



Gender and Performativity in Contemporary American Novel: A Butlerian Reading of *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn

Sadegh Ahmadi Asl, ^(Corresponding Author) 1

Graduate Student in English Literature, University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Iran

Hossein Aliakbari Harehdasht²

Assistant Professor of English Language and Literature, Persian Gulf University, Bushehr, Iran

Ehsan Karaminejad³

Graduate Student of TEFL, Sharif University of Technology, Tehran, Iran

Article ID

CLS-1906-1026

Article Info

Received Date: 30 September 2018

Reviewed Date: 6 November 2018

Accepted Date: 28 December 2018

Suggested Citation

Ahmadi Asl, S., Aliakbari Harehdasht, H. and Karaminejad, E. "Gender and Performativity in Contemporary American Novel: A Butlerian Reading of *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn." *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2019, pp. 147-165.

¹ sadegh.sp.ahmadi1370@gmail.com

² haliakbari@pgu.ac.ir

³ e.karaminejad.ao1@gmail.com



Abstract

One of the most challenging approaches toward literary works is the feminist approach. After three waves of feminism through the history of literary criticism, Judith Butler has introduced a new vision that is gender-based rather than sex-based. She has strongly influenced the domain of feminism and queer theories. In her preeminent book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Butler sharply criticizes the former feminists for their division of men and women into two distinct groups, the latter being the underdog and the former being the superior. Butler argues that gender is a cultural and social construct. One's gender is performative for one's actions determine and construct his/her gender identity. The present paper aims at investigating Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2012) in terms of Butlerian concepts of gender and performativity. The novel takes advantage of certain characters to depict the idea of gender, as performative. The current study explores the concept of gendered identity focusing on the characters of Amy Elliott Dunne, Margo Dunne, and Maureen Dunne. Further investigations of the characters, particularly Detective Rhonda Boney and Amy Elliott Dunne, illustrate the link between the concept of performativity and the novel.

Keywords

Gender, Performativity, Performance, Heterosexuality, Norm

1. Introduction

Gillian Flynn received high praise from both the common readers and the eminent critics. *Gone Girl* is a distinguished literary work for exploring the questions related to the concept of gender. This process is maintained via examining the way that the



central character Amy reveals her thoughts and actions regarding her husband and other characters in the novel. Flynn vividly demonstrates Amy as a female character who goes beyond any known limitation of the society. She does not restrict herself to the boundaries of conjugal life, as other females tend to do. For example, Nick tells Margo “Amy clearly isn’t a puppet on a string, she’s the puppet master” (244). In fact, she challenges Nick Dunne, Tommy O’Hara, and Desi Collings, the male characters who symbolize the dominant power in the society.

The outstanding novel, *Gone Girl*, depicts the troublesome life of married couples after their economical breakdown. It has a marvelous plot with two distinct narrators, Amy and Nick. The narrations are mostly about Amy and her interactions with other characters, particularly her husband, Nick. After their moving to Missouri, unemployment and lack of friend cause Amy to be haunted by despair and disappointment. The disappearance of Amy without any trace is the opening of the novel. The event follows as the police and the media become suspicious of Nike. Meanwhile Amy’s diary adds to the possibility of Nike being negligent in Amy’s disappearance. It results in the complexity of the plot. Further reading of the novel reveals that both narrators are unreliable, and that Amy is alive. After losing money, she murders her ex-boyfriend Desi Collings and frames him as her kidnapper. At the end of the novel, Amy uses Nick’s semen to make herself pregnant; as a result, Nick is forced to stay with her. Amy violates and challenges the traditional beliefs and norms in a society in which males are the dominant power. The present study thus examines Butlerian gender theory to concentrate on the female characters’ gender construction via performativity in the novel.

The present article adopts a qualitative literature based method towards both theory and the case study. After the introductory section, researchers offer a critical reading of the former researches with regard to both novel and the theory. The following section goes through a detailed reading of the Butlerian concepts that shape the conceptual framework of the article. Afterward, the main part of the research, which is the critical reading of the novel, will be provided with further subsections. The last section of the paper is devoted to the findings and conclusions derived from the discussion section. It is there to give answers to the leading concerns of the researchers.



2. Literature Review

This section reviews the previous studies conducted on the novel *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn in order to highlight the significance of the novel. Moreover, it illustrates the way that this study is different from other former researches. Elina Cederfeldt Vahlne in her research entitled “Everybody Loves a Bad Girl: A Study of Female Evil in Margaret Atwood’s *The Robber Bride* and Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl*” (2018) thoroughly analyzes Amy Dunne’s character. Vahlne begins her study by considering Amy to be a female antagonist character. She compares Amy to the traditional evil women traceable in literature and claims, “Amy’s behavior and actions are far from acceptable and she could of course be interpreted...as an ill-intended stereotype” (16). However, she argues if we observe Amy’s actions through a feminist viewpoint then we may find them less malicious. Vahlne also asserts that instead of labeling Amy with vicious title, the readers should consider to what has made Amy to be the way she is. (11-12)

Patrick Osborne in his article “I’m the Bitch that Makes You a Man: Conditional Love as Female Vengeance in Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl*” (2017) has generally focused on what he has addressed as violence against women. He attributes the violence against women to what he calls the consumer culture of the society. He argues that Gillian Flynn in *Gone Girl* “presents Amy’s revenge as a response to a patriarchal consumer culture” (9). In fact, the consumer culture by means of insisting too much on biological differences causes various forms of discrimination against women. Osborne then goes forward by picturing the concept of revenge versus violence. Revenge is Amy’s answer to her violence-infested society.

Rajlakshmi Kanjilal in her thesis entitled “In Search of “Real Amy”: An Analysis of *Gone Girl*” (2016) focuses on the negative consequences of the gender stereotype on women and particularly on Amy in a patriarchal society. She argues that the condition could trap every single woman. She therefore claims, “the story of Amy does not belong to a particular country or society. There are thousands of Amazing Amy everywhere” (103). Moreover, she asserts that the actions of the female character, Amy, challenge the traditional beliefs and the common norms of the dominant power. Thus, Amy’s actions are a source of inspiration for other women to change their miserable conditions in a society mainly dominated by the male.



Sara A. Amato in her article “Female Anti-Heroes in Contemporary Literature, Film, and Television” (2016) states that based on the society's stock of common sense, a female personality is commonly believed and expected to be trustworthy, reliable, and affable. However, she argues that in *Gone Girl* the “unreliable female anti-hero narrators completely violate the expectations put in place by some reader's prior conceptions” (44). She holds that, having successfully changed the presumption of her readers Gillian Flynn has also managed to portray Amy's character as a Female Anti-Hero outstandingly. Additionally, she claims that a series of actions such as killing, escaping, violating and framing one's husband as the murderer, which Amy does, are solid evidence to confirm the understanding that the novel depicts the personality of Amy as more masculine than feminine.

In the thesis “The Representation of Masculinity as Seen through the Spouse in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*” (2016), Kholif Fitriyani concentrates on the struggles between gender roles in the married life of Nick and Amy through the lens of Stuart Hall and his theory of representation. She argues that the novel *Gone Girl* “is about the dominant position of masculinity particularly in marriage life.” (31). Linearly she asserts, the characters' behaviors, actions and their ideas regarding each other will lead us to this conclusion that “[s]ome of characters in the novel represent the characteristics of masculinity especially Nick Dunne and Amy Elliot” (31). She deploys the concept of hegemonic masculinity proposed by R. W. Connell to investigate the problematic role of gender in his study. She moreover raises some questions regarding the reasons for putting masculinity above femininity in the novel as a symbol of American society.

Muhammad Abirzaim Veraldy in his thesis “Marital Conflicts between the Main Characters and Parents-In-Law in the Novel *Gone Girl*” (2017) keeps his eye on Nick's and Amy's backgrounds. He states that dissimilarity of Amy's family to Nick's family appears to be the root of some serious problems in their married life. Hence, he mainly focuses on the sociological aspects of the two families. He claims that the background of Nick's and Amy's life and particularly their families “affects a marital conflict. The backgrounds are socioeconomic status and social relationships. By; we can understand that every main character has his/her own status and relationship” (25). He properly refers to the economic status of the two families; Nick comes from



a poor family, however Amy belongs to a rich high-class family. He gives examples from the novel noticing that Nick was completely dependent on Amy's money. At the end, he concludes that in-law relationships make threats against the married life of the central characters of the novel, Amy and Nick.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. The Construction of Gender

Judith Butler is currently considered a noted gender critic particularly for her salient book *Gender Trouble* (1990). Publishing her prominent book, Judith Butler has profoundly influenced the field of feminism and queer theories regarding sex and gender identity. Annamarie Jagose contends that Judith Butler in her groundbreaking book "approaches differently the question of the analytic relation between gender and sexuality" (2015: 37). Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* defines her aim as criticizing "a pervasive heterosexual assumption in feminist literary theory" (1990: 7). Therefore, the present paper seeks to scrutinize the selected novel of Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl*, in terms of Butlerian concepts of gender and performativity.

Criticizing the former feminists for their divisions, namely men as the superior and women as the underdog, Judith Butler puts forward the idea of sex and gender. In fact, she repudiates the dominant ideas about sex defining one's gender. According to Butler "the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (1990: 11). She argues that there is no priority for sex in comparison to gender. It is worth noting that for Butler sex and gender defines a subject's body because both gender and sex could be constructed in society or through culture. Therefore, according to Butler a woman can only be defined as a female by her actions.

According to Judith Butler, subject's actions define its gender. In other words, she means we construct and form our gender identity through repeating certain behaviors and actions. Influenced by Foucault, Butler lays considerable emphasis on the fact that gender is constructed in culture and social discourse. Furthermore, she demonstrates that "identity categories are fictional products of these regimes of power/knowledge or power/discourse" (2008: 17). Judith Butler claims that the division of sex and gender is a false and artificial categorization imposed by the dominant discourse. In Other words, not only gender but also sex is culturally



constructed by social contribution. According to Butler, in a heterosexual society one is forced to be entitled as a man or a woman.

Butler holds that “the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all” (1990: 178). Consequently, if there were no repetition of actions, there would be no gender production. Furthermore, she argues that this repetition of actions is inevitable and occurs all the time. Actually, for Butler the concept of gender is performative exclusively through repetition of actions. It is worth mentioning that although one’s sex is biologically fixed, for Butler gender is not already determined and could be susceptible to change. This is why she claims there is no difference between sex and gender, because both of them are dependent on culture and a product of societies.

In “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*” (1986) Butler argues, “all gender is, by definition, unnatural” (35). According to her, subject’s gender is not natural and is not an instinctive feature that one is born with. In other words, it is constructed through repetitive actions. Moreover, as gender is essentially depended on actions, she claims that body does not determine a subjects’ gender. Therefore, it is possible to be a women but not having a female characteristics. This is the repeated actions and behaviors of oneself that define her/his gender. Additionally in her article, “Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig and Foucault” she maintains that “gender is a choice” (128) and the subjects make choice on their own. Therefore, in Butler’s opinion, we choose to produce our own gender by doing specific actions. Regarding Butler, this choice is not the same as choosing something. It refers to choosing to perform particular actions that will lead to the production of a particular gender.

One can thus argue that gender is not something innate or inbred; it is only through acting, or doing things repeatedly, that one can successfully establish his/her gender. Naturally, the question which arises here is that if one build his/her gender? According to Butler, “gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (1988: 191). Based on the definition provided by Butler, Gill Jagger asserts that “gender is a matter of the repetition of gender acts” (2008: 28), noticing that one’s identity consists of such acts



and that the “sense of a psychological interiority”, and they are “fictional products of reproductive heterosexuality” (8).

The identity of the subject would be the product of heterosexuality. However, the notion of heterosexuality itself includes significant regimes in which Jagger argues Butler’s claim that “identity categories are fictional products of these regimes of power, power/knowledge or power/discourse rather than natural effects of the body (17). Therefore, one can contend it is not the body or natural body that produces one’s identity; it is the regime of power that functions in these terms. However, this production is “fictional” as Butler says. Jagger argues that by the idea of fictional Butler tries to demonstrate that those categories “do not pre-exist to the regimes of power/knowledge but are performative products of them” (17). Therefore, this is “first power/knowledge” regimes which produces those categories and do not exist prior to them (power, and knowledge), and they are constructed performatively by those regimes.

3.2. Performativity of Gender

The concept of performativity is in close affinity with gender. Derrida influenced Butler by his deconstruction theory and his notion about the illusion of fixed meaning. Judith Butler employs these ideas and focuses on gender as being in constant change through various actions that a subject does. Therefore, for Butler gender like language is not fixed. We should pay particular attention to the contradiction between performance and Performativity that she makes. Butler in an interview argues that performance is different from performativity because “the former presumes a subject, but the latter contests the very notion of the subject” (1994). Moreover, gender performativity is not already fixed and stable. However, for Butler, performance is stable and already determined. It is worth noting that in gender performativity we do not choose to do and perform, on the contrary we do it by repetition.

Establishing one’s gender is determined and influenced by one’s actions. Moreover, these actions are not limited to one’s biological and physical body. According to Butler, our gender identity is built through repetitive actions that we do, and not a singular one. In “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” (1988) maintains that “gender reality is



performative, which means it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (527). For Butler, performativity and gender identity do not pre-exist because both of them are socially produced in a heterosexual society. Butler argues that gender becomes performative by the actions we do, thus according to her ideas gender is performative. Therefore, one is able to move beyond the common norms of society by acting against those norms and traditional beliefs.

What Butler highlights as performative is completely different from that of performance, as it has been noted earlier. Performative is not what one chooses, whether by intention or not, rather it is what one does repeatedly. Butler’s performative notion includes “acts, gestures”, and it is the “repetitious citations of sex and gender” (Craver, and Chambers, 2008: 43). For Austin language was by some means “referential”, since he contended that when there is no “referring” then there would be no “meaning”. However, what Butler focuses on is the “context”. For Butler “juridical realm” is highly significant since contexts are established through it by “citationality, practices, and repetition” (38). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that defining the meaning of the notion of “performativity” is to some extent controversial, in that it “might change over time” (1990: xv). This notion does not refer to any act that is single; however, as she puts it:

Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition of a ritual, which achieves its effect through its naturalization in the context of body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration (xv).

As it has been highlighted in *Gender Trouble*, one’s gender identity is established through the acts one does. One could argue that the notion of “performativity” is relevant to Nietzsche’s statement, since he claims “there is no being behind doing, effecting, becoming the doer, is merely a fiction added to the deed, the doer is everything” (34).

Therefore, it is performativity that brings the subject into existence, and it is the performativity of gender which makes a coherent relation between identity categories. Thus, when one’s performative gender performs the acts, it makes the incoherent “discourses” understandable by the acts it does, in that it makes the subject, by performing the very act, and through those performances, the “I” of the subject is constructed.



4. Reading *Gone Girl*: A Butlerian Treatment

4.1. Formation of Gender in the Female Characters

According to Butler, we do not inherit our gender from the day that we are born but rather we construct our gender through actions. What one does is significant for defining who one is. Gill Jagger argues, "Gender [for Butler] is a matter of the repetition of gender acts" (2008: 28). Moreover, Butler claims that in a male dominant society those who are in power considerably influence how one's identity is constructed resulting in some degree of ingenuity. It should be noted that according to Judith Butler, gender does not pre-exist but rather it is constructed through actions every individual takes. The following sentences and quotations will demonstrate the construction of gender identity in the selected novel. For instance, the following quotation describes Amy through Nike's perspective:

I could feel Tanner's doubt. I needed to really show him Amy's character. Her lies, her vindictiveness, her score-settling. I needed other people to back me up that my wife wasn't Amazing Amy but Avenging Amy (2012: 244)

In this quotation, Nick is talking to his sister and his defense attorney about Amy's deceitfulness. He describes Amy as liar and revengeful. People unanimously think that Amy has been kidnaped or murdered and they have a feeling of pity for her. In the novel, most characters blame Nick for being cruel toward his pregnant wife. Moreover, they have had this conversation after the disclosure of the affair that Nick had had with his student. For that reason, no one believes him, even his twin sister. Nevertheless, Nick is right about the real character of his wife Amy, because she falsely frames Nick as a malicious person and the prime suspect for her disappearance. By amazing Amy, he means the girl character in a famous children's book series that her parents Rand and Marybeth Elliott wrote based on their child, Amy.

For Judith Butler the contradiction between sex and gender is rooted in the question of being pre-existent. While sex pre-exists before the construction of the subject, this is not the case for gender. According to Butler, gender is constructed in



culture and through acts that one does. For instance, Amy says “I’ve always thought I could commit the perfect murder. People who get caught get caught because they don’t have patience; they refuse to plan” (2012: 248). We normally do not expect women to seek revenge like that. This quotation indicates that Amy has built her gender against the cultural norms and traditional beliefs, because “the norm of heterosexuality is constantly reinforcing itself” (2011: 31) on the minority groups in society. Therefore, she is not showing feminine attitudes. She is more masculine and her attitudes are a departure from the social norms.

The divorce of Maureen, Nick’s mother, from his bad-tempered father is an example which well demonstrates the concept of gender in the novel. According to Judith Butler, a gendered subject is able to change his/her condition because gender is not fixed and it is dependent on the actions of its doer. The following instance vividly depicts the idea of Judith Butler:

My father, a mid-level phone-company manager who treated my mother at best like an incompetent employee. He never beat her, but[...]Throwing things near her but not exactly at her[...]So my father went away and my thin, pained mother got fat and happy – fairly fat and extremely happy[...]Within a year, she’d morphed into the busy, warm, cheerful lady she’d be till she died, and her sister said things like ‘Thank God the old Maureen is back,’ as if the woman who raised us was an imposter. (69-70)

In this quotation, Nick is associating his problematic past life to his family. The days he and other members of the family were suffering because of their bad-tempered father. Bill Dunne, Nick’s father, hates women and his misogynistic attitude toward his wife is unbearable. As Nick narrates that his father thinks women are stupid and are not worthy of any consideration, Nick’s father behaviors make Maureen Dunne thin and ill. She finally gets a divorce. After the separation, she becomes healthy making everyone surprised with changes in her mood. She now is warm and kind enjoying her life. Some years later, she gets ill and dies in peace.

Judith Butler maintains that gender is not an object that one chooses and after sometime throws it away for another one. On the contrary, gender is constructed through actions. Moreover, she claims that gender is a process that is built with the passage of time and through determined actions. Butler argues, “the social norms



that constitute our existence carry desires that do not originate with our individual personhood” (2004: 2). Although at first she endures the aggressive behavior of her husband, she finally breaks the norms of the male dominant society and gets a divorce. Butler also believes that gender is not fully formed and is prone to constant change.

Another character who deserves our attention is Margo Dunne. She is Nick’s twin sister and a support for his life. As an example, Margo was supportive to Nike throughout the challenging experience of Amy’s lost. As it was mentioned earlier, for Butler there is no distinction between gender and sex and both of them are culturally constructed. Butler claims that it is possible to be a woman biologically while having attitudes and manners of a man. In this example, Nick’s sister Margo Dunne, is acting like a male character. She also indicates elements of a masculine personality in the difficult situations that Nick is going through:

Don’t let her worry you.’ Go lit a cigarette. She smoked exactly one a day. ‘Women are crazy.’ Go didn’t consider herself part of the general category of women, a word she used derisively. I blew Go’s smoke back to its owner. ‘Wow.’ My sister cocked her head back[...].Jeez. Fuck. Dude. That came fast.’ She blew more smoke toward me, a lazy game of cancer catch. (25)

In this excerpt from the novel, Nick and Margo are in the bar talking to each other while smoking and drinking. Nick and Margo after losing their jobs are running the bar together. It is the fifth wedding anniversary of Nick and Amy and they are talking about Amy. Margo tells Nick that he should take control of his life and never allow Amy to manipulate him. Margo is meticulous about her smoking and smokes only one a day. She does not consider Amy as an ordinary woman and Nick agrees with her as well. For Nick, Margo is more than a sister. She is the most trustable person that Nick has in his life.

Judith Butler debunks the common ideas about sex and gender that one’s sex determines one’s gender. She argues that there is no priority for sex in comparison to gender. It is worth noting that for Butler one’s sex and gender define one’s body because both gender and sex are constructed in society and culture. For Butler “identity categories are fictional products of these regimes of power/knowledge or power/discourse” (2008: 17). For instance, in the abovementioned extract of the



novel, Margo is smoking and acting in a way we normally expect a man to do. In addition, there are numerous examples in the novel proving that her personality is stronger and more masculine than Nick. For instance, she tells dirty jokes and additionally, during the difficult period of Amy's disappearance while no one is around to help, calms Nick.

4.2. The Performative Gender of the Central Female Character

Judith Butler takes the view that constructing one's gender falls into two categories. One is doing actions against the social norms and the other refers to those actions that are in line with the traditional beliefs honored in a society. Butler in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) argues, "Performativity is [...] not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms" (12). Therefore, according to Butler taking specific actions repeatedly will construct one's gender. It also demonstrates that one's gender is performative. It is worth noting that Butler is of the opinion that the concepts of gender and performativity are in close affinity. The following quotation is about detective Rhonda Boney, a police officer:

Rhonda said. 'Don't you think? He reminds me of you, actually. Real golden boy, baby of the family [...] Where you were the morning your wife went missing,' Boney said [...] And you still can't recall anyone seeing you there?' Boney asked [...] Rhonda [...] infuse the room with a mood of her choosing, like an octopus and its ink [...] Where'd you buy your coffee that morning? [...]] Could tighten the time frame at least, right? (188-89)

After Amy's disappearance, Nick calls police for further interrogation in this regard. Detective Rhonda Boney and Detective Jim Gilpin are then looking for evidence about Amy. The prime suspect is Nick and they are questioning him while searching their house. Detective Boney calls Nick a boy that reminds her of her little brother. She is asking him about the time of disappearance and if he has any witness to prove his sayings. Nick admits that she is a very serious and good cop, although she is a woman. Detective Boney frequently asks questions and interrogates Nick to find the truth behind Amy's disappearance.

In this example, Detective Boney not only is repeatedly asking questions about Amy but also is doing her routine job as a police officer. According to Judith Butler,



what makes a gender to become performative is doing actions repeatedly and for a long period of time. When interrogating Nick as a police officer, Rhonda Boney goes through a performative gender formation. Perhaps these quotations will best demonstrate the true personality of detective Boney “[Detective] Gilpin [...] I tell my wife [...] I don’t know how to iron [...] I can’t cook [...] I’ll catch the bad guys [...] Boney [told him] I catch bad guys too, idiot.” (193). These quotations unearth the fact that she is not like an ordinary woman spending most of her time doing typical feminine duties like washing or cleaning. She is more masculine based on her routine actions. Being a detective entails asking questions frequently in an authoritative manner. Therefore, her gender is performative and her actions are against the norms of the society.

Another character who vividly depicts the concept of performativity is Amy, the central character of the novel. For Butler, one does not choose the performativity. On the contrary, it is constructed through repetitive actions. Moreover, this is not one’s body which determines one’s gender. One’s gender is shaped and constructed through actions that one does frequently. The following sentences will demonstrate this notion of Judith Butler:

Now, I like a writer party, I like writers, I am the child of writers, I am a writer. I still love scribbling that word – WRITER – any time a form, questionnaire, document asks for my occupation. Fine, I write personality quizzes, I don’t write about the Great Issues of the Day, but I think it’s fair to say I am a writer. I’m using this journal to get better [...] But really, I do think my quizzes alone qualify me on at least an honorary basis. Right? (16)

Here Amy has been invited by one of Carmen’s good friends to a writer’s party. Amy is amazed for being among a number of great writers. She likes to be called a writer and her parents are famous writers too. She frequently claims to be a writer and that writing is her job. She is also proud of her talent and skill as a writer. Meanwhile, she meets Nick and their affairs begins. It should be noted that the whole novel is about the diary that Amy has written. The act of writing is significant since she does it repeatedly.

As it was mentioned before, for Butler a gender is performative only and only by actions that one does. Those acts should also be repetitive. In the novel, Amy



constructs her gender by the act of writing. She also develops her thought and true personality by writing which she is not able to reveal in her conjugal life with Nick. According to Butler, “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition” (1990: xv). In fact, by the repetition of the act of writing Amy makes her gender to become performative. According to Butler, gender is not fixed, therefore, one is able to change and rebuild his/ her gender through repetitive actions. In the novel, Amy through repeating the act of writing is able to shape and build her gender identity.

Butler in *Gender Trouble* argues that performance and Performativity are in marked contrast to each other. For Butler, performance is associated with a kind of “speech act model” (2008: 21). Butler claims that performance is stable and already determined while gender performativity is not already fixed and stable. In the novel, Amy avenges Nick for his behaviors and in particular for having affair with his student. However, this is not the only time Amy does such an action. Amy has displayed such behaviors before toward her ex-boyfriends. Therefore, according to Butler she performs her gender by the repetition of certain actions. In the following quotation, Amy is talking to Nick about killing Desi Collings and all of her conflicts:

The baby was a lie [...] My wife as a murderer was frightening, repulsive [...] the fear of blood was a lie [...] I found some twine in one corner of his basement [...] Whenever Desi wasn't around, I'd tie the pieces as tight as I could around my wrists and ankles so they'd leave these grooves [...] I took a wine bottle, and I abused myself with it every day [...] for a rape victim. Then today I let him have sex with me [...] I slipped some sleeping pills into his martini. (406)

These sentences clearly depict the real personality of Amy. She is talking with Nick about the reasons for killing Desi. It is highly unlikely for Nick that the whole story of the baby was a lie. After losing her money, Amy returns to her ex-boyfriend Desi Collings for devising a new plan. She then realizes that Desi also tends to be a dominant male and to control his environment. She therefore decides to return home and kill him. From the provided quotation, we can distinguish that she is meticulous and careful with her plans. She manages to build a trap for Desi and after framing him as a rapist, attempts to kill him. She decides to give a chance to Nick after



returning to home. In addition, she gets pregnant by him. Nick is finally forced to stay with her for the sake of the baby.

In the novel, Amy manipulates several characters such as Desi Collings, Hillary Handy, Tommy O'Hara and Nick. Her plans and actions for controlling and manipulating others are above any male character in the novel. According to Butler, she has performed her gender by doing specific actions for a long time; therefore, her gender is performative. Although she is physically and biologically a woman, she is not a female, because as Butler argues gender is a cultural and social construct. She framed the rape scene more than once and abused other people and characters of the novel like Tommy O'Hara. For example, Tommy O'Hara claims that after spending one night with Amy "The next thing I know, two cops are at my door, and they've done a rape kit on Amy, and she has wounds consistent with forcible rape. And she has ligature marks on her wrists" (2012: 292). This reveals that she has done this act and behavior more than once and repeatedly. In fact, she is a gendered subject who stands against the male dominant society and gradually constructs her gender. She also repeats her actions that determine her gender as performative.

5. Conclusion

This analysis demonstrated how the major characters built their gender through doing specific actions. In addition, it proved the performativity of their gender by focusing on the repetition of those actions. It was observed that for Judith Butler, there is no distinction between sex and gender since both of them are constructed culturally. According to Butler, there is a close affinity between gender and performativity. Furthermore, she argued that gender becomes performative via doing. For instance, In *Gone Girl* the female characters such as Amy murder and deceive other female and male characters. Margo, Nick's sister, is also represented in the novel in a fashion more reminding of a masculine existence than a female one. For instance, this feature is conspicuously demonstrated when she tells dirty jokes about Amy. Another female character is Maureen who got divorced and left her bad-tempered husband.



Detective Boney constructs her gender via doing particular police activities that shape and form her gender identity.



References

- Amato, S. A. *Female Anti-Heroes in Contemporary Literature, Film, and Television*. (Thesis), Eastern Illinois University, 2016.
- Brady, A. and Schirato, T. *Understanding Judith Butler*. Los Angeles, Calif. London: SAGE, 2011.
- Butler, J. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory". *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 1988, pp. 519-531.
- Butler, J. *Bodies that Matter*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Judith Butler [interviewed by P. Osborne & L. Segal]. *Radical Philosophy*, Vol. 67, 1994, pp. 32-39.
- Butler, J. *Gender Trouble*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Butler, J. *Undoing Gender*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Butler, J. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 1988, pp. 519-531.
- Butler, J. "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," in *Yale French Studies*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986, pp. 35-41.
- Butler, J. "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig and Foucault", in *Feminism as Critique: Essays on the Politics of Gender in Late-Capitalist Societies*, Benhabib, S. and Cornell, D. (Eds.), Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987, pp. 129-42.
- Craver, T., Chambers, S. *Judith Butler's Precarious Politics*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Fitriyani, Kh. *The Representation of Masculinity as Seen through the Spouse in Gillian Flynn's Gone Girl*. (Thesis), Jember University, 2016.
- Flynn, G. *Gone Girl*. Great Britain: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2012.
- Jagger, G. *Judith Butler: Sexual politics, Social Change and the Power of the Performative*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.



- Kanjilal, R. "In Search of Real Amy: An Analysis of *Gone Girl*." *Arts and Educational International Research Journal*, Vo. 3, No. 1, 2016, pp. 102-104.
- Medd, J. (Ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*. Cambridge: Carleton University, 2015.
- Osborne, P. "I'm the Bitch that Makes You a Man: Conditional Love as Female Vengeance in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*." *Gender Forum*, No. 63, 2017, pp. 4-29.
- Salih, S. *Judith Butler*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Vahlne, E. C. (). "Everybody Loves a Bad Girl: A Study of Female Evil in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* and Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*". *English Studies, Centre for Languages and Literature*, 2018. <http://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/8936991>. [Accessed 27 March 2019]
- Veraldy, M. A. *Marital Conflicts between the Main Characters and Parents-In-Law in the Novel Gone Girl*. (Thesis), Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University.