief and not supported by any data.

Another indication that Desi was raised by an overbearing mother is that she was also hostile and intrusive with Amy. The relationship between a man's girlfriend and his mother is always negative when the mother is a controlling, intrusive mother. At Amy's first meeting with Desi's mother, Amy noticed the striking resemblance between his mother and herself. Also, his mother murmured in her ear, "Good luck"; the narrator comments:

When he brought his mother down to meet her, Amy grew queasy at the striking resemblance between herself and Mrs. Collings. The older woman had kissed her cheek coldly and murmured calmly in her ear, "Good luck." Amy couldn't tell if it was a warning or a threat. (Flynn - 85)

The above-mentioned indications are enough to conclude that Desi was raised by an overbearing mother. Forward also gives an example of a man with an overbearing emotionally dependent woman who uses her son for emotional support, due to living with a misogynistic, abusive husband. She talks about Ed and his mother, and how his mother used to complain to a six- or seven-year-old child about his father's mistreatment. She used to tell him that he was her whole life, and that he was the only one who truly loved her. This tore him up inside and made him feel inadequate, because he cannot make his mother happy. He swore to do whatever it takes to make her happy. Forward states that the previous statement made by Ed indicates that his mother has reversed the roles with him, and she became the young frightened child and he has to comfort her and regulate her emotions (Forward 173- 174). This puts tremendous pressure on the child; a child cannot solve his mother's complicated problems and emotional needs, he cannot even fathom them, so he is doomed to fail, and as a result develops a feeling of inadequacy, guilt and failure that will reflect indirectly on all aspects of his life as an adult and directly on his relationships with women his life.

Forward further argues that, even if the mother did not verbally express her suffering, it may manifest itself through being chronically depressed, heavy drinking, or becoming involved in any kind of self-destructive behaviour. Nevertheless, if she suffers in silence, the child would be able to pick up on it and it will have the exact same impact on him. The child will always feel it is his responsibility to make his mother happy and that he has to rescue her, which is intangible for a young boy to achieve. According to Forward, this burden will lead to the child hating his mother and in due course hating all women (175). Some boys when they grow up, start to look for damaged women or women in need of help to fulfil their need of becoming the saviours they failed to be with their mother.

Similarly, Desi was brought up by an overbearing single mother, which is why it is reasonable to infer that she had burdened him with her needs and complaints; the following examples will further prove this point. Desi likes to date women who require

help so he can play the role of the saviour and get self-fulfilment from it. Amy lied to Desi when they were a couple and said that her father had molested her as a child; this made him very interested and fascinated with her and drove him to fall in love with her. She says: “Long ago, back in boarding school, I’d told him about my father’s nightly visits to my bedroom, me in a ruffly pink nightgown, staring at the ceiling until he was done. Desi has loved me ever since the lie” (Flynn -318). He wants to be the hero to correct his childhood failure of not being able to save his mother, nor to satisfy her emotional needs. Amy also informs the reader about Desi’s other relationships, since she has kept in touch with him all the years following their break up:

Over the years, after Wickshire, when we’d talk, I’d ask after his latest girlfriend, and no matter the girl, he would always say: “Oh, she’s not doing very well, unfortunately.” But I know it is fortunate for Desi —the eating disorders, the painkiller addictions, the crippling depressions. He is never happier than when he’s at a bedside. Not in bed, just perched nearby with broth and juice and a gently starched voice. Poor darling. (Forward - 317)

Forward adds that a child stuck between having an abusive father and a needy, emotionally unstable mother or an emotionally unstable single mother would not find a father to escape to, and rely on for his own needs. In the first case, the father is an abusive frightening man and in the second, the father is absent or deceased. Those needs will not disappear over time or when the child grows up. The adult version will look for a woman now to act like a mother for him and to satisfy his unresolved childhood needs. No woman can realistically treat her husband or partner like a six-year-old child. Consequently, the adult man-child will resent her for it and will rationalize his abusive behaviour towards her as a justified response for not providing him with the treatment he is entitled to receive (Forward 178). This man-child lacks the emotional intelligence needed to interact with women in a healthy way, and will attribute the cause of this to his perceived mistreatment by women, as he ultimately becomes a misogynist. Since Desi is living with an overbearing single mother, then without a doubt his emotional needs as a child were not met, and therefore he would be looking for someone to fill his emotional gaps. As quoted above, Desi’s mother looks quite similar to Amy, and that makes him even more obsessed with her, which is another piece of evidence that indicates that he is looking for a woman to take the place of his mother, to compensate for the lack of emotional support he found in his mother.

Forward provides further evidence to support her claim which is Charlie. Charlie lived with a very controlling, needy mother and an abusive father. He has had two failed marriages and is now with his third wife. As an adult he was drawn to helpless women in need of help, to rescue them and fulfil his failure of not being able to rescue his mother. However, this need does not stop when he rescues the woman, he now wants to retaliate against his mother's abuse and take revenge for all the damage his mother has caused him, and he does so by controlling this woman (183). He used to support and help his self-conscious, trembling, nervous third wife and expects her in return to be grateful to him, to do whatever he pleases, to love him and never leave. Charlie says that whenever his wife would threaten to leave him or not do what he expects her to do, he would make her feel guilty by saying, as quoted in Forward's book: "I've invested all this in you, in helping you. How could you pull away from me, you stupid bitch!" (182) He also says: "Here I've done all this for you and you're a goddamned ingrate. You're just a sniveling piece of crap." (183). Charlie says he never hits his wife, but he knows exactly what to say to break her down and make her feel small and helpless, so she would never leave him. Forward says that his behaviour is due to both hating his mother and copying his abusive father's behaviour, the only way he learned how to interact with women (183).

The example above resembles how Desi, Nick, and Todd interact with the women in their lives. As discussed above, Desi tried to control Amy and change her as he pleased, further proving his misogynistic behaviour, Amy informs us of the ways he tried to change and control her:

He brings me something nice to eat, but not as nice as what he's had: He's thinning me up, he always preferred his women waify. So he brings me lovely green star fruit and spiky artichokes and spiny crab, anything that takes elaborate preparation and yields little in return. I am almost my normal weight again, and my hair is growing out. I wear it back in a headband he brought me, and I have colored it back to my blond, thanks to hair dye he also brought me: "I think you will feel better about yourself when you start looking more like yourself, sweetheart," he says. Yes, it's all about my well-being, not the fact that he wants me to look exactly like I did before. Amy circa 1987. (Flynn 353)

As can be seen here, Desi wanted a woman similar to his mother, so he could not only save, but also control all aspects of her life; her food, her weight, her clothes, and her hair, which is a way to feel safer in this relationship, since it gives him a sense of total control over everything. Also, to ensure Amy's constant need for him, believing his actions will

lead to her eternal gratitude, which will result in her loving him and never abandoning him. All the information provided by Forward on Charlie's case is precisely the same as Desi's except one; the abuse following her noncompliance. Amy knew what Desi was capable of and she knew his hidden motives for helping her. She clearly states this, saying: "Desi has ensured I will be forever indebted to him" (332), that is why she did not wait for his reaction and decided to kill him to escape the house he had locked her within.

As for the case of Nick Dunne, he was raised by an alcoholic father and a submissive mother. According to Forward, this combination has the same result of not having a father present. The young boy cannot relate to his frightening abusive father and will be more connected to his mother, and as I mentioned before, the young boy will not be able to disconnect from his mother and be independent without the help of the father. The only difference in Nick's case, in comparison with Desi, is his submissive mother. Forward informs us of the huge psychological damage a submissive mother has on a young child in her study of Charlie's case. Being an abused, battered woman, Charlie's mother would often get physically abused by Charlie's father for not following his orders.

Charlie reports a recurring incident in his childhood home. When Charlie's father returned home one evening and asked Charlie and his brothers, "Why have not you done what I asked you to do?", Charlie would respond that he did not know he had to do anything. Subsequently, his father would turn to his mother and ask, "Did you tell them?", but his mother had forgotten about it and was tired of all the physical abuse and battering, she would lie and say she did. This makes his father batter them both for not doing what should have been done and for allegedly accusing their mother of lying (Forward 180). Charlie hated his mother for this and lost all trust in women after his own mother betrayed him. This example is quite common in abused households, due to the mother's inability to withstand the abuse. The mother is a human and she will eventually reach a breaking point and then she will try anything to take a break from the constant abuse, which leads to accidentally betraying her own children (182 - 183).

Both Nick and Todd lived with abusive, alcoholic fathers, who at some point had assaulted them and their mothers. As for Nick, his father is a very abusive man, as seen in the novel he suffers from Alzheimer's disease and more than once has mistaken Amy for

another woman and Nick and Amy's house to be his own house, so he proceeded to verbally assault her Amy narrates the incident:

Bill Dunne says, pointing now, jabbing an index finger toward my face, [...] "Is she doesn't belong here. Little bitch thinks she can do whatever she wants." Mama Mo swoops in then, her arm around her ex-husband, always, always rising to the occasion. "Of course, she belongs here, Bill. It's her house. She's your son's wife. Remember?" "I want her out of here, do you understand me, Maureen?" He shrugs her off and starts moving toward me again. "Dumb bitch. Dumb bitch." It's unclear if he means me or Maureen, but then he looks at me and tightens his lips. "She doesn't belong here." "I'll go," I say, and turn away, walk straight out the door, into the rain. [...] I walk a loop around the neighborhood, waiting for Nick to appear, to guide me back to our house. The rain spackles me gently, dampening me. I really believe Nick will come after me. I turn toward the house and see only a closed door. (Flynn 126)

Having Alzheimer's disease can make a person confused, forget people around him, and especially recent memories, Alzheimer's disease can make the person who suffers from it a bit hostile, due to fear, confusion, frustration and sometimes pain. However, Bill Dunne seems to mistake Amy for other women that he does not like. His overreaction might be justifiable if he only does it once or only does it having in mind the woman that he dislikes. In the quote above he says: "Dumb bitch. Dumb bitch." It's unclear if he means me or Maureen" (126); it is not clear if he means Maureen, Nick's mother or, Amy. Also, these raging incidents are reoccurring and are always against women. I would like to argue that Bill is a Misogynist and due to his medical condition, he cannot control his anger and is raging at the women around him. Another incident that supports my claim goes as follows; Nick heard his father's voice outside and when he rushed to see what had happened, he heard the words "bitch bitch bitch." (55). His father was saying those words to a female officer. In Nick's own words, his father used to curse women for trivial reasons, "My father, out of his mind, had taken to flinging the word at any woman who even vaguely annoyed him: bitch bitch bitch." (55). Bill did not settle down until a male officer came and took him to his elderly care home. Being this hostile, especially towards women, is a clear indication that before his health deteriorated, he was a misogynist.

Another incident worth mentioning happened after Amy's disappearance. Bill appears at Nick's house thinking it is his own and proceeds to look for a woman, this woman can be an ex-girlfriend of his or Nick's mother Maureen. He says: "Is she here?" he snapped. "Who, Dad, who are you looking for?" "You know who." (350), He pushes Nick and proceeds to the living room and he keeps mumbling, "Little bitch that little bitch"

(350), and then he says: “You tell her, you tell that little ugly bitch it’s not over. She’s not better than me, you tell her. She’s not too good for me. She doesn’t get to have a say. That ugly bitch will have to learn —” (350). It can be concluded that was the way he used to talk to Maureen and any woman that upset him, based on his behaviour and how aggressive he is, despite his age and bad health condition. It is safe to say that he was and still an abusive-alcoholic-misogynistic husband.

Forward in her book *Men Who Hate Women and the Women Who Love Them*, based on Charlie’s example argues that a young boy needs to relate to his father even if his father was an abusive man. Sometimes young boys will overlook that and even start hating their mother for not being able to stop him (Forward 182 - 183). Having been raised in such harsh conditions, Charlie now has a distorted idea of what a normal household should look like. He stated that: “By the time I was eighteen and got married for the first time, my view of marriage was that men were controlling and brutal while women whimpered and made promises and demands” (183). Based on what Forward is arguing, a young boy’s need to relate to his father is so strong that he can even overlook his father’s abuse. Young boys need a role model to teach them how to be men and how to interact with the world around them, and even if this role model is a bad one, a young boy will be forced to copy the only behaviour they see, and that is what Charlie did. Nick has also unconsciously copied his father’s behaviour. Nick denies being like his father and insists on being “a one-woman misogynist” (Flynn 351), hating only Amy, as he states here:

I was not that man: I didn’t hate and fear all women. I was a one-woman misogynist. If I despised only Amy, focused all my fury and rage and venom on the one woman who deserved it, that didn’t make me my father. That made me sane. Little bitch little bitch little bitch. I had never hated my father more for making me truly love those words. Fucking bitch fucking bitch. (Flynn 351)

Even though he denies being like his father, his actions reflect the opposite. Nick states here that he loves using those words, which are mainly used to insult women, “Fucking bitch fucking bitch”, also he does not respect women whatsoever. His affair with a twenty-three-year-old woman called Andie shows how he prioritizes sexual pleasure over a meaningful emotional connection, also his lack of care and attitude towards infidelity reflects his lack of respect for his wife and women in general. Another point to be made on his misogynistic attitude can be seen in his description of her in using very disrespectful

terms. He says: “In real life she wears snug tops that show off her breasts, and clingy jeans, and her hair long and wavy. In real life she looks fuckable” (Flynn 322). This description is quite degrading to Andie, especially the word, “fuckable”, reducing a woman solely to her sexual appeal is an objectification of that woman. His lack of respect for his wife and Andie, along with his fondness for cursing Amy, could be considered as subtle misogyny.

Todd Brett’s case is very similar to Nick’s but worse. Nick’s father was an alcoholic misogynist, but his abuse as far as mentioned in the novel was all verbal and not physical, which does not exclude the possibility of him physically abusing Nick’s mother, but significantly reduces it. Todd’s father is only mentioned once in the novel when Todd is trying to get the attention of Ilona with a sad story from his childhood, which he does often to get the women he is interested in to pity him:

He’s broken into a sweat. A prickly heat is spreading across his chest and burnishing his forehead. “When I was ten,” he says, “I watched my father break my mother’s arm. He held it behind her back and twisted till it snapped. It was her left arm. ‘So you can still work,’ he told her. When he did it he was looking straight at me. I’ll never forget the expression on his face. Like he was showing me something, giving a demonstration. Teaching me.” (Harrison 194)

Similar to Nick, Todd did not have a good male role model to teach him how to become a man or how to interact with women. As mentioned above in Forward’s example, Charlie hated his mother for her weakness and he could not help following in his father’s footsteps because of the lack of an alternative male role model; as a result, he started to control and abuse his partner. Todd had the exact same side effects that Charlie developed. (1) he looks for a woman to compensate for the role of his mother and take care of him as she should have. He chose Jodie because she treated him like a child and mothered him, taking care of his food and clothes. (2) he looks for women who are mentally weak in order to control them. He sensed she was mentally weak and that was due to the sexual abuse she had suffered as a child, her guilt for not helping her brother who was also sexually abused, and she was traumatized by the suicide of one of her patients. He chose Natasha, due to her young age, which makes her easier to control. However, when she became pregnant and demanding, he approached Ilona, who works as a waitress, whom he could control with his money. Based on Forward’s study and the reasons stated above, Todd’s obsession with controlling women and abusing them leads to the conclusion that he is a misogynist.

## Reasons for men to cheat on their wives

Men have been cheating on their wives since the beginning of time, and they have always blamed it on being male; and on men being more sexual than woman and so needing more than one woman, which is not correct. It has been proven wrong by numerous studies and the fact that not all men are cheaters and most of them are in monogamist relationships is further evidence. The marriages of Nick and Amy Dunne along with Todd and Jodie Brett were seemingly happy marriages; especially Todd and Jodie's, as they did not even fight, yet both women were cheated on. Esther Perel in her book *The State of Affairs: Rethinking Infidelity* addresses the shift from religion to pathology when talking about infidelity and cheaters, saying:

The idea that infidelity can happen in the absence of serious marital problems is hard to accept. Our culture does not believe in no-fault affairs. So when we can't blame the relationship, we tend to blame the individual instead. The clinical literature is rife with typologies for cheaters—as if character always trumps circumstance. Psychological jargon has replaced religious cant, and sin has been eclipsed by pathology. We are no longer sinners; we are sick. Ironically, it was much easier to cleanse ourselves of our sins than it is to get rid of a diagnosis. (Perel 128)

Perel says that even a good marriage with no serious problems can contain infidelity and that people nowadays are leaning toward blaming individuals and their mental disorders for a bad relationship and not both parties. Answering the question of why men cheat is not an easy thing to do, there are so many factors and they differ from one person to another. She gives one example of a happily married man who was discovered by his wife to be a regular visitor to BDSM sites and dungeons; the dungeon is the name of the room in which BDSM is performed, which stands for Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism. He visited sites, visited dungeons as well as meeting strangers for sex. He was later diagnosed by a therapist to be a sex addict self-medicating his depression by the above-mentioned behaviours. This is an extreme case and does not answer the question of why most men cheat, but it can be a contributing factor.

One of the reasons why Jodie was so tolerant of being cheated on by Todd—and still wanting him back—was, as previously discussed, her guilt over not being able to help her brother when he was sexually abused as a child. brother for not being able to help him when he was sexually abused as a child. This is the main reason for treating Todd as a child, taking care of all his needs and loving him unconditionally as one would do with

their child. Another reason, as Perel says, is mental illness; in Todd's case it's depression, Jodie as a therapist was able to notice that Todd's depression seems to lift for a reason unknown to her, and that reason is his affair with Natasha. The narrator comments:

You could almost say it started with the onset of Todd's depression—that's when things took a turn for the worse—and then again with his depression lifting the way it did as if he had suddenly found a reason to live. That was in the spring or early summer, and she was happy to have him back even though he seemed distracted a lot of the time.

Having depression is not an excuse for infidelity, and an affair is not a solution, it is only a mere distraction. An obvious example is the fact that Todd was not happy with Natasha either and he approached the waitress Iona to date her. Jodie as a therapist had tried to get him to have therapy but he refused. Having a mental illness does not justify the crimes that one commits against others; it only makes some people more understanding towards the sick person, and those people are often not the ones against whom the crime is committed. Todd not only cheated on Jodie; he also tried to force her out of the house that she lived in for twenty years.

Based on Perel's book, one of the main reasons people have affairs is the search for the self. According to Perel, searching for oneself does not qualify as a psychological issue that leads one to infidelity. In this process the person concerned longs to discover a new version of themselves or return to an old version of themselves that they had lost due to life difficulties and the passage of time. Thus, seeking other relationships.

Sometimes, when we seek the gaze of another, it isn't our partner we are turning away from, but the person we have become. We are not looking for another lover so much as another version of ourselves. Mexican essayist Octavio Paz describes eroticism as a thirst for otherness. So often, the most intoxicating other that people discover in the affair is not a new partner; it's a new self. (Perel 131)

Some cheaters are trying to relive a period of their life that they liked or live an experience they did not have at a young age when they were teenagers (Perel 131). This can apply to Todd and Nick, who are both having affairs with much younger women. Todd is forty-six, Natasha is in her mid-twenties, and Nick is thirty-four and his lover Andie is twenty-three years old. We can presume that both men choose younger women so that they can feel younger and relive a previous period of their lives all over again. This is especially true for Todd, who dyed his hair, bought new clothes and started going to the gym in an

attempt to look younger and keep up with Natasha. Another example that proves that claim that Todd is looking to have live new experiences through his affairs, as evident in the text the women Todd is interested in differ in appearance and body types, as described in the text comparing Jodie and Natasha's body:

His hands explore the delicate bones of her back and shoulders, relearn her subtle curves and childlike proportions. He's already grown accustomed to Natasha, her sturdy frame and padded hips, the exaggerated recess of her waist. (Harrison 136)

As mentioned in this comparison, it is quite clear that they have opposite body types. One is in her twenties, with a curvy body, large breasts, and broad shoulders. The other is in her mid-forties, short and petite, with small breasts, subtle curves, and a skinny body. As for Ilona, she is entirely different from both women. She is described as follows:

The way she looks—gaunt with lank hair and hollow cheeks—makes him think of an undernourished child. She has a long torso with a flat chest, jutting hip bones, and a concave belly. Feet like planks but narrow. Eyebrows unplucked. (Harrison 194)

Ilon looks nothing like Jodie or Natasha; her facial and physical features are different, which entails that Todd does not have a specific type, and he tends to be attracted to the unfamiliar, new types of bodies or women that he has not experienced before.

Perel in her book talks about having an affair, describing it as offering one the chance to escape from one's old life and live a life in a parallel universe where one can act differently and fulfill one's hidden fantasies. This forbidden love or unattainable relationship is the most exciting part of having an affair. Humans always want what they cannot have, this makes the feelings and the whole experience more erotic and more desirable for the cheater (Perel 133).

Humans have an innate desire to defy rules, similarly, the cheater has a desire to put himself over society, his family, his wife, his morals and all other constructions that would forbid him from cheating. The power that transgression has over the cheater lies in the risk factor; the cheater is risking his marriage, his life, and his reputation by cheating or having an affair. This will result in a transformation in the life of the cheater, because now they either have to live two lives simultaneously, or they will have no life, by having it all destroyed when they get exposed. According to the sexologist Jack Morin, there are

two types of cheaters motivated by the desire to break the rules; one category includes narcissists. They think rules do not apply to them and that they deserve certain privileges that others do not. They cheat with no remorse or hesitation; they jump at the opportunity when it presents itself. The second type is, as Morin describes it, having a sense of childhood-like pride when breaking the rules, he says: “encounters and fantasies with a flavor of violation so often leave the violators with a sense of self-validation or even pride” (qtd. in Perel 135). He attributes this to his erotic equation: “Attraction plus obstacles equal excitement.” Accordingly, Perel took his words to explain why people in a happy marriage with no issues would still cheat on their wives (Perel 135).

Nick according to Morin’s standards would fall into the second category, the ones that get self-validation and take pride from their affair, and Todd would be in the first category, the narcissist who tries to impress woman with money. Todd is a very good gaslighter; he manipulates women with his sad childhood stories and he cheated on Jodie multiple times in the novel. However, I would have to disagree with Morin, since seeking validation and having pride from immoral acts like lying and cheating is the same as being a narcissist. I will explain in the following pages why the two categories that Morin is proposing are actually one. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM), nine points determine if a person should be diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD); a person should have at least five of them to be diagnosed with NPD and they are:

- A grandiose sense of self-importance—in other words, the individual exaggerates achievements and talents and expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements
- A preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love
- A belief that he or she is special and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions)
- A need for excessive admiration
- A sense of entitlement—unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations
- Interpersonally exploitative behavior—someone who takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends
- A lack of empathy—a person who is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others
- Envy of others or a belief that others are envious of him or her
- A demonstration of arrogant and haughty behaviors or attitudes ( Burgo 14)

Based on Doctor Burgo's book *The Narcissist You Know: Defending Yourself Against Extreme Narcissists in an All-About-Me Age*; Burgo argues that NPD falls on a spectrum, and having four or three of these destructive behaviours that affect the person who has them and those around him is almost the same as having all nine in terms of the effect on the people involved. He claims that these nine features overlap and interconnect with each other, and are actually only two, which are an inflated sense of self-importance and a lack of empathy for other people. The nine characteristics are a by-product of those two. Building on Burgo's argument, Morin's two types of cheaters, the Narcissists and the one seeking validation and having pride from cheating are both Narcissists and not two separate categories.

Nick and Todd have most of the official nine characteristics to be diagnosed with NPD; Nick thinks highly of himself and often dwells on the fact that he used to be a writer; he believes running a bar is beneath him, exaggerating the importance of his previous occupation as writer for a magazine. He always contemplates his past self-proclaimed brilliance as a writer and his love affair with Andie. His need for admiration led him to pursue Andie and get into an affair with her. Most of his abusive behaviour stems from his belief that he deserves special treatment, as mentioned above in chapter three on gaslighters. He exploits his wife for her money, her love and her body; similarly, he exploits Andie's love and body.

A person who cheats on his wife or partner is not thinking about others feelings, they are only concerned with their own needs and desires. The cheater might have empathy or regret for his actions, but Nick does not. Cheaters are known to be more affectionate, showering their partners with gifts and attention in order to compensate for the guilt they are feeling for having an affair. In Nick's case, he physically assaulted his wife, raped her and verbally abused her; these are not the actions of a person having any feelings of empathy. Nick has shown his envy of Amy's money numerous times and his arrogance is clear through all the above-mentioned characteristics. Nick has seven of the nine required characteristics to be diagnosed with NPD.

Todd is the owner of a construction company and he always acts as if he is a millionaire. He looks down on his workers, targets poor women, and tries to impress them

with money to have his way with them, as he tried to do with the waitress Ilona. He also, contemplates his relationship with Natasha which he at first used to think of as ideal. He thinks he is smarter than all the women in his life which is why he attempts to be with three women at the same time, Jodie, Natasha and Ilona. He is in need of excessive admiration; this is crystal clear in his need to have more than one woman's love in his life. He thinks he deserves special treatment, as stated before in chapter three on gaslighters. He has taken advantage of Jodie's love, care and body, he also took advantage of Natasha's young age and naivety and later tried to cheat on her with Ilona, and finally, he took advantage of his childhood friend Dean's trust, in dating and impregnating his young daughter Natasha. Todd has no empathy whatsoever towards Jodie, he cheats on her after spending twenty years with her, and he moves out with his lover. When he starts to miss Jodie's cooking and her body, he goes back home and pretends that he regrets his actions and that he made a mistake, has dinner, has sex with Jodie, and the next day she gets a call telling her to evacuate the house and leave.

All the previously mentioned characteristics display that he is an arrogant person. Todd has six of the nine required characteristics to be diagnosed with NPD. According to Doctor Burgo, only two characteristics can sum up the nine which are an inflated sense of self-importance and a lack of empathy for other people, but even following the rules of the DSM, both Nick and Todd are Narcissists, which is one of the reasons they cheat on Jodie and Amy. The desire for an un-lived life is another reason for cheating, according to Perel; it is the yearning for a life the cheater has never lived. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman touches on this issue, saying:

There is always a suspicion . . . that one is living a lie or a mistake; that something crucially important has been overlooked, missed, neglected, left untried, and unexplored; that a vital obligation to one's own authentic self has not been met or that some chances of unknown happiness completely different from any happiness experienced before have not been taken up in time and are bound to be lost forever if they continue to be neglected. (qtd. in Perel 135)

This can be seen as regretting one's choice of marriage or being in relationship with a person to the extent of cheating on them. However, it is possible to end the first relationship before getting into another, if one does not want to be with one's partner, one should end the relations. The reason such men cannot leave the person they are with is out of fear; fear of loneliness, fear of judgment, fear of losing love and fear of abandonment.

According to the therapist Nicole Arzt in her article: “What Is Compulsive Cheating Disorder? 7 Common Signs of a Cheater”, cheaters are afraid of being alone:

Despite their contradictory actions, many compulsive cheaters struggle with abandonment issues and fear loneliness. These problems can lead them to seek multiple sources of external validation. They want continuous reassurance that they are desired, loved, or otherwise special. Some chronic cheaters also want to have alternative options available, in case their primary relationship doesn't work out. (Arzt)

Most cheaters if not all are insecure people with abandonment issues, seeking multiple relationships in an attempt to fill in the gaps their lives. These issues can only be resolved with seeking professional help or by somehow finding peace with one's self. Both Nick and Todd have a huge fear of abandonment, and as I have proven above, they are both gaslighters who have a huge fear of abandonment.

Reliving previous parts of one's life through infidelity and having multiple selves is another excuse or reason that cheaters employ. Perel in her book mentions Ayo, who has been with his wife for twenty-seven years, during which he has had several affairs, but his wife Julie was informed of them. He says:

I have layers or circles of friends corresponding to various stages of my life, in different parts of the world,” he tells me, “Each one summons the person I was in the formative years of those relationships. I find it exhilarating to re-experience myself across life stages simply by choosing to spend time with one or the other circle of friends. (qtd. in Perel 139)

He seems to take pride and joy in having had these relationships, as if he were living multiple lives with multiple personalities. This desire for living multiple lives stems from a number of flaws in his personality which he admits to, saying:

I seemed to want many of the good bits of love—the warmth, the protection, the caring, the friendship, and the romance—but not the leaky parts—the vulnerability, the weakness, the fear, and the sadness. (qtd. in Perel 140)

This is not a healthy person, and suppressing his feelings of sadness and fear is one of the most common reasons for men to act violently or sexually in a negative way, as I discussed previously in chapter four on the effect of the patriarchal society; however, in Ayo's case, he acted sexually. Perel also discusses in her book how infidelity can be a reaction to a tragedy in the cheater's life, she discusses how the loss of a family member, bad news from the doctor, infertility, unemployment, and depression can throw a person into the arms of a new lover. In short helplessness can result in escaping one's life into another

hidden life which is the affair, the use of the affair here is a defence mechanism against one's life (Perel 145).

This cannot be applied to Nick nor Todd, but they both had tragedies in their lives. Nick lost his mother to cancer on October 21, 2011, but started his actual affair with Andie on April 2010. His mother's death was not the cause of the cheating; the affair was caused by depression and not having the job he wanted as a writer, which did not make him reach the level of helplessness that Perel interduces in her book. As for Todd, his tragedy was infertility; he claims that Jodie being Sterile is his reason for having an affair in order to start a family, but that is not true because he was ok with this for the twenty years they spent together, so it does not justify his actions. Both men may argue that the tragedies in their lives led to their infidelity, but as discussed above, Perel's helplessness theory cannot be applied to neither of them.

And last but not least, the search for an adventure as well as the desire for security is another possible motive. Perel discusses how humans have an innate desire for security while at the same time they crave adventures, which are polar opposites (Perel 148). Perel also mentions Stephen Mitchell's book *Can Love Last the Fate of Romance over Time*, in which he discusses Stability and Adventure, saying that children since infants would seek safety sitting next to their mothers and that we find safety in familiarity, the more familiar the place, the situation or the person we are with, the safer we feel and the more at home we feel. As for adventure, the search for an adventure away from home has been ingrained into our minds, in stories with heroes leaving home to learn how to become men or in search of knowledge.

The desire to be away from home, feel different things and see different people is in our human nature. Mitchell also covers the differences between the sexes. He says males are more likely to go searching for an adventure than women, not because they can detach themselves from the safety of home easier than women or because they are not as emotionally dependent on the safety of home, but because society and culture have taught them that as men, they should be the ones to explore the unknown and to travel in search of an adventure, and similarly society has taught women that staying at home for safety is the more feminine way (27- 29 Mitchell). Perel has concluded that the only way to be

close to home while living a dangerous adventure is by having an affair (Perel 145). To elaborate, she quotes the sociologists Lise VanderVoort and Steve Duck:

The transformative allure of an affair is heightened by this contradiction—everything changes yet nothing need change. An affair offers the seductive promise that both/and is possible—the either/or of monogamy can be defied. (qtd. in Perel 151).

These are some of the many reasons why men would cheat on their partners. Cheating is an individual experience differing in motive from one person to another. Their personality, morals, psychological issues or disorders determine why they would cheat on their partners. As for Nick and Todd, their cheating was motivated by their Narcissism, their selfishness and their lack of fulfillment in life, which they tried to fill with another woman for Nick, and multiple women for Todd.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aims to introduce and further explain what the domestic noir genre is and whether it is a genre on its own or a sub-genre of the crime fiction novel. It determines the kind of contribution this new genre introduces to the literary domain and how it empowers victims of domestic abuse. Given that the current research has been focusing on only feminist and gender issues, this study will broaden the discussion by introducing a new perspective on domestic noir through the viewpoints of psychologists, psychotherapists, experts in domestic issues, and legal experts, in order to uncover the motives that drive the characters' actions. This study paves the way for further exploration of this genre in the fields of literature, social science, domestic abuse, women's rights, psychology, psychoanalysis, relationship issues, marital infidelity and behaviour issues.

Crime fiction novels are based on three major things, a murder, a detective, and one or multiple murders and typically the detective takes on the role of the narrator. The new sub-genre/genre of crime fiction addressed in this thesis is called: domestic noir. The term domestic noir was coined by Julia Couch at the 2013 CrmeFest. Julia insisted that her type of writing was not crime fiction, and was not a thrilling story of a murder mystery, but rather a story of women struggling with domestic abuse and how they overcome their abusers and reclaim their lives. The Domestic noir genre has many similarities with its precedent crime fiction; both include a crime, a detective, sometimes police, a victim and

a mystery, but domestic noir has some specific characteristics not found in any other literary genre. Domestic noir always takes place within the walls of the household, the victim is always the husband, he gets murdered, and the wife is always the murderer. Additionally, Domestic noir addresses the conditions which lead a woman to take her husband's life. Laura Joyce in her book, *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction* defines domestic noir as being: "a capacious, flexible category that encompasses realist writing about domestic violence, intersectional feminism, religion, mental illness, and women's rights" (Joyce 3). She reports it being traced back to the 1940s with (marriage thrillers): stories of women murdered by their mentally unstable husbands. Women in this sub-genre/genre are neglected, used, abused, raped, battered, stolen, from and humiliated. This is not only done by their husbands but by most of the men in their lives and by their society. This foul treatment inflicts several psychological issues on the women, which leads them to kill their husbands in order to reclaim their lives.

This thesis looks at the novels under study: *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn and A.S.A. Harrison's *The Silent Wife*. It has analysed the characters of Amy Dunne and Jodie Brett and how they struggle with domestic abuse, the reasons for enduring this abuse, and not leaving their abusers and the reasons behind choosing violence. It also justifies the use of violence and murder as means of revenge/self-defence for the women to seek liberation. It also analyses the character of the men in the novels; Nick Dunne, Desi Collings and Todd Brett, their motives for the abuse, their reason for infidelity, their toxic treatment of the women and the source of their misogyny.

Chapter One explores the literary antecedents of domestic noir; as mentioned above this new genre requires the presence of a murder, a murderer, domestic abuse and the character development of the female protagonist in taking a stand against her abuser and reclaiming her freedom. One of the first authors to introduce a strong and independent female character is Daniel Defoe. Defoe's novel *Moll Flanders* published in 1722. It is a pioneering example of domestic noir because it introduces the development of Moll as a woman, how she struggles in man's world, and how she rebels against her society and

does anything in her power to survive, which includes breaking the law and using her body, which is exactly what women of domestic noir do.

Another prime example of the struggle women go through in a male-dominated world is presented by; Angela Carter's book *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*. In which she studies The Marquis de Sade's female characters. Those characters claim their rights by force. Two of the most famous novels of the Marquis are *Justine*, or *The Misfortunes of Virtue* written in 1787, and *Juliette* published in 1797. Justine is a submissive pure innocent young lady, who suffers greatly to uphold her virtue, never commits sin and always follows rules, which leads to her exploitation and abuse by her society, especially men. Juliette on the other hand has no morals and would commit any sin or crime to reach her goals. She desires wealth and eventually achieves it by using the men around her and she does that by weaponizing her body and sexuality. *Juliette* was written directly after *Justine* and can be considered as a direct response, or a reaction to the treatment her sister Justine endured. The fact that both novels were written consecutively and that their protagonists are sisters reveals that the Marquis intends to show how such abuse and injustice towards a woman could eventually result in transforming her into a figure like Juliette. This type of character development is the same one seen in domestic noir novels.

A very old and interesting precedent of domestic noir is the biblical story of Salome. Oscar Wilde tells us the story from Salome's perspective in his one-act tragedy written in 1891. His play shows how John the Baptist was extremely rude towards Salome, which made her ask for his head. John cursed her just for the sins of her mother Herodias; this does not justify her actions, but her attack was provoked by an unjust treatment. This reinforces one of domestic noir's key principles that pushing a woman to her limits can have serious consequences. The above-mentioned examples serve as a tool to understand this new genre more and to further distinguish it from the crime fiction genre. Having a specific message and specific characteristics that often result in the killing of the husband distinguishes domestic noir from other literary genres, especially crime fiction. This supports the conclusion that domestic noir is a genre in its own with specific characteristic and specific message it conveys.

Using Charles Patrick Ewing's book *Battered Women Who Kill: Psychological Self-Defense as Legal Justification*, this thesis explicates the severity of the abuse they undergo, which is unknown to most people. Ewing cites several very important studies on domestic abuse including J.J. Gayford's study on 100 cases of battered women, and Lenore E. Walker's study of 435 battered women, Hilberman and Munson's study of 60 battered women. All the previously mentioned studies aim to understand the psychological damage battered women develop, which will help to understand the novels under study more.

Ewing does not just explore the psychological damage the abused women go through, but also explores reasons that would push them to resort to killing their husbands; and the legal consequences resulting from what seems to be self-defence—but is not considered so under modern law. This part is essential in my argument justifying the killing of the abusive men in the novels under study. Even though the abuse Amy and Jodie went through was not as severe and graphic as the cases described in Ewing's study, all the evidence leads women to eventually the same result. Domestic abuse works in a cycle, as Walker calls it "The Three-phase Cycle of Violence", the cycle's pattern among other mentioned reasons concludes that eventually Amy and Jodie's lives will be in danger, which makes their act of killing a form of self-defence. Also, Walker in her study observed how a huge number of women committed suicide after failing to endure much more abuse, and according to Ewing, several women were about to commit suicide when they decided not to do it and murder their husbands instead. The thought of suicide did cross Amy's mind, and Jodie, who was in a horrible mental state, was moving towards the same path. Had it not been for her friend's help and support, she might have considered it, as she was already exhibiting early symptoms of suicidal ideation. The above mentioned further stresses how the killing of the husband is a form of self-defence and a means of survival.

Chapter one also addresses manipulative tactics used by abusers, to keep their victims in a controlled-submissive state that adheres to the abusive's desires. By quoting Dr Sarkis in her book: *Gaslighting: Recognize Manipulative and Emotionally Abusive People-and Break Free*, this thesis manages to explore manipulation done by the abuser

to further control his victim: those tactics include Gaslighting, Love-Bombing, Hoovering, and Stonewalling. This part highlights the importance of recognizing that not all abusive relationships are physical and that emotional abuse is just as hurtful and damaging to the victim as physical abuse is. This part helps in analysing the emotional aspect of the abuse Amy and Jodie were subjected to and emphasises how damaging it is to the victim. The last part of this chapter tackles the question of: why men abuse their wives, and different types of abusers. This part serves as a guideline to recognise abusers in our lives and to further understand the reasons that could make men commit such heinous crimes against their wives. It also plays a key role in understanding Nick, Todd and Desi, who seem to be average, law-abiding citizens often regarded as “good men”.

Chapter two discusses the abused women’s mentality and goes deeper in analyzing in depth how Nick and Todd manipulated Jodie and Amy using the above-mentioned techniques. Also, it dives into the psychological and sexual abuse of the family on the two women. Here the thesis analyses the embedded clues of this abuse and how it affected the way the Amy and Jodie interacted with Nick and Todd. This thesis manages to deduce what psychological issues Amy and Jodie have and how it negatively impacted their relationship with their husbands and made them an easier target to be used and abused. This part is essential to understand some of the irrational behaviour that Jodi and Amy exhibit regarding how they treat, feel, and tolerate their husbands. Chapter three dives deeper into analysing the manipulative tactics used by the abusers, such as gaslighting, love-bombing, hoovering, and stonewalling. This chapter focuses on the novels under study providing examples and direct quotes to prove the manipulation done by Nick, Todd and Desi; to further understand the characters and what drives them. Also, it discusses the importance of women’s mutual support for each other in helping domestic abuse victims escape their domestic imprisonment.

Chapter four examines the making of the abusive men, what made them behave this way, what are their motives, and whether they were abused before by anyone. This chapter explains how the patriarchal society encourages men to be aggressive and dominate women and other less aggressive men. They serve as soldiers to maintain the superiority of men over women, and the superiority of the rulers over regular citizen.

Another very important factor in the making of the abuser is the family. The family unit typically consists of the father and mother, both of whom have an equal impact on their child's development. A father should be the male role model from whom a male child can learn and look up to. Nick, Todd and Desi did not have healthy role models. This chapter explores the effect of having an alcoholic father and the negative effects it has on their children, with the help of Dr Woitiz's book *Adult Children of Alcoholics*. This thesis manages to identify the cause of many of Todd's behaviours since he had an alcoholic father. As for Nick, his father was a very sexist abusive father who was often absent in his life.

Based on Kindlon et al in their book: *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*; not having a father can cause serious issues in a child's life as an adult. This can be applied to Nick's case for having an abusive father who is always absent and Desi whose father was never involved in his life. As for the mother's effect, mothers are taking one of two roles in the abusive household; either they have patriarchal ideas and contribute to the oppression and pressure made on their young boys, or they are too submissive and lack the power to defend themselves or their children. They sometimes also contribute in the abusive behaviour that the father does. Having either type of mother will result in numerous psychological issues. The family's effect contributes highly in the making of an abusive man.

Another contributing factor in the making of the abusive man is Toxic Masculinity. Men have been culturally trained to be tough, strong and masculine; by masculine they mean the opposite of a woman's behaviour. They are told to be strong, logical, and unemotional, which is damaging for humans and against their nature. Grayson Perry's book *The Descent of Man*, Dr Oriana R. Aragon's study "Dimorphous Expressions of Positive Emotion: Displays of Both Care and Aggression in Response to Cute Stimuli" and Ian Frederick Moulton's "'A Monster Great Deformed': The Unruly Masculinity of Richard III." are all used to make the effects of toxic masculinity and hypermasculinity on the making of the abusive man more evident.

According to Jess Hill's study, not all abusive men are misogynists (Hill 98); however, I argue against that, in line with Susan Forward's book: *Men Who Hate Women*

*and the Women Who Love Them* and Jess Hill's book: *See What You Made Me Do: Power, Control and Domestic Abuse*, as well as a detailed examination of the texts under study; this thesis has led to the finding that Nick, Todd, and Desi are misogynists, due to exhibiting several misogynistic traits, and the way their misogynistic traits were formed.

The last point examined in this thesis is the causes behind the choice some men make to cheat on their wives. By examining Esther Perel in her book: *The State of Affairs: Rethinking Infidelity*; this thesis found out that there are several reasons for a man to cheat on his wife and all of them are due to psychological disorders. This part explains, clarifies and argues that Nick, Todd and Desi all suffer from narcissistic personality disorder: (NPD), and that is one of the motives beyond their infidelity.

To conclude, the sub-genre of domestic noir is a genre of its own, since it aims to describe a specific type of murder, in a particular setting, with a specific motive. It also seeks to depict the struggles faced by women subjected to domestic abuse, instead of describing a mere murder mystery. All domestic noir novels are set within the household, describing how domestic abuse women are left with no choice but to murder their abusive husbands as a form of self-defence to gain their freedom. The killer in this new genre is always known and is always the protagonist of the story. Having particular sets and goals distinguishes it from the crime fiction genre and qualifies it to be an independent literary genre. This thesis has determined with the evidence provided above that Jodie Brett from *The Silent Wife* by A.S.A. Harrison and Amy Dunne from *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn are both justified in the murder committed, to it being a form of self-defence to preserve their lives. Also, both women suffered from abuse at the hands of men in their lives, which led them to tolerate their husbands' abuse for too long and a delayed reaction. Finally, the three abusive men in the novels under study Nick, Todd and Desi are all suffering from hypermasculinity, misogynistic attitudes and as proven above, all of it can be traced back to their fathers' abusive treatment of them. This genre sheds light on the experiences of abused women and their untold narratives concealed behind closed doors, raising awareness on this critical issue and empowering women in a similar circumstance to stand up for themselves, instead of waiting to be rescued.

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