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Drew Harris
DePauw University

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**The Narrative of Courtship: Literary and Biological Constructions
and their Impact on Women**

Drew Harris

DePauw University Honor Scholar Program

Class of 2020

Dr. Michael Sinowitz

Dr. Angela Flury, Dr. Jim Benedix

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Introduction

Representations of courtship within the context of the narrative provide a confounding and puzzling source of opinions and ideologies. These opinions and ideologies offer an important and pivotal source of insight into the idea of gender as either constructed through the lens of literature or biased biological theories. However, both of these perspectives have and continue to inform the roles that both men and women fulfill within the context of courtship. Thus, the overarching question becomes, how has the narrative of courtship developed and subsequently shifted over time and to what extent has this shift informed the behaviors that women exhibit within the context of courtship? Additionally, how have certain biological theories impacted or informed this shift in the narrative of courtship and what does this prevailing effect look like?

To better understand this question, two particular literary periods can be considered and compared including literature derived from both the 18th century as well as contemporary society. Although both of these periods reflect a wide range of novels that communicate predominate ideologies surrounding the development of courtship, two particular novels derived from the 18th century can be examined. These include Samuel Richardson's 1740 epistolary novel, *Pamela*, as well as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Within each of these novels, both Richardson and Austen simultaneously address various troubling and complex qualities associated with the idea of courtship. Through the recognition of these qualities and a persistent drive to draw their own personal conclusions regarding these qualities, both authors offer their own distinct approach to understanding how both men and women engage in the legacy of courtship.

In comparing 18th century novels such as *Pamela* and *Pride and Prejudice* to contemporary texts, shifts in the subsequent portrayal of courtship within the context of the

narrative can be seen. To illustrate this point, Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* can be considered. Flynn's novel offers the portrayal of a primary female protagonist who vehemently denies the subservient role that women have been encouraged to fulfill within the context of courtship. Through this protagonist, Flynn constructs a relationship that seems to question the legacy of courtship that both Austen and Richardson substantiated within 18th century literature. In this, Flynn's novel elaborates upon the shifts that have occurred with respect to traditional notions of courtship while simultaneously questioning the approach towards courtship that both men and women embody within a contemporary context.

Despite these shifts in the legacy of courtship and the subsequent behaviors that this shift encourages from both men and women, prevailing biological theories can be examined as an additional facet that contributes to the method of engagement with the notion of courtship. Within these biological theories, the emotions provoked within characters and the motives that they apply to the success of their courtship are impacted by the very biological components that govern our thoughts and actions. However, these biological theories also present an important conundrum in that the construction of these theories were continually foreshadowed by the biologist's very own biases. Thus, certain biological theories regarding women have led to the development of a contradictory standard in which women are encouraged while concurrently discouraged to embody certain behaviors. Therefore, the biases embedded within these biological theories serve as an additional factor to consider when examining the manner with which women, in particular, interact with and interpret certain ideologies surrounding courtship.

Earlier Texts

The depictions of courtship found in Samuel Richardson's 1740 epistolary novel, *Pamela*, are troubling to modern readers. What makes them troubling is the mere notions and qualities regarding courtship. Within this novel, Richardson constructs the inappropriate and abusive relationship between the main character *Pamela*, a 16-year-old maid, and her employer, Mr. B. While Richardson takes his reader on a journey of both confusion and frustration infused with moments of extreme moral clarity, he ultimately constructs a novel that establishes a clear reflection of the ideas surrounding courtship during this time. We can find echoes of this within Jane Austen's 1813 novel *Pride and Prejudice*. In short, the troubling and complex qualities of courtship established within *Pamela* resemble as well as juxtapose themselves to the courtship ideologies that Austen establishes. Through this juxtaposition, the following question can be considered: to what extent is the legacy of how both men and women engage in courtship changed over time?

I'd like to begin by considering the essential relationship that exists between social class and courtship within *Pamela*. This conversation and sense of fluidity between social class and courtship clearly reflects itself within the relationship between Mr. B and Pamela. Because of the differences between social classes, it's impossible to understand Mr. B's courtship without identifying the role of social class in their relationship. In this relationship, each character represents an entirely different and distinct social class. While Mr. B, a wealthy squire, can always rely or fall back on his money; however, Pamela never has much of her own. In fact, Pamela signifies a much lower social class when compared to Mr. B as the primary servant of Mr. B's Bedfordshire's estate. This rather obvious difference in social class between Pamela and Mr. B substantiates a power imbalance between these two characters. This hierarchy,

particularly Mr. B's place in the hierarchy, awards Mr. B the freedom to seek his pleasure and sexual gratification regardless of Pamela's position. Richardson presents Pamela as a young servant whose ongoing distance from her family perpetuates a state of vulnerability. This vulnerability, while continually illustrated, is initially alluded to by Pamela's desire to return home. In a letter responding to her desire to return home, Pamela's parents express how excited they are that she will be returning home as "innocent, and happy, and honest" (69). However, after learning of Pamela's intentions to leave, Mrs. Jervis encourages a source of guilt within Pamela as a "child half as dear to me as you are" while simultaneously discussing Pamela's intentions to Mr. B. In this, through Mrs. Jervis's actions, Pamela is intentionally placed in this state of vulnerability as she's being made to feel guilty for leaving while coincidentally being "turned away" by her master (70). In this, Pamela is in fact reprimanded for her desire to return home, acquiring a guilty conscience with respect to Mrs. Jervis while successfully angering and disappointing her master. However, Pamela's vulnerability provides an avenue of manipulation and deceit on behalf of Mr. B. that's further solidified through a clear class discrepancy between these two characters. And within this avenue of manipulation is an unspoken level of excusability regarding Mr. B's potential actions, actions that are both encouraged by characters as well as covered up and protected by characters like Mrs. Jervis. However, this excusability in large part grounds itself within this hierarchy that flourishes upon differences in social class.

The willingness of Richardson to excuse Mr. B's actions is made clear within the letters that Pamela constructs to her parents in which Pamela remarks about Mr. B's "affable and sociable state" (47). This description of Mr. B's oddly pleasant and jovial state following the death of his mother provokes several moments of concern within Pamela's parents who remark upon this inherent "fear" that Pamela would "reward him with her jewel, her virtue which no riches...can

make up” (46). Pamela’s parents potentially arrive at this source of concern due to source of manipulation embedded within the death of Mr. B’s mother that’s subsequently available for him. In essence, Mr. B could potentially coerce Pamela into losing her virtue through potential sexual favors as a method of helping Mr. B grapple with the death of his mother. Although this might potentially seem rather far-fetched, I’m attempting to place myself within the position of Pamela’s parents whose utmost concerns revolve around the safety and successful future of their daughter. For modern readers, including myself, it may seem that her parents are overly focused on her virtue.

This intense focus on Pamela’s virtue speaks to the unfortunate reality and prevalence of the “sexual double standard” defined by Ruth Bleier in her book *Science and Gender: A Critique of Biology and its Theories on Women*. Bleier begins her definition and subsequent critique of this double standard by stating that the “generalizations” that sociobiologists make with respect to actions of each sex inadvertently confine each sex to particularly constraining characteristics. These “sociobiologists leap from some obvious facts...to sweeping and unwarranted generalizations about...presumed female and male innate characteristics” (19). These innate characteristics embody the assumption that “women are coy, choosy, and fussy” while “males are fickle and promiscuous” (19). Here, the question becomes, how did sociobiologists jump to these “unwarranted generalizations” (19)?

When attempting to answer this question, the prevailing biological idea is that women are bestowed a certain number of eggs that as time continues become increasingly less viable. Because of the female sex’s biological predisposition to successfully carry a healthy fetus to term, the female must choose wisely with respect to the individual she mates with. This “choosy” characteristic therefore resides from a cost to benefit analysis. What is the cost associated with

mating knowing that the energy investment required to sustain a healthy fetus is incredibly large? Is this energy investment worth it knowing that the mate presents advantageous characteristics for the future offspring? From this biological scenario comes the common stereotype applied to women in that women are particular and “choosy” (19). This “leap” from a known biological phenomenon to characteristics that are not necessarily rooted in science implies that these characteristics must “ascribe a biological basis to such social phenomena” (20). This phenomena includes the “marital fidelity for women” in which an odd source of winning and losing transpired between men and women. This establishes a biological upperhand in which a “woman stands to lose much less by her husband’s sexual infidelity” than “a husband stands to lose by his wife’s infidelity” (20). This is due to the fact that the husband would be “helping to rear children who do not bear his genes” (20).

Here is where Bleier introduces the idea of the “sexual double standard” in which from a biological perspective, a woman’s virginity far outweighs a male’s infidelity. Because of this “differential valuation of virginity and differential condemnation of marital infidelity,” Pamela operates under the idea that her virtue is of the utmost importance (20). Yet, this standard has two lasting and pivotal ramifications. First, because women tend to apply a greater investment of energy into the fetus, they will also apply the same amount of energy to her actual offspring. Second, because the amount of eggs does not compare to the continual production of spermatocytes, the competition for women increases due to a limited amount of eggs that are able to be fertilized. A male’s aggressive behavior towards females is a result of this competition, as argued by sociobiologists. As a result, a woman who conserves her virginity follows these two postulates. In maintaining her virginity, a woman ensures that the offspring contains the genetics of her partner. Additionally, in conserving her virginity, a woman presents

herself as a more competitive candidate for mating, an aggressive process due to the amount of eggs available for fertilization. Unfortunately, this dynamic leads to the “exploitation” of the female sex because “eggs are larger than sperms,” according to Richard Dawkins (20).

This exploitation of the female sex is further detailed by Ruth Hubbard in her book titled *The Politics of Women’s Biology*. Within one of Hubbard’s initial chapters titled “Fact Making and Feminism,” Hubbard describes several sources of bias that impacted the development of certain biological theories of thought pertaining to women. This “ideology of women’s nature” is described by Hubbard within the example that “a woman’s capacity to become pregnant leaves her always physically disabled in comparison to men” (26). This opinion allowed women to be placed into an inferior role in comparison to men, a role dictated by the disabling nature of their biology. Yet, Hubbard draws attention to the fact that these ideas were “produced” and perpetuated by “white, university-educated, mainly upper-class men who made up the bulk of the new professions” (27). As a result, the biological theories regarding women produced within the nineteenth century were proposed by a terribly biased source, sources that operate within an inherent fear that if women were presented as equal or even superior to men, they too would “gain access to professions” (27). Thus, although Ruth presents a rather specific example, her overarching point remains this same. The biological theories constructed about women were posited by men who wanted to eliminate the presence of women within particular spheres such as the workforce. In doing so, scholars used “these theories about women’s innate frailty to disqualify girls and women of their own race who might compete with them for education” (27). To perpetuate this phenomenon, scholars continually sought to uncover information that further reiterated or backed this overarching point. Asserting that “women’s brains were smaller than men’s” while “uteruses required more energy and rest in order to function properly,” these

scholars “proved that young girls should be kept away from schools and colleges” upon menstruation (27). As a result, the theories substantiated by predominantly white, male scholars successfully encouraged women to fall into specific roles while simultaneously discouraging the fulfillment of other roles. This ultimately lended a helping hand in the creation of this double standard. This standard operated upon a woman’s virginity that was continually valued and reverberated throughout society as a method of preserving a specific role constructed by a source that did not have a woman’s best interest in mind. In doing so, we see reverberations of these biological theories and the constraints that these theories have placed on the roles that women are capable of fulfilling within the context of courtship. These constraints are derived from a biased perspective in which women were encouraged to rest at home as their reproductive organs required an immense amount of energy, thus limiting their ability to attend school and educate themselves. Thus, in the context of *Pamela*, the emphasis placed on Pamela’s virginity serves as a mere reminder of these biological theories that purposely placed a greater source of value on the conservation of a woman’s virginity rather than potential intellectual pursuits. Therefore, the amount of effort that Richardson places on Pamela’s virginity further reverberates this double standard throughout the novel.

However, Richardson’s depictions of virtue indicate to me that virtue falls under a cloud of threats from Mr. B. While I would argue that Mr. B’s threatening actions towards Pamela’s virtue would remain consistent regardless of Pamela’s social class, I would extend this argument a step forward. Yes, class difference is nevertheless extremely important. In fact, it seems as though this sharp difference magnifies the ease with which Mr. B successfully preys on Pamela. This magnification relates quite closely to the lack of visibility or the subsequent invisibility that

Pamela's class provides. In essence, the particular class standing which automatically removes Pamela from societal attention simultaneously provides a visibility screen for manipulation and control on behalf of Mr. B. Through this screen, Richardson establishes an adequate footing of control that Mr. B utilizes. Richardson illustrates this when the series of "proposals" that Mr. B makes prior to marrying Pamela. Within these proposals, a statement and response format is substantiated in which Pamela reacts to each of the opinions that Mr. B shares. While this format seems to imply a source of confidence within Pamela to assert her opinions, Pamela ultimately concludes that because she is "a poor, weak, friendly, unhappy creature," she is ultimately and "too fully in your (Mr. B's) power" (231). Although Pamela begs Mr. B to "resolve upon my ruin," hoping that "God Almighty...touch your heart in my favour," Pamela concludes her appeals by continuing to reside under the influence of Mr. B (231). This unfortunate circumstance reflects an important shift within the novel in which Pamela recognizes that because she is "poor," she is also "weak" and this reality shelters her from exercising any sort of control over her situation.

This weakness is illustrated within the confining nature of certain sociobiological opinions. The presence of these opinions provides an opportunity for individuals to deduce or draw conclusions about the role that both men and women fulfill within society. The confining nature of these sociobiological opinions also manifests itself within the subordinate positions that women are placed within. This subordinate position is illustrated within several "biological explanations" such as the fact that a woman is inferior to her male counterpart because "childbearing and motherhood limit her productive contributions...and her participation in the public" (138). On the contrary, "man is aggressive and universally dominant because of his genes" (138). This presents a challenge as well as a source of contention with respect to

“women’s position” (140). Bleier describes the “women’s position” as a “composite of many different variables, often casually independent one from another,” a definition coined by Naomi Quinn in 1977 (140). Therefore, the singular role that a woman fulfills for society is dynamic and encompasses a wide range of environmental influences depending upon the context with which a woman is operating under. A woman’s “position” is “variously affected by class or age or kin relationships, as well as by the history of that culture” (141). To understand a woman’s role, the “particularities of their experiences” must first be considered. As a result, it is simply impossible for sociobiologists to construct an overarching role that women embody due to the sheer complexity of their actions. Thus, a delicate balance exists when drawing conclusions from a sociobiological perspective in that these conclusions can entrap women into certain roles. These roles are created in part through the opportunities that sociobiological opinions provide to extrapolate particular phrases or ideologies, using these ideologies to further confine women to particular roles (21).

To further understand the entrapment of women into particular roles, Bleier offers a thought experiment in which she encourages her audience to imagine a hunter-gatherer society in which the roles fulfilled by both sexes are “viewed as equal in worth and status” (146). Within this “contemporary nomadic gatherer-hunter societies,” both women and men carry out and complete a variety of actions. “Women are the primary gatherers of vegetable and small animal food” while also participating in “gathering expeditions about every other day” (147). This requires women to be “gone up to ten hours a day and often travel eight to ten miles from camp” (147). When the women are completing these expeditions, the men are expected to care for the children thus eradicating any source of stigma associated with men as the primary caretakers of the children.

This situation establishes a rather obvious source of equality between both men and women in that the actions that they complete are equally important and maintain the same amount of value. Because “neither girls nor boys are socialized to be child caretakers, and neither have such responsibilities,” the playing field is leveled while the burdens of child-rearing are equally distributed across both parties (147). This contemporary scenario described by Bleier still feels slightly foreign to me. In fact, contemporary society continues to praise the men who make dinner for their partners or complete a load of laundry *without* being asked, begged and reminded. This contemporary scenario does not necessarily pay recognition to the women who continue to work after giving birth three weeks prior. In fact, portions of contemporary society continue to demonize women who don’t give up their job to be stay-at-home mothers, comparing mothers to each other as a method of generating a competitive environment. Thus, through the introduction of this thought experiment, Bleier ultimately highlights the discrepancies in these reformed ideologies and what’s actually being circulated within society. In response to this situation, Bleier draws a discrete amount of attention to the fact that sociobiologists have a “tendency to play loose with both language and logic” (21). As a result, sociobiologists present such a severe contrast between the roles that men and women fulfill biologically. The severe contrast results in the alienation of women that occurs through the imprisonment within certain roles. This imprisonment ultimately renders Pamela invisible.

Richardson substantiates this invisibility initially through the disappearance of Pamela’s letter to her parents. Upon the disappearance of this letter in which Pamela describes how “truly miserable!” she is, Pamela’s voice and her opinions about her position are effectively silenced (53). This act of silencing which Pamela speculates as an attempt by Mr. B to monitor or “watch [her] very narrowly,” continues to provide the materials to build a wall of isolation (53).

However, embedded within this isolating wall is a clear source of control. This birth of control, coupled with Mr. B's efforts to remove Pamela's visibility, presents the very bread and butter for the depiction of courtship within *Pamela*. In essence, Mr. B acts as if isolating his intent is in fact how courtship should be conducted. Embedded within his intent is the implication that he needs her alone in order to properly court her. Pamela. This presents a clear contrast to Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in which the differences in social class between the main couple are not nearly as severe. Pamela, in comparison to Lizzy, has very little. Everything that she does possess, Mr. B seeks to take away. However, Lizzy, while lacking the agency of Darcy, is able to exert far more agency than Pamela. This agency reflects itself through her physical movements, her confidence in talking back to those above as well as her ability to exercise her own choice in a spouse. Thus, Richardson and Austen differ quite significantly within their construction of relationships through the absence of a drastic contrast within Austen's novel, a contrast that presents several important implications.

Pamela depicts a relationship in which social class provides a strong determinant in regards to Mr. B's relatively unnoticed behaviors by the characters. These behaviors, while somewhat identified by Pamela's parents, are readily ignored and in some respects encouraged by those that work for Mr. B. However, within the context of Austen's novel, with a decrease in severity with respect to class differences emerges a greater possibility of equality between for example, Darcy and Lizzy. This equality highlights the importance of class standing that's independent from monetary standing. By class standing, I mean the privileges that an individual inadvertently receives due to the family they were born into. This idea of class standing occupied half of the definition of "social class." Thus, within the case of Lizzy Bennet, despite the absence of immense wealth, Lizzy reflected an impressive familial status by residing from the Bennet

household. In fact, Lizzy, the daughter of a member of the landed gentry is socially superior to other characters including her uncle, a wealthy lawyer. In this, Lizzy was capable of maintaining or holding her own within the realm of social class, a capability that was simply out of reach for Pamela. This ability to maintain her own is defined by Lizzy's ability to act confidently and assert her opinions within a variety of situations, situations where other character's might've felt pressured to abide. Austen substantiates this capability of holding her own through Lizzy's strict denial of Mr. Collins's proposal.

Upon arriving at the Bennet's household, Mr. Collins requests that he "solicit for the honor of a private audience with [Lizzy]" (75). Without even asking Lizzy, Mrs. Bennet with exuberance exclaims "Oh dear! —Yes—certainly. I am sure Lizzy will be very happy" (75). As Mr. Collins provides a lengthy explanation as to why he would like to marry Lizzy including his ability to "set the example of matrimony" while adding "greatly to my happiness," Lizzy politely yet sternly declines (75). Despite this decline, Mr. Collins persists with the assumption that perhaps Lizzy will come to her senses; however, Lizzy clarifies and distinguishes herself from the pool of women in that she is "not one of those young ladies who are so daring as to risk their happiness" (77). Despite this clarification, Mr. Collins continues to assume that Lizzy is both confused and in need of convincing, an assumption that continually is refuted by Lizzy. This assumption that clarification is what Lizzy ultimately needs presents an interesting clue as to how Collins personally understands courtship. In fact, this seems to imply that Mr. Collins believes that this is part of the ritual of courting someone. This process and the overall great deal of effort that Lizzy applies in denying Mr. Collins offers a perfect illustration of Lizzy's ability to ultimately decide her fate. This illustration is one that provides multiple sources of bombardment that could've encouraged Lizzy to change her mind. Despite these ploys to

overwhelm her, Lizzy does not waver amidst the pressure of marriage. However, this privilege to remain headstrong and determined despite an absence of wealth was not available for Pamela. In fact, wealth and the ability to marry up into the hierarchy were the sole determinants of social class. Thus, if Pamela had in fact resided from a particular family despite the involvement of wealth, her social class would remain within the lower echelon of society. In this, Pamela's advancement within this period of time was solely dependent upon wealth and the success of a marriage. Pamela has the ability to marry up and this opportunity is, in some respects, more valuable than money. In fact, even if Pamela retained some sort of wealth, she would not be classified under the same class as a squire due to her biological absence from this class. Although I found myself separating the character of Lizzy from that of Pamela with respect to the overarching premise of their character arcs, the fate of both characters is quite similar. Despite this discrepancy, both characters namely Pamela and Lizzy end up in a similar position with regard to courtship and their ascent into a higher class status via marriage. In essence, both characters utilize the privileges and sources of social power that are awarded to women who marry as a method of improving their lives. Thus, despite this small incongruity, the similarities surrounding their predicaments illustrate the conservation of comparable ideologies surrounding marriage.

Although this predominant similarity prevails over both characters, I find myself returning to the level of insulation that Lizzy's familial status provides her. Although Richardson's portrayal of courtship operates upon both isolation and control, Austen's construction of courtship provides a source of empowerment and equality as opposed to coercive control. This legacy of courtship or subsequently the "secret" of *Pride and Prejudice* is described as both the "equality of intelligence and perception" according to Laura Mooneyham (45).

Within her book titled *Romance, Language and Education in Jane Austen's Novels*, Mooneyham begins her discussion regarding *Pride and Prejudice* with the idea that a rather remarkable facet embedded within the relationship between Lizzy and Darcy is in fact their intelligence and wit (45). Because the novel suggests that they are of equal intelligence, an essential "balance of power" is struck between the two main protagonists (45). This balance of power is consistently conserved throughout the novel in which the growth of one character inadvertently catalyzes the development and evolution of the personality within the other character. Thus, Austen seems to suggest that both men and women engage in courtship through the prevailing assumption that both sources of change are in fact intertwined and ultimately achieved together. This rather remarkable quality associated with Austen's novel removes the pressure that's frequently placed on women to adjust their personalities or character in order to ascend to the man's higher class status. In other words, the success of the courtship "does not hinge on the capitulation of either lover to the other" (45).

I would go beyond Mooneyham's argument and suggest that it seems as though Austen vehemently dissuades and deters these sources of pressure to solely change on behalf of the woman through Darcy's acceptance of Lizzy's sense of self. However, Darcy's acceptance of Lizzy's sense of self is in fact a source of change from his initial perturbed and annoyed approach to Lizzy's personality. Austen illustrates this quite clearly when Lizzy visits her ill sister Jane at Netherfield Park. After receiving a note from her sister Jane stating that she found herself "very unwell this morning," Lizzy in a nervous state decides to attend to Jane, concluding that "walking was her only alternative" in order to reach Netherfield Park (25). Although Mrs. Bennet discourages Lizzy from walking stating that she "will not be fit to be seen" upon her arrival, Lizzy disregards her mother's input by solely focusing on her sister Jane stating that "I

shall be very fit to see Jane—which is all I want” (25). After arriving to Netherfield Park with “weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise,” both Miss. Bingley and Mrs. Hurst are initially described as both surprised and impressed by Lizzy’s commitment to attend to her sister (26). While Lizzy assumes that Miss. Bingley, Mrs. Hurst and Darcy are all silently making assumptions about her, Austen indirectly celebrates Lizzy’s actions by describing both their “good humor and kindness” (26). However, behind closed doors, both Mrs. Hurst and Miss. Bingley ridicule and criticize Lizzy describing her as “almost wild’ with “her hair so untidy, so blowsy!” (27). Despite their obvious disapproval, Mr. Darcy does not contribute to their criticisms and in fact remarks that this “adventure” had in fact “brightened” Darcy’s appreciation and respect for Lizzy. Thus, through Darcy’s rebuttal of this source of criticism, he experiences a shift, a change with respect to how he now views Lizzy versus his previous perceptions of her. I would go as far as to say that Darcy is in favor of Lizzy’s failure to remain content, substituting complacency with care regardless of how she (Lizzy) might look. Not only do I admire this particular quality within Lizzy, I would venture to guess that both Miss. Bingley and Mrs. Hurst are perhaps envious of Lizzy’s confidence and disregard for social norms that dictate their everyday lives. However, this confidence ultimately equips Lizzy with a source of privilege while reiterating the “balance of power” between Lizzy and Darcy, two characteristics that influence the legacy of engagement within the courtship between these protagonists.

Although Lizzy has the freedom to engage in courtship without abiding by an encouraged ritual, this freedom is also mirrored within the relationship between Lizzy’s parents. Within this relationship, Austen’s portrayal of Mrs. Bennet seems to suggest that she in fact finds her to be unintelligent and dramatic. However, the portrayal of Mrs. Bennet is entirely purposeful for this

character serves as an illustration of Mr. Bennet's ability to *choose* despite the judgements he potentially receives from others. This ability to choose is remarked upon by scholar Gary Kelly who states that Mr. Bennet "has given in to courtly gallantry in choosing a merely beautiful wife" (27). In essence, Mr. Bennet rebels against a social system which encourages him to marry for social status or money, qualities that he ultimately disregards by marrying Mrs. Bennet. However, this relationship establishes an important precedent regarding courtship that prevails throughout the novel.

The precedent that the Bennet's relationship establishes cultivates a source of intellectual and moral fortitude within their daughter Lizzy. These characteristics allow Lizzy to also exercise a large amount of choice within her relationship with Darcy. In essence, Lizzy may feel as though she has a similar right to her own choices as her father did. However, crossing these gender lines is notable. With that being said, Lizzy's ability to choose is synonymous with an immense source of freedom. In other words, her ability to choose awards her a keen sense of freedom, a precedent established by her parents. Austen illustrates this quite clearly within the repercussions surrounding Lizzy's denial of Mr. Collins' proposal. Upon finding out that Lizzy has denied him, Mrs. Bennet insists that Mr. Bennet "come and make Lizzy marry Mr. Collins, for she vows she will not have him" (79). To Lizzy, Mr. Bennet states that her "mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins;" however, "I will never see you again if you do" (80). In this, Mr. Bennet's clear disapproval of Mr. Collins promotes the "headstrong" nature that Mr. Collins initially recognizes within Lizzy (79). Embedded within his response to the refusal is the assumption that Mr. Bennet will continue to support his daughter in whatever decision she ultimately makes. This support in some respects inflates Lizzy's pride and dignity, two qualities that she's ultimately required to readdress within her relationship with Mr. Darcy.

However, Lizzy's pride also establishes her as this character that denies what scholar Gary Kelly describes as "upper-class arrogance" which further mobilizes her ability to make her own decisions (28). These qualities cause Lizzy to stand out in comparison to both the female characters within Austen's novel as well as *Pamela*. In fact, these qualities provide an illustration regarding a shift in the legacy of courtship and the decisions that women were once discouraged and ultimately prevented from making.

While Lizzy's ability to choose casts an interesting spotlight on her, this spotlight is absent when examining the character of Pamela. In fact, the subsequent absence of insulation within the context of *Pamela* further magnifies several issues surrounding courtship. Pamela's state of isolation in comparison to Lizzy's insulation produces a hide and seek dynamic between Pamela and Mr. B. The spark which ultimately leads to the development of this relationship includes Mr. B's initial inquiries into the dynamic that Pamela maintains with men. Richardson illustrates this inquiry within the conversations that Mr. B has with Mrs. Jervis, the head maid at the estate. By investigating whether Pamela keeps "men at a distance" while reflecting upon the fact that Pamela was "very pretty," Mr. B's interests quickly transition into a complicated game of cat and mouse (50). However, upon receiving word of Mr. B's praise surrounding Pamela's physical presentation, Pamela does not indicate any discomfort with Mr. B's inquiries. In fact, her concerns pertain to a rather obvious source of self-criticism in which Pamela feels she must "try to deserve" praises from Mrs. Jervis (50). This is in direct opposition to the sense of insecurity that Pamela indicates regarding Mr. B's advancements towards her as portrayed within the letters constructed to her parents. I find this disparity within Pamela's opinions to be incredibly telling. In essence, when Pamela is interacting with Mrs. Jervis, she does not allude to her distaste for Mr. B's advancements; however, when writing to her parents, she illustrates her

distaste quite clearly. This seems to suggest a discrepancy in Pamela's personality. This discrepancy is defined by Tassie Williams as the "feminine duplicity." Williams argues that there's an apparent division between the interior and exterior areas of the female characters that Richardson creates and the implications that this has for 18th century gender norms. When examining this division, I've found that Richardson applies this division to the multidimensional nature of Pamela's personality. In essence, Richardson presents Pamela as a complicated individual who's viewed one way by the characters in the book and in an entirely different way by the reader. However, because we have access to both the interior and exterior layers of Pamela, the reader is capable of interpreting Pamela through a distinct light. Thus, even if we as readers strip away the exterior of Pamela, we soon discover an entire universe of complexity beneath the exterior. This multifaceted characteristic, according to Williams, complicates traditional notions of femininity in which female characters are not constructed from both an exterior and interior approach. Additionally, this complication resides within its applicability to sexuality. When defining this complication, Williams focuses on the push and pull relationship between rejecting sexual desire while simultaneously "provoking desire" within men (20). I find this disparity as an indication of the following: women needed to be viewed as sexual objects or perhaps, in a more positive light, sexual beings without explicitly revealing their own sexual desires. This goes hand in hand with the importance of preserving and potentially testing a woman's virtue. Richardson continually calls the nature of women's virtue into question through the dichotomy between associating sexual connotations with Pamela while simultaneously preventing Pamela from expressing her sexual desires. However, this dichotomy presents a compelling argument for Pamela's ability to preserve her virtue. In essence, if Pamela is able to protect her virtue amidst a flurry of sexual desire and suppression, she's worthy of marriage.

However, Williams continually remarks that although this division exists, Pamela specifically has control over this dichotomy, a dichotomy that is ultimately supported by the epistolary format of the novel.

Through this small yet important discrepancy, manifestations of the epistolary format and the fact that Richardson shows different sides to different audiences allows readers to gain a greater understanding regarding Pamela's inner thoughts. Richardson only partially presents these genuine feelings within the interactions she has with the various characters in the novel. This discrepancy alludes to the isolation Richardson surrounds Pamela with and the relationship that she carries with the characters within this novel. Lastly, although this epistolary format heavily contributes to the dynamic nature of courtship within *Pamela* by illustrating her perspective, this format reveals the interiority and depths of the woman character. This interiority within the separation of this body is what Nancy Armstrong emphasizes as the "surface" and the subsequent "depths" of the body. Thus, the novel's structure encourages an examination of the peripheral and private nature of Pamela. In fact, this examination acts as a substitution for the first person perspective which potentially achieves the same idea, a perspective that Austen's illustrates. However, the epistolary format also provides a third party perspective to Pamela's situation and the implications surrounding her impending marriage through the introduction of her parents.

Within the initial introduction of Pamela's parents, Richardson successfully highlights several issues quite clearly. These issues, as Richardson previously alludes to, pertain directly to the preservation of Pamela's virtue and the inherent fears that her parents had in maintaining this valuable asset. The rather omniscient approach to the relationship between Pamela and Mr. B also illustrates the differing roles that parents maintain within the context of marriage. For

example, the parental role that Austen demonstrates carries a comical component as indicated within the mere extravagance and desperation of Mrs. Bennet. Austen illustrates her extravagance within the primary goal that Mrs. Bennet continually focuses on, a focus that seemingly drives her to psychosis: marriage. However, readers are not encouraged to take her seriously due to Austen's mere exaggeration of Mrs. Bennet that's exacerbated by the elaborate schemes that she plans to ensure the successful pairing of each daughter.

Regardless of the subsequent humorous perceptions of Mrs. Bennet, her concerns are in fact the very opposite of absurd. They are realistic. In this, I find it interesting that despite the realistic nature of Mrs. Bennet's goals, readers often attach negative connotations to her actions. These negative connotations manifest themselves within Mr. Bennet, the central character who readily undermines Mrs. Bennet's central goal: marrying her daughters. Austen clearly reflects this level of undermining within the scene in which Mr. Bennet encourages Lizzy to entertain romantic thoughts about Wickham. Through these romantic thoughts, Mr. Bennet inadvertently inspires Lizzy to deviate from the predetermined path of marriage that Mrs. Bennet continually encourages. In fact, Mr. Bennet remarks that "next to being married, a girl likes to be crossed in love" (97). Despite Austen's comical approach towards the construction of Mrs. Bennet's character, a thread of realism continues to prevail. This source of realism that Austen associates with Mrs. Bennet's intentions also provides a rather accurate depiction of courtship during this time. Although Lizzy was capable of reflecting a level of class status due to her associated family, true upward mobility within this pre-established social hierarchy operates within the confines of marriage. Thus, similar to Pamela's situation, the characters of the novel can only achieve mobility through marriage. In this, when comparing the marital dilemma associated with

both Pamela and Lizzy, it's clear that this source of parental input created a storm of immense pressure regarding an inherent need to wed.

However, an interesting contrast arises when comparing the Bennet's to Pamela's parents. One crucial difference includes the preservation of virtue, a focus that Austen does not explicitly emphasize within *Pride and Prejudice*. This deviancy from the perspective that Mrs. Bennet provides harks back to the shift in class status that occurs when comparing *Pamela* to *Pride and Prejudice*. When examining these two particular characters, the insulation that Lizzy experiences inadvertently implies the preservation of Lizzy's virtue. In essence, the achievement of a particular class status ultimately dissipates any source of variability associated with virtue. Therefore, based upon Lizzy's class status despite the absence of wealth, her virtue was entirely protected. With that being said, it's important to note that while it seems like Lizzy's virtue is not continually endangered by others, that's not necessarily the case for everyone. Based upon the removal of Lizzy's virtue from the limelight of questioning, the concerns that the Bennet's apply to Lizzy's future shift to that of marriage. In contrast, based upon the absence of this insulation, Pamela's parents are left to protect while simultaneously identify her virtue as their utmost priority due to the absence of this insulation. This priority is continually reflected throughout the novel and is immediately established within the opening via a series of letters illustrating their concerns regarding the preservation of her virtue.

Following their remarks that the "loss of our dear child's virtue would be a grief that we could not bear," Pamela immediately replies that she would rather forfeit her life than "be dishonest in any way" (46-47). Richardson follows up on this concern when Pamela's parents learn of Mr. B's intention to wed Pamela. When they learn of his intentions, both parents fall into the trap of immense concern for their daughter stating that "now was over with their poor

daughter” as Pamela had “yielded” to the “honor” of Mr. B (315). However, Pamela’s parents are ultimately hindered from offering any substantial input within Pamela’s decisions due to their class status. In fact, this status serves as a limiting reagent within the scenario. In this, through the introduction of this parental input, the reader gains a greater understanding regarding not only the differences in class but the implications that these differences have on the priorities that parents focus on. And through this parental input, a narrative regarding courtship and the troubling qualities associated with courtship are developed. This narrative is entirely composed of the preservation of Pamela’s virtue amidst a discrepancy in class that prevents Pamela’s parents from inserting any source of parental persuasion or control within her decisions. However, this narrative is one that differs quite significantly from *Pride and Prejudice* thus illustrating how social class shifts the priorities imparted on the ideas of courtship.

Despite the lack of emphasis that Austen places on virtue, the idea of virtue continues to retain an immense amount of value and purpose within the novel. Although Austen does not specifically highlight this virtue in comparison to the significant amount of attention that Richardson places on this quality, she still hints at the role that virtue plays in substantiating a marriage. We first see the importance of virtue within *Pride and Prejudice* through the introduction of Lydia, one of the five Bennet sisters who tends to reflect a less common or popular path to marriage. Marrying in a rather sudden manner while simultaneously failing to inform her parents separates Lydia from the remainder of the Bennet sisters. This separation is derived from Lydia’s sheer willingness to make her own unique decisions despite the consequences. This particular characteristic of Lydia not only separates her from the remainder of the sisters but adds an interesting dynamic to the overarching idea of marriage. This idea is one that extends back to the importance of maintaining female purity prior to the consecration of

a marriage. This importance, although rather obvious, relates quite clearly to Richardson's *Pamela*. However, the manner with which virtue is illustrated and discussed within the two novels differs quite significantly.

Within Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, virtue only becomes a focus when a character seems to violate the standards distinctly set in place. This focus reflects itself within the character of Lydia who passionately denies the parameters that Mrs. Bennet constructs, parameters that serve as methods to facilitate proper marriages for her daughters. Because of this violation of Mrs. Bennet's standards, Lydia is immediately identified as an anomaly due to the freedom with which she parades her virtue and the absence of care that she places towards its preservation. This situation seems to imply that the idea of virtue would not have been highlighted if Lydia had not pursued a situation that potentially endangered the preservation of this value. In contrast, Pamela's virtue is identified fairly early on and is continually reiterated throughout the plot of the novel which functions upon the protection of this value. However, when comparing these two novels, it seems as though both Austen and Richardson banish these female characters that disobey or potentially threaten the preservation of their virtue. Within the context of Austen's novel, Lydia is continually reprimanded and subsequently looked down upon for endangering her virtue. This source of scrutiny with respect to virtue continues to intertwine itself within the plot of *Pamela*. This is illustrated within the character of Sally Godfrey whom after becoming impregnated by Mr. B immediately flees the country to escape further repercussions for her actions. During this escape, Ms. Godfrey subsequently gives up her parental rights pertaining to Ms. Goodwin, the child who Mr. B describes as having a "fine black eye...and is the genteleest-shaped girl" (496). Within this particular conversation, Pamela remarks that she in fact pities and mourns for Sally Godfrey due to the fact that her child, Miss. Goodwin, whom she calls "her

chiefest delight” is in fact “her shame” (497). Richardson then clarifies this grievance by adding that Sally Godfrey’s mother had in fact encouraged Mr. B to intimately spend time with Sally, knowing that her “young and inexperienced” daughter was under the influence and control of the “unsettled and wild” Mr. B. In this, through the character, Sally Godfrey, Richardson illustrates the tragic reality of young women who do not preserve their virtue. Richardson extends beyond this reality by also alluding to the unfortunate acceptance of these corrupt, deviant young men whose actions go unnoticed and undiscovered amidst the loss of a young woman’s virtue. In essence, the ease with which men prey on women such as Sally as well as their very actions is inherently disguised by the loss of a woman’s purity. Although Austen does not specifically identify this idea within her novel, the fact still remains: impure women are automatically looked down upon. Thus, while readers have interpreted Austen’s novel as a revolutionary text embedded within the literary canon, it’s clear that the overarching ideas do not significantly differ from the ideas that Richardson conveys. In fact, the characters that are continually dissected and scrutinized by others include those that subsequently tampered with their virtue.

This commonality between both novels is also illustrated within Austen’s main character Lizzy, a character who’s continually awarded as the most radical yet innovative character within the novel. Although Lizzy does in fact present several qualities that seem to disrupt the parameters that her mother, Mrs. Bennet, has tactfully put in place, Lizzy’s desires are entirely common. Thus, I find myself replacing my own perceptions of Lizzy as radical with the exact opposite. In fact, while Lizzy actively asserts her will, her desires are confined to the common desires of the culture. I ultimately identify Lizzy’s sense of conformity within her enamored state after visiting Pemberley and her subsequent immense desire to marry Darcy following her visit. Although I was rather naive in thinking that Lizzy solely wanted to marry Darcy for love, this

important sequence of events that Austen portrays seems to imply an additional facet within this quest to wed: social capital. In this, while some might argue that Lizzy in fact denies these common desires of her culture, she in fact fantasizes about the social capital that she could potentially gain upon marrying Darcy. Austen clearly illustrates this when Lizzy initially arrives at Pemberley and falls into a perpetual state of fantasy, imagining that “of this place...I might have been mistress!” (insert page number here). In conjunction with her fantasy, the physical upward movement that Lizzy experiences as she reaches the estate in which she starts at “one of its lowest points, and drove for some time” presents a visual representation of a shift in social capital (insert page number here). This shift is one comprised of an ascent to a higher status following her successful upward movement and journey to reach the Pemberley estate. Thus, through both these physical and psychological descriptions, Austen in fact places Lizzy within the common group of women during this time whose desires ultimately coalesced with respect to marriage and social class.

These desires of the culture ultimately manifest themselves within the inherent pressures and needs associated with women to marry, a process that also provides an essential boost in social standing. In this, despite the uniqueness of this main character within Austen’s novel, it’s clear that Lizzy reflects the exact opposite of revolutionary. Lizzy, despite her wit and intelligence, ultimately desires what every other woman wants: marriage. In fact, I would argue that Lydia is actually the most revolutionary character within *Pride and Prejudice* through her successful implementation of her own personal desires with her very reality. Despite this success, Lydia’s actions are not endorsed. In fact, these actions are entirely discouraged from almost all of the characters within the novel, a discouragement that ultimately relates back to the issue that arises upon the loss of virtue prior to a secured engagement and marriage. Thus,

because of the radical nature of Lydia, this character is presented as a fool. However, I find this presentation of Lydia as a fool to be rather ironic due to the fact that Austen does seem to support this idea of the revolutionary female character who does not conform to societal ideologies; yet, this revolutionary characteristic only goes so far. In fact, there's an essential boundary that Austen seems to suggest with respect to the revolutionary female. This boundary operates upon the assumption that virtue is an implied asset that is protected and subsequently never endangered. However, with respect to Lydia, the novel does not endorse this particular form of revolution and substitutes any source of applaud with dismissal. This substitution is entirely derived from Lydia's lack of care towards the protection of her virtue. In contrast to the presentation of Lydia as foolish and illogical, Lizzy is continually portrayed as the most interesting character regardless of the rather commonplace nature of her decisions that ultimately result in marriage. Therefore, based upon this conclusion, it's clear that even Austen felt the need to conform to the ideology and importance of courtship. Although her main character Lizzy seems to address courtship in a rather unconventional manner by applying individualist choices to the decision of marriage, her choice is one that the culture ultimately accepts. This acceptance provides a clear and concise illustration of the source of marital conformity that Austen applies to her novel, a conformity that maintains echoes within Richardson's *Pamela*.

Although Pamela ultimately conforms to the overarching goal of marriage, similar to that of Lizzy, her decisions as a character despite this result seem to offer distinct and unusual qualities. While Pamela ultimately achieves a greater social standing through her marriage to Mr. B, she continues to defend her original class status as a maid residing from a lower class standing. In this, Pamela's inherent fervor to maintain this source of low socioeconomic class presents her as rather revolutionary in that Pamela continues to pay respect to her status despite

the setbacks it has created for her. This source of pride is illustrated throughout the novel and serves as a direct line of communication between Pamela's life at Bedfordshire and the life she previously pursued when surrounded by her family. This pride is also a primary component of Pamela's character that extends into the interactions that she has with Mr. B. For example, upon the death of Mr. B's mother, Mr. B immediately encourages Pamela to transition into his mother's clothes and outfits. Although Pamela's initial denial of the clothes seems to reside from a place of respect for her late employer, it ultimately illustrates Pamela's unwavering loyalty to her home, regardless of the absence of wealth.

A primary example of this pride includes the source of identification that she derives from her clothes. Within the initial part of the novel, immediately following the death of her mistress, Mr. B continually bombards Pamela with a variety of gifts that are entirely reminiscent of his late mother. By providing her a "suit of my late lady's clothes," we see this initial level of encouragement, on behalf of Mr. B, for Pamela to abandon her current identity. Through this abandonment, Pamela could successfully transition into a lady of class and status that Mr. B is ultimately interested in. However, despite this stream of rewards, Pamela craves the comfort and familiarity of her clothes from home. In fact, in a letter to her parents, Pamela in a state of emotional turmoil seems to be longing for her "poor honest dress, with which fitted me out for going to this place" (57). In this, I feel as though perhaps other characters in this position would have accepted Mr. B's offers with fervor and excitement. In fact, I would venture to guess that they'd view it as an opportunity for social mobility and economic success. However, Pamela continually denies Mr. B's monetary offers. This denial is also illustrated in a series of proposals that Mr. B makes in an effort to secure Pamela's hand in marriage. Within these proposals, Mr. B states that he will provide "five hundred guineas" to which Pamela replies, "money, sir, is not

my chief good,” rejecting his offer (228). Despite her rejection, Mr. B persists offering “patterns to be sent...for chusing four complete suits of rich clothes” (229). Pamela continues to refute his offers, valuing the “pride” that she has for her “honest poverty and meanness” (229). She ultimately concludes her refusals by admitting to Mr. B that she is in fact in his “power,” knowing that “all the resistance I can make will be poor and weak” (229). However, she continues to defend her virtue stating that she will “make no freewill offering of my virtue” (229). In this, Pamela presents an interesting contrast to my expectations as a reader through the source of pride that she applies to maintaining her identity particularly amidst the pressure to claim a new identity. Thus, a portion of this legacy that Pamela contributes to her courtship includes the allegiance and loyalty that she maintains for her upbringing and home. With that being said, I find Pamela’s identity and its depiction within her loyalty to a particular social class to be rather twofold.

This multidimensional nature is one that Tassie Williams identifies as the “mask of femininity.” Williams defines this “mask of femininity” as the idea that femininity is in fact a “mask” that according to Joan Riviere presents “womanliness” as a façade to “hide the possession of masculinity” (25). Because of this mask, Riviere argues that men are in fact intimidated by the mask due to the masculine qualities and characteristics that lie behind it. Based upon this intimidation, the use of the mask can be twisted and can present the woman as “duplicitous, hypocritical” (25). In this, the mask equips females with the power of the masculine identity while inadvertently complicating the relations between men and women. This complication seems to disrupt the hierarchy by revealing an underlying source of masculinity. Richardson immediately presents this mask of femininity through the deception depicted within Pamela’s perceived identity as a poor young woman. By presenting herself as a young woman

who resides from a poor family, Pamela continually employs this feminine mask that according to Williams encourages a powerful transformation within the novel. Upon the filtering of Pamela's manner of dress through the eyes of Mr. B, Mr. B actually accuses Pamela of deception and dishonesty. This deception and dishonesty embedded within the disagreement of Pamela's outwardly appearance is what characterizes Pamela as a disingenuous character within the eyes of Mr. B (60).

However, this disguise is solely associated with Pamela's manner of dress. In this, this disguise is not necessarily associated with her personality but rather the mere manner of dress. I find this discrepancy to be rather telling. In fact, I would argue that although Pamela presents herself truthfully when dressed in the clothes from home, Mr. B's confusion surrounding her identity forces Pamela into a very specific role. This role is one that Mr. B ultimately wants her to portray. Within this role, Pamela is required to abide by "sketch of the conduct I must have expected from my wife" that Mr. B provides for Pamela shortly following their wedding (266). This conduct manual in fact requires Pamela to respond to both the physical actions as well as the emotions of Mr. B in a very particular manner. This includes ensuring that she "thinks his displeasure the heaviest thing that can befall me" in addition to simply accepting the fact that although "some men can compromise with their wives for quietness-sake; he cannot" (268). However, embedded within this list of requirements are Pamela's very own thoughts indicated in italics, offering her own unique responses to each request. Despite the absurdity of these requests, Pamela consistently seems to accept them internally. Although some provoke her to question or potentially "wish he had given his reasons for this!," she feels they are "all very tolerable" as described in one of the final letters that she writes to her parents (470). Through this response, Richardson purposely turns a blind eye to the substantiation of Mr. B's control and

influence over Pamela within these written requests. Richardson's intentional disregard simultaneously romanticizes and perhaps praises the requests that Mr. B outlines. These praises are further reiterated through Pamela's immense approval and appreciation for his requests in which she "thanked him for these kind hints, and generous assurances" indicating to him that they "made so much impression" on her mind (467). In fact, this role is slowly romanticized by Richardson as he draws a correlation between courtship and the shift within a woman's identity. This correlation seems to imply that within Richardson's depictions of courtship, women are required to shift their character in order to secure a valuable relationship. This shift is one that provides an environment that welcomes and applauds the abusive, controlling behaviors of Mr. B as the "wife...draws a veil over her husband's faults" (470). Additionally, if a woman fails to transition their character accordingly, they will not achieve a successful and sustainable relationship. Thus, the legacy of courtship in this particular novel is one that requires women to shift their identity to suit the male's perceptions.

Richardson inadvertently tackles this through the "doubleness" of Pamela's character. In fact, the duality of Pamela's character highlights her sheer beauty as she bravely holds her true identity regardless of the consequences. Through this identity, she can "define her clothing's use rather than being defined by it" (33). In this, although Pamela does in fact employ a sort of feminine masquerade, she denies any attempts to present herself as someone else. However, I'm still left in this state of confusion as to exactly why Pamela continually gravitates towards her original identity despite the consequences. One particular reason could potentially include a mere method of avoiding Mr. B's sexual advancements in order to protect her virtue. With that being said, Pamela's method of protecting her virtue through her prevailing sense of loyalty towards her identity draws an overwhelming source of criticism.

The preservation of Pamela's identity despite the potential consequences deepens my respect for her due to the influences she experiences from her culture to act in a certain way. This influence is what Dr. Melvin Konner describes as "culturally mandated performances" within his book *The Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints of the Human Spirit* (133). Konner defines these "performances" as acts that inherently "influence underlying emotions in some way" (133). When expressing certain emotions, the "stiff-upper lip, upper-crust English" require a tranquil composure regardless of an individual's circumstances. Similarly, "the Balinese chose cheerfulness" amidst a tragic, emotionally provoking accident. In necessitating a certain composure, "culture strongly shapes the expression of the emotions" (133). Despite these requirements, the differences in expectations merely reflects the "variety of cuisine" between a variety of cultures. What might pass as an excusable response within the grieving process might be looked down upon when brought into a different environment or context. Although there are discrepancies in the manifestations of emotions, each encouraged act all achieves the same result--a masking of reality. Thus, these acts or performances inadvertently disguise the reality of an individual's emotions. In the case of Richardson's *Pamela*, Pamela's feminine masquerade simultaneously preserves her identity. Pamela does not succumb or buckle under the pressure of these "culturally mandated performances" that according to Konner are pushed onto individuals like Pamela. Within the context of *Pamela*, this pressure to pretend manifests itself within the character of Mr. B who embodies the burden placed on Pamela to conform and change. Yet, due to Pamela's allegiance to her identity, Pamela is able to consistently resist these acts encouraged by Mr. B.

This immense sense of loyalty is carried by Pamela into her new relationship and social class, offering an intriguing perspective regarding the wealthy's understanding of this

hierarchical system and its expressions within marriage. This understanding is illustrated through the role of Lady Davers and the shift that Davers experiences with respect to her opinions surrounding Pamela. Within the character of Lady Davers, readers receive an additional interesting perspective from a female character who cares but returns to a level of judgment when interacting with Pamela. During the initial introduction of Lady Davers, Pamela is continually noticed and gawked at by Mr. B's sister. Through her descriptions of Pamela as a "very pretty wench" who encourages her to "keep the fellows at a distance," we see an initial investment in the outwardly appearance of Pamela on behalf of Lady Davers. This investment in hindsight is entirely composed of an obsession with molding Pamela into a woman worthy of upward socioeconomic movement. Based upon this obsession, Pamela's duality that ultimately threatens this transition into the woman that society demands is the very detail that Lady Davers continually criticizes. Despite this criticism, Pamela retains a rather obvious sense of individuality even within the midst of transitioning her life from a servant to a wealthy wife. In fact, Pamela's ability to retain her individuality and withstand sources of pressure to abandon it enrages Lady Davers.

This anger is constructed quite clearly towards the conclusion of the novel when Lady Davers visits Pamela at her newly established estate. Within a conversation that Lady Davers has with Pamela, she states that the entire wedding was in fact a sham or a farce composed of a "foolish ring, and all the rest of the wicked nonsense" (419). From the perspective of Lady Davers, her anger resides from a place of disappointment towards her social class that accepted a thief like Pamela who uses her duality as a method of protection. Lady Davers anger is important to consider due to discrepancies in both offensive and defensive aggression detailed by Dr. Melvin Konner. These discrepancies pertain to the presence of "different motives" in which

defensive aggression “has a strong fearful component” (182). On the contrary, “aggressive behavior “combines unlearned and learned components” yet each behavior that an individual or animal acts upon is composed of both offensive and defensive aggression. The aggression that Lady Davers exhibits and displays towards Pamela falls under the category of defensive due to the anxiety and distress that she experiences as Pamela attempts to assimilate into this particular social class. While the origin of her anxiety is fairly clear to see, Konner encourages an investigative strategy to the cause or root of this aggressive, angry behavior that Lady Davers evokes.

Konner’s investigative strategy is composed of multiple questions that attempt to address all angles of this aggression, an aggression that both Mr. B and Lady Davers present to Pamela. When listing these questions, Konner divides his inquiries into both personal and external environmental factors that aid in the development of this anger. For example, Konner begs the question “what events in the environment immediately triggered the behavior?” (183). Here, we see that in an attempt to better understand Lady Daver’s aggression towards Pamela, Konner encourages us to examine environmental factors that could’ve impacted her response. While this external input or stimuli does not serve as an excuse for her behavior, it offers a source of understanding with respect to her responses. It’s impossible to conclude exactly what transpired before Lady Davers approached Pamela. However, the recognition of an outside input provides a greater understanding regarding components that impact an individual’s response. In addition to this question, Konner also inquires about “what adaptive function does the behavior serve?” (183). An adaptive function implies the embodiment of new behaviors that benefit the conservation of a species. Adaptations might include physiological and genotypic alterations or mutations that introduce characteristics that improve the viability of an organism. An example of

this includes the physiological adaptation of a bird's beak. This evolutionary adaptation changes the structure and shape of the bird's beak in order for the bird to consume a variety of bugs or other insects. In doing so, birds are able to adapt to a variety of environments that might reflect varying compositions in insects and other food sources. Although Lady Daver's adaptive function is not encapsulated within a physiological or genotypic shift, the overarching premise remains consistent. Lady Daver's aggressive disposition and behavior towards Pamela presents a very unique adaptive response in that she is attempting to preserve her social class. By communicating a source of combative disapproval, Lady Davers inadvertently adapts to the possibility of welcoming an outsider into her social class. In exhibiting this particular behavior, she attempts to sequester the prestige of her social class in discouraging the conservation of Pamela's identity. In doing so, as Pamela transitions into the upper echelon of society, she enters with a clean slate in her identity, an identity that can later be defined by her newfound social class. Yet, Pamela seems to deny the efforts that Lady Davers makes in discouraging the preservation of Pamela's identity. In denying these efforts, Pamela effectively distances herself from the adaptation that Lady Davers' behavior attempts to bring about.

This presents an interesting point to consider. At the very beginning of the novel, we see Pamela as identifying with her poor parents. However, the end of the novel concludes with a source of insulation within her marriage to Mr. B. This insulation protects Pamela's identity from the threats of individuals like Lady Davers. In fact, it allows Pamela to defend her parents as "honest" and "good" while reiterating the fact that there is "no crime to be poor" (419). This very insulation is what ultimately infuriates Lady Davers in that an individual like Pamela was able to successfully transition into this socioeconomic class without abandoning her sense of self. Despite the success that Pamela ultimately achieves in preserving her identity, I find myself

returning to a rather simplistic realization. A woman's identity is ultimately protected against the opinions and actions of others if she can achieve a marriage derived from a place of economic footing. In essence, we as the readers are ultimately lead to believe that Pamela reaches a point of protection upon not only marrying Mr. B but marrying his wealth. Embedded within this reasoning is one particular implication: a woman's identity is ultimately protected upon this "possession by the masculine," a phrase coined by Williams herself. Thus, legacy of courtship is in fact a game of seizing masculine authority on behalf of the female in an effort to preserve her very own identity.

Ultimately, throughout this entire debacle, Pamela seems to sequester Mr. B's masculine authority while simultaneously gaining control over her very own identity. This is portrayed within the hidden letters that Pamela writes to her parents in an effort to illustrate the true actions of Mr. B. Although Mr. B attempts to distract Pamela from constructing these letters while simultaneously stealing them, Pamela, according to Williams, constructs a sort of "paper pregnancy" (33). This pregnancy is one in which Pamela "self-fertilizes" her own ideas without the help of Mr. B (33). In this, Pamela is truly able to think for herself, a process that's prevented due to the inundation of opinions from Mr. B. Thus, Pamela "literally embodies femininity's fruitful duplicity" in which she concurrently transitions into an entirely new life while remaining involved in the individual that she consistently is (33). This source of self-preservation particularly with respect to the pressures of courtship is an inherent part of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. In fact, some might argue that the emphasis that Austen places on retaining one's own sense of self is in fact the most redeeming quality of the novel. This emphasis is primarily portrayed through the character of Lizzy who despite an immense amount of pressure to marry, ultimately integrates her own unique opinions surrounding courtship and the notions of marriage.

These unique opinions that Lizzy continually reflects upon is in fact the primary component of her wit, a quality that according to Mooneyham has several “unforeseen effects as well” (50). One particular effect that Mooneyham describes includes the mere “nourishment of prejudice” that Lizzy’s wit continually feeds into. Thus, despite her impressive intelligence and almost intimidating nature, Lizzy in fact cultivates an inflated sense of self that’s ultimately encouraged and fostered by her wit. In this, Lizzy’s opinions that were once sources of nourishment for both prejudice and personal ego, are ultimately replaced with a more refined sense of self. Although this is continually illustrated throughout the entire novel, Austen primarily portrays these opinions not only within the relationship that Lizzy pursues with Mr. Darcy but the conversations that she has with Lady Catherine De Bourgh, a similar character to that of Lady Davers.

Upon the initial introduction of Lady Catherine, it’s clear that Austen is attempting to attach negative connotations to this character. The unpleasant characteristics and the continual negative portrayal of her seems to encourage audiences to err on the side of caution when attempting to understand this character. Although one of the most powerful and influential characters within *Pride and Prejudice*, Lady Catherine’s assertive and often overwhelming personality transitions and permeates nearly every space that she enters. However, Austen’s thoughtful and interesting construction of Lady Catherine seems to offer an intriguing commentary regarding the comparison of women both young and old throughout the course of the novel. In one particular scene in which Lady Catherine addresses Lizzy’s relationship with Mr. Darcy, Austen immediately sets the scene by describing her entrance as one reflective of an “air more than usually ungracious” (253). As Lady Catherine is paraded around the Bennet’s estate, she immediately opens her conversation with the statement that she is essentially unfit to

marry her nephew, Mr. Darcy. By assuming that Lizzy in fact lured her nephew in through “arts” ultimately leading to a “moment of infatuation,” Lady Catherine states that Darcy was lead to “forget what he owes to himself and to all his family” (256). Upon the conclusion of this conversation, Lady Catherine communicates to Lizzy that not only is she unfit to marry Darcy, she “came here with the determine resolution of carrying my purpose” and she “will not be dissuaded from it” (257). This particular conversation is oddly reminiscent of the multiple conversations that Pamela has with Lady Davers, a character who, like Lady Catherine, finds Pamela to be entirely unfit for marriage to Mr. B. Despite these similar conversations, an important contrast arises.

While Lady Davers attempts to mold Pamela into the individual that Mr. B requires for a proper courtship and ultimately a marriage, Lady Catherine makes no attempt to revise or potentially refurbish Lizzy’s character. In fact, Lady Catherine simply states that the marriage between Lizzy and Mr. Darcy will not be taking place. This discrepancy seems to indicate two entirely distinct caveats of courtship within *Pamela* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Within Richardson’s depictions of courtship through the lens of Lady Davers, the courtship between two individuals encompasses a shift in the identity of the woman to fit the desired perceptions of the male. This shift, if achieved properly, ultimately results in a marriage in which the woman eventually reflects, according to Williams, these “possessions of the masculine.” These possessions inadvertently insulate the woman from further criticism by others. However, Austen does not seem to suggest any sort of shift in a woman’s identity in order to achieve marriage. In fact, through the character of Lady Catherine, Austen seems to suggest that a successful courtship and marriage does not require a shift in the identity of the female. Despite the pressures and criticisms that Austen communicates through characters like Lady Catherine, a character

similar to that of Lady Davers, a courtship will take place regardless of the opinions of others. In fact, I would argue that Austen purposely incorporates Lady Catherine as a mere catalyst that attracts and illustrates Lizzy's opinions surrounding courtship in which she "will not be intimidated into anything wholly unreasonable" (258).

This is where we return to an essential difference between *Pamela* and *Pride and Prejudice* with respect to courtship. While both novels seem to imply that individuality and retaining one's independence is a primary component of courtship, the fluidity with this retention differs between the novels. Within *Pamela*, although virtue and the protection of virtue plays a primary role within Pamela's very own individuality, she does in fact experience a rather noticeable shift in her individuality upon marrying Mr. B. This shift can be attributed to the "possession by the masculine" in which Pamela derives a source of comfort and protection for her individuality within the bounds of marriage. However, in the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, the individuality of Lizzy is entirely stagnant and remains protected, regardless of her marriage to Mr. Darcy. This protection is clearly illustrated through the conversation that Lizzy has with Lady Catherine in which Lizzy almost explicitly states that she will continue to pursue a relationship with Mr. Darcy regardless of the consequences. Despite the stagnant nature of her individuality, it's important to consider the potential reasons that scholars have offered as a method of explanation. In one particular piece, Mooneyham concludes that Lizzy's independence and freedom is in fact awarded to her by her beauty and attractiveness. In this, because "Elizabeth's attractiveness is in part a function of her freedom and independence," a large portion of Lizzy's inherent character is gifted to her by factors she cannot control. This, in my opinion, almost demotes and reduces the seriousness and perhaps difficulty of maintaining one's individuality and freedom. In essence, if this freedom is dependent upon her physical

appearance, one that she cannot entirely control, to what extent is Lizzy playing an active and tangible role within the preservation of her freedom? Based upon that question, it's important to note that Lizzy, while not explicitly stated, seems to look forward to the opportunities and privileges that will be rewarded to her upon her marriage to Mr. Darcy. Austen clearly illustrates this within her descriptions of Lizzy's visit to Mr. Darcy's estate, a visit that is shortly followed by Lizzy's infatuation and immense desire to marry Mr. Darcy. This interest in the opportunities of marriage that Lizzy quickly becomes aware of is something that is rather ignored by Pamela. In fact, Pamela's fight to retain her individuality amidst the pressure to change is a factor embedded within her desire to remain within her socioeconomic class. This particular difference between Pamela and Lizzy provides an additional source of discrepancy regarding the mere virtuous nature of Pamela. This honorable characteristic is, in Ian Watt's opinion, what caused *Pamela* to stand out.

When examining Watt's opinions illustrated in the source titled "Samuel Richardson: Pamela," he suggests that what caused Pamela to stand out is in fact Richardson's focus on virtue with respect to a servant girl (43). Because "Richardson attributed such motives to a servant girl," he presents a rather visionary approach due to his departure from a clear separation between "high and low life" (43). He continues this separation through the marriage between a servant and a wealthy individual or "the rakish squire versus the humble but virtuous maid" (44). This, according to Watt, "lends the story a much larger significance than the purely individual matters at issue between the protagonists" (44). In this, Richardson's failure to substantiate a clear difference between the "high and low life" in fact permeates the story with a small yet noticeable level of equality between the two main protagonists. Although this source of equality is rather short lived, ultimately disappearing into the background of their relationship, it's

important to pay attention to. This departure which unintentionally equates the two main protagonists is also illustrated within Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Although Austen substantiates this equality in a more substantial manner, Mooneyham identifies a more convoluted yet integral piece to this puzzle: "the treatment of language" (46). Although Austen's initial "treatment of language" according to Mooneyham suggests a rather clear separation between two distinct methods of language employed by both Darcy and Lizzy, they come to an important point of conflict. Within this particular point in which the "two systems of language and thought clash openly for the first time," Darcy and Lizzy reach a point of equilibrium. This point of equilibrium, although inherently contradictory, is ultimately achieved through the presentation of truthful and emotionally charged opinions presented by both protagonists. Because "neither Elizabeth or Darcy hold anything back," the "months of prior misunderstanding on either side are swept away" (46). This process, although rather confusing and uncomfortable in the moment, ultimately brings these two protagonists together within a space that welcomes the opinions of both individuals. Through this space, a new language is rebuilt and reconstructed allowing the romance to slowly manufacture itself throughout the process (47).

Watt follows this up by concluding that although the novel presents a mere reflection regarding the function of courtship, the actual conclusion encourages a transformation on behalf of both characters. In this, not only did Pamela experience a shift in character when ascending to a higher class status, so too did Mr. B. However, this shift involved the "complete re-education in the proper attitude to sex and marriage" (44). Although Watt clarifies this shift by alluding to a sort of equality that was achieved within the moral hierarchy of courtship, I would argue that this shift that Mr. B supposedly experiences is in fact another method of concealing his actual actions and opinions. This method of concealment, although illustrated quite clearly within Mr. B's

rather specific list of requirements for Pamela, seems to be a rather predictable facet of Mr. B's character. Although Richardson continually reiterates the ease with which Mr. B is able to conceal his actions, the most remarkable yet horrifying facet of this argument includes the sources of collaboration that are readily available for Mr. B including Mrs. Jewkes. This unfortunate circumstance is illustrated quite clearly within Mr. B's successful attempt to sexually assault Pamela. Within one of the earlier scenes following Mr. B's initial attempt to seduce Pamela, Mr. B disguises himself as one of Pamela's lady maids. As he "kissed [her] with frightful vehemence," Mr. B ultimately exclaims that Pamela is "in my power!" unable to "get from me, nor help yourself" (242). However, we ultimately learn that the triumph of Mr. B's planned assault is in fact attributed to Mrs. Jewkes "who very likely had been instigating him again" (246). Thus, although it's apparent that Mr. B utilized both power and coercion to control Pamela, he sourced additional help from those closest to Pamela. This, in my opinion, negates Watt's argument that Mr. B in fact experienced a shift in his character as the novel progressed.

Despite this disagreement, Watt ultimately concludes that in essence, both individuals experienced a shift in their character in order to achieve courtship. Whether this implies that a woman must change her character to secure a courtship is debatable. However, I interpret this shift from both respective parties as a humbling experience particularly for Mr. B. Based upon this experience, Watt describes this change as a method of creating a "much richer psychological and moral content than that between the traditional lovers of romance" (44). In essence, this shift substantiates the idea of courtship within the novel. This method of substantiation actually removes the idea of force and replaces it with love and equality between both individuals. Perhaps this implies that this is what individuals ultimately need to do in order to achieve a fruitful courtship and marriage.

Despite this realization, Watt ultimately draws attention to the “middle-class Puritan sexual code” through which the idea of courtship develops from (45). When describing this “Puritan sexual code” that permeates all aspects of *Pamela*, Watt draws an important distinction between “courtly love” and “puritanism” (45). He defines “courtly love” as encompassing a severe division between a woman’s virtue and purity and the male’s sexual desires. In essence, a “yielding” to these sexual desires caused a “complete breakdown of the convention” (45). However, Watt describes “puritanism” as a method of encouraging the joining of these two spheres via marriage. This marriage actually provides a “possible bridge between the spirit and the flesh between the convention and social reality” (45). With that being said, Watt brings in an additional piece of clarification in which the crux of puritanism in fact requires women to “withhold their sexual desires and wants for gratification until the male alluded to a marriage” (45). This is, in my opinion, is what Richardson ultimately took advantage of. Through this distinction that Watt defines, Richardson was able to write a novel solely regarding the interim period between marriage: courtship. And within this novel came the development of a legacy that encompassed the engagement of both men and women within the realm of courtship. Although Richardson’s depictions of courtship seem to support a legacy composed of both class status and a woman’s inherent need to change, manifestations of this legacy as well as important discrepancies also present themselves within Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Through these two particular novels, a shift in the legacy of courtship can be observed, a legacy that initially required yet eventually encouraged both men and women to engage in courtship rituals in very specific manners.

Contemporary Texts

Contemporary society, in my opinion, takes pride in reinforcing female protagonists that do not conform to the traditional ideologies of courtship. These are qualities that I've come to appreciate particularly as a young woman in which novels aren't necessarily reiterating notions or ideologies of courtship that others such as *Pamela* seem to suggest. Instead, there's a noticeable source of effort placed by authors to construct primary female protagonists who do not abide by traditional notions of femininity or courtship rituals. These protagonists are portrayed as attaining goals that coincide with advancements in careers, intellectual pursuits and accomplishments while simultaneously fulfilling roles that were previously unattainable. In fact, the women that are in a sense becoming normalized are those that reflect an ambitious spirit similar to Austen's Lizzy Bennet, valuing independence from a confining system. This evident shift from traditional notions of courtship conveyed in 18th century literature reveals itself within Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* in which the construction of a sexually liberal, independent, narcissistic female protagonist offers an interesting approach to the idea of courtship. However, despite this encouraging shift, fragments of traditional characteristics of courtship continue to manifest itself within contemporary texts like *Gone Girl*. This departure and consistency when comparing 18th century and contemporary literature offers a source of complexity and questioning surrounding the manner with which men and women interact with the traditional skeleton of courtship.

This source of questioning is embedded within the narrative structure of *Gone Girl*. The novel is divided into several major sections titled the following: Boy Loses Girl, Boy Meets Girl and Boy Gets Girl Back. The verbiage associated with these sections is entirely reminiscent of the boy meets girl structure, clearly evoking the structure of romantic comedy. However, this

element follows a very specific equation: boy meets girl + boy loses girl = boy gets girl back. Yet, ultimately, Flynn seems to invert this pattern. It's almost as though she flips this structure on its head in an effort to poke fun, ridicule and ultimately contextualize her opinions surrounding this structure. By mimicking this typical structure, Flynn makes the reader think that she's going to abide by this structure or at least revise the structure and allow it to fall back into place. In fact, I must admit, I fell for Flynn's purposeful trick. While initially confusing, I've realized that Flynn's purposeful reversal of such a traditional structure is not only entirely purposeful but simply brilliant. It's almost as though Flynn declares, "this is not a traditional romance novel so please, don't read it like it is one."

Most readers grow accustomed to this structure of boy meets girl + boy loses girl = boy gets girl back. It's all I've ever encountered in the courtship novels I've read including *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, *Sense and Sensibility* as well as *Pamela*. This familiarity has caused me to approach novels with a very particular bias as though I expect the novel to follow the framework that I'm accustomed to read and experience. Janice Radway elaborates on this particular concept in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. For Radway, Romance is a formulaic construction of the "institutional matrix" in which the creation of literature is "controlled by a host of material and social factors" (19). Here, Radway implies that as a result of this "institutional matrix," "category or formulaic literature" has flourished (29). This formula such as boy meets girl + boy loses girl = boy gets girl back is derived from a "standard reliance on a recipe that dictates the essential ingredients to be included in each new version of the form" (29). Through this formula, authors are able to attract a very specific yet loyal or "regular audience" that gravitates towards the predictable and inadvertently comforting format of the novel (29). When defining this "regular audience," it's worth noting that Radway is referring to

the romance novels like the novels produced by the Harlequin series. The degree to which it applies more broadly to the romance narrative is pertinent, however. Despite this discrepancy, the predictability that readers are able to derive an immense source of comfort from also creates a “pleasurable and restorative” experience while simultaneously provoking a sort of “emotional dependence on romantic fiction” (119). This “form” is what I would argue Flynn purposely invokes and then upends. Through this structure, Flynn inadvertently attracts the conventional romance reading audience; however, in doing so, Flynn simultaneously inverts this the structure of a predictable romance novel. Thus, Flynn’s approach is twofold in that she’s able to both attract a large body of readers while concurrently attempting to reverse the structure that audiences are accustomed to reading. In this, Flynn is able to attract while also distance herself from the common pool of readers thus following a similar method of attracting audiences to that of Jane Austen.

Austen characteristically follows the boy meets girl formula thus essentially reproducing the pattern started by Shakespeare. Despite her loyalty to this pattern, Austen also successfully created her own collection of readers through the narrative structure of her novels. In fact, Austen substantiated this collection of readers through the “verbal structures” that she employed, according to Radway (197). Here, Radway is trying to suggest that what allows Austen to attract readers that would not normally read romance is her verbal aesthetic and sophistication. In this, because of the difficulty of deciphering and understanding these “verbal structures,” Austen attracted readers that were willing to put forth an immense amount of effort when reading her novels. With that being said, Radway states that although “women admitted that although they found her stories intriguing, they could read her only if they were not tired” (197). Thus, Austen’s verbal structure required readers to put forth an “active collaboration in the production

of textual meaning” which further perpetuated the development of a specific subset of readers (197). In essence, Austen’s distaste for spoon feeding the narrative caused a divide in the individuals that actually read her novels. In this, while Austen sought to elevate the form, Flynn seems to satirize it. However, their results remain consistent in which both Austen and Flynn not only separate themselves from conventional authors but more importantly build a very specific audience.

Extending beyond this point, Flynn’s departure from the familiar romance plot communicates a source of fluidity and degree of influence over the subsequent construction of courtship within the novel. This overarching source of fluidity actually allows Flynn to reinvision the idea or meaning of courtship, a process that’s primarily reflected with the novel’s two main protagonists: Amy and Nick. Upon their initial presentation, Flynn seems to purposefully contrast or juxtapose these two characters. This is portrayed within the physical descriptions that Amy and Nick assign to each other. Within the very first chapter, Nick states that when thinking about his wife Amy, he immediately envisions “her head, the shape of it to begin with” (3). Nick goes on to state that he envisions her head is in relation to because when they first met in which Nick stared at Amy’s “finely shaped head” (3). Flynn does not want us to focus on Amy’s actual head but instead on what is *inside* her head. In fact, Nick is intrigued with the idea of “her mind” as well as the following questions: “What are you thinking, Amy? Who are you?” (3). These questions reveal what Nick is truly concerned about with respect to Amy. However, these questions get repeated at the very end of the novel, suggesting that Nick never fully answers them. These questions include “What are you thinking, Amy? How are you feeling? Who are you?” (384). This circular construction of Nick’s thoughts regarding Amy, thoughts that remain consistent despite the severe shift in his situation, offers an interesting

perspective with respect to the conservation of Nick's opinions regarding Amy. Despite everything that has transpired, Nick is still left wondering, pondering what's occurring inside his wife's mind. This source of wonder was even elicited within the first few months they began dating. However, the complexity associated with Nick's descriptions are in stark contrast to the physical descriptions assigned to Nick. In fact, Amy's introductory descriptions of Nick are derived from his sexual attraction.

Amy's reasons for smiling include the mere fact that Nick is "gorgeous, distractingly gorgeous" (13). This description of Nick is preceded by Amy drawing distinct categories between the various men that she's encountered. These categories include the "preppy Ivy Leaguers...slick Wall Streeters...and sensitive smart-boys" (12). By presenting these categories prior to Nick's physical descriptions, we, as readers, are led to believe that Amy will also place Nick into one of these categories. This source of organization with respect to the men that Amy has encountered seems to imply a stiff, starchy conventionality to Amy's engagement with courtship. Instead of conveying the blossoming of an organic, natural relationship, Amy's need to categorize her relationships sets a precedent for the relationship that she develops with Nick. This precedent inadvertently creates a cloud of forcefulness with respect to how both characters engage in the courtship. In this, by setting this precedent, Amy places a series of expectations that the relationship must meet in order to fit one of the categories that she engages with.

However, Amy's control over these categories suggests just how much knowledge of these conventions she has. This experience equips Amy with a familiar sense of sexual liberation and self awareness with respect to the character types that she recognizes in men. Flynn illustrates her liberation through Amy's profound confidence regarding the number of men that she's slept with. In fact, this confidence allows Amy to even admit that she "sounds quite slutty"

(13). Despite this recognition, Amy seems to parade or brag about her experiences, a tally so high she even has to “pause while she counts how many” (13). Despite her arrogance, the initial construction of Amy as this sexually liberal, confident woman who knows exactly what she wants is intriguing to see. This type of female character is not typically presented in courtship novels and in some respects is made fun of and not taken seriously by authors. While Lizzy Bennet is similar to Amy in that her confidence is strikingly similar to a point of near arrogance, Lizzy’s sexual advancements and desires are not elucidated by Austen. Instead of the sexually liberal character, I, as a reader, am accustomed to following the journey of a virginous, meek and submissive young woman whose sexuality is subsequently discovered by her male counterpart. However, Amy distances herself from this inherent sexual need to be discovered due to her experience as a woman who engages with her sexuality. In fact, I would argue that instead of the source of discovery that falls on behalf of the man, Flynn transitions this power to Amy.

Amy’s power over Nick is initially alluded to in one of the first encounters between Amy and Nick. In her diary entry written on September 18th, 2005, Amy recounts an encounter she had with Nick after not hearing from him in “eight months, two weeks, couple of days” (25). Soon, we learn that Amy had given Nick her number that Nick promptly lost. In an unfortunate series of events, Nick’s “cell was out of juice, so he’d written it on a stickie” (25); however, after washing the sticky note which resided at the bottom of his pant pocket, he “could only see a 3 and an 8” (29). Although a rather simple encounter, Amy documents this entire situation within her diary. In documenting this interaction, Amy is setting up her view of Nick as this irresponsible, careless and aloof individual, characteristics that later come to define Nick. Nick is no Mr. Darcy, the man who reaches out with the charming sort of confidence about him. In fact, Nick reflects the exact opposite. This redistribution of power between Amy and Nick results in a

rather odd, uncharacteristic reversal of roles in which the female protagonist is granted the upperhand. This upperhand is illustrated through the fact that Amy has more money, is more educated and is smarter than Nick. Flynn further develops this upperhand through Amy's incorporation of quizzes into her journal entries in which Amy lowers herself to Nick while simultaneously ridiculing the format of the quiz.

Within these quizzes, Flynn reveals Amy's inner thoughts and psyche, the same world that Nick tries to decipher, often through less formal versions of these quizzes. While Amy incorporates these quizzes due to her profession as a magazine writer who wrote personality quizzes, she consistently mocks the form of the quiz. This sarcastic form manifests itself within the quiz questions that pertain to her interactions with Nick. For example, while running into Nick during her lunch run, Amy contemplates saying several things. Choice #1, "do I know you?" is entirely too "manipulative and challenging" (29). Choice #2, "oh, wow, I'm so happy to see you!" is too "eager and doormatlike" (29). Choice #3, "go fuck yourself" evokes an aggressive, bitter connotation. Thus, Amy ultimately lands on her fourth and final choice, "well, you certainly take your time about it, don't you, Nick?" (29). This final choice is what Amy feels is enough of a "light, playful, laid-back" response. As suggested by these quiz questions, Amy selects a particular mood that she employs when interacting with Nick. Extending beyond this point, I get the sense that writing these quizzes is a lowering of herself, just as perhaps choosing Nick is.

In lowering herself to Nick's level, Amy's decisive and calculated nature in large part grants her an upper hand as well as a source of control over Nick. In fact, Amy's condescending tone regarding these quizzes suggests her maturity as well as the way in which she treats her relationship with Nick. Her emotional maturity helps to construct a mental chess game in which

Amy utilizes her quiz questions as pawns to beat her opponent, Nick. In doing so, Amy establishes a goal to win through this quiz question strategy. However, it's important to note that Amy desires an opponent for this game such as Nick. Amy conveys this desire when she states that she wants a "man with a little fight in him, a man who calls me on my bullshit (but also kind of likes my bullshit)" (29). With that being said, Amy also doesn't want to "land in one of those relationships where we're always pecking at each other, disguising insults as jokes" (29). This is where things get tricky. Amy's desire for this back and forth dynamic reminiscent of a cat and mouse game is not entirely unprecedented, odd or weird. In fact, it seems as though sometimes the most healthy relationships and courtships are the ones where partners are not afraid to call each other out while simultaneously applying a level of humor to most situations. This dynamic operates at the heart of most screwball rom coms in which farcical situations whose exaggerated nature and obscene acts present humorous situations. With that being said, this cat and mouse game provokes a source of competitiveness between Amy and Nick. In order to present themselves as competitive players within this metaphorical game, both utilized whatever they could to give themselves a leg-up. While some couples might not consider this approach, both Amy and Nick turned to the possibility of performative identities.

Ruth Bleier introduces the idea of the performative identity within her discussion surrounding the impact that colonialism had on the "North and South American and African women and men" (142). This process of colonialism introduced "slavery and exploitation in places where they did not exist before" (142). As a result, women were forced into subservient roles while exhibiting "silence in the political world" (142). While these roles confined women into particular roles, Bleier remarks that the women coped with their circumstances through the "adaptability of African women as actors, not merely victims" (142). The role of acting in a

sense helped to preserve a personal source of self-assurance while more broadly conserving the identity of an indigenous population that was slowly being eradicated. Therefore, the act of pretending or stepping into the role of a performative identity has been employed by women for a sufficient period of time, dating back to periods of colonization. However, this process ultimately implies that in order for a woman to survive, she must perform the role that the colonizer or perhaps her male counterpart wants her to perform. This caveat associated with performative personalities is illustrated within the relationship between Nick and Amy. Both Nick and Amy feel as though they must perform or fulfill certain characteristics in order to satisfy the other partner. This acts as the overarching premise enveloping the complexity of their courtship. Thus, both Amy and Nick seem to interpret this method of courtship as one that provokes a need for performative personalities. The manifestation of a performative personality with respect to the success of their courtship is initially brought into question through Amy's own series of questions.

While Amy's incorporation of questions in some respects grants her the upper hand while also illustrating her emotional maturity, perhaps the amount of thought that goes into Amy's response is derived from a place of insecurity. As a child whose parents obtained the majority of their wealth off of a fictional series of stories titled *Amazing Amy*, Amy alludes to the frustrations that she continually felt as a young woman. While Amy's parents explicitly reiterated to her that they "worried that I'd take Amy too personally," Amy remarks that "whenever I screw something up, Amy does it right" (26). Despite their worry for Amy, it seems as though it was nearly impossible for Amy to separate herself from this more perfect fictional version of herself that followed her throughout the entirety of her life. This insecurity based on never measuring up to *Amazing Amy* seems to infiltrate the relationship that Amy has with Nick. Therefore, perhaps

Amy's planned responses reside from this obligation to fulfill her role as Amazing Amy and ascend to perfection. But to be perfect, she must perform. As such, "don't screw up, you are Amazing Amy," seems to become a motto that Amy closely abides by despite her admittance that this is in fact an "unfair responsibility" (259).

Therefore, this desire to be flawless and faultless reflects itself within Amy's need to ascend to the status of her Amazing Amy counterpart. As such, by securing herself in a relationship with Nick, Amy is just one step closer to fulfilling the relationship that Amazing Amy, if in fact real, could've easily obtained. Through these series of events, Amy can match her fictional form that she's consistently tried to achieve. Within this situation, Flynn reveals an interesting point to pay attention to. Just as Amazing Amy seemed to push Amy to perfectionism and insecurity, Amazing Amy also seems to set a standard for Amy's relationship with Nick-- that it too must be perfect. Thus, the pressure that Amy experiences to resemble her fictional character subsequently infiltrates the relationship that she has with Nick and their resulting courtship. I find the uncovering of Amy's reality to be incredibly depressing. Despite what seems like a revolutionary, authoritative and a controversially inspiring female character, I find this need to achieve the status of Amazing Amy to be incredibly confining. Why does this seemingly liberated and confident woman feel as though she must prove herself and operate within the bounds of both her parent's standards and subsequently Nick's desires? Although Amy admits that she has in fact "never been more than a symbol anyway," she seems to behave as if the actions of her parents provide a sufficient excuse for her behaviors (259). Thus, instead of distancing herself from being an idealized daughter, Amy seeks to meet this standard quite literally written by her parents. In Amy doing so, despite some of the rather uncharacteristic yet

revolutionary qualities that Flynn tries to evoke within their courtship, this courtship, like many others, is operating under an apparent cloud of parental pressure.

This source of pressure is important to note for it seems relatively inescapable. Following the disappearance of his wife, Nick must interact with and manage Amy's parents, Marybeth and Rand Elliott. When observing her parents, Nick can't help but notice how different their relationship differs from that of his own father and mother. While at the police station after Amy's disappearance, Nick remarks that Amy's parents "stand with their arms around each other...like they were posing for prom photos" (59). In fact, Nick remarks that "that's how I always saw them, hands patting, chins nuzzling, cheeks rubbing" (59). What reads as a rather cheesy and uncomfortable display of love is juxtaposed quite clearly with the reality of Nick's family. In fact, contrastingly, Nick says his parent's relationship consisted of "communications that were entirely transactional" (60). Nick suggests that his father was quite abusive towards his mother due to the fact that he "just didn't like women" (60). In fact, Nick's father felt that they were "stupid, inconsequential, irritating" while his "favorite phrase" was "that dumb bitch" (60). This contrast between the relationship that Amy's parents portray versus Nick's offers an additional source of pressure and strain with respect to fulfilling expectations, expectations similar to Amy's desire to compete with fictional Amy. However, from this discrepancy arises Nick's very own insecurity. While Nick doesn't necessarily reflect this level of disgust for women, it seems as though his experiences with his father set an important precedent for Nick's very own courtship. However, this precedent is one that Nick seems to be acutely aware of.

To break this down, it's important to recognize Nick's inherent fear of acting and subsequently becoming like his father, an insecurity that "Amy could tell you all about" (61). Nick's insecurity is inadvertently perpetuated by the fact that he feels as though he cannot be the

man, the husband that Amy's parents want him to be. For example, while on the surface it seems as though Amy's parents are genuinely concerned for Nick following Amy's disappearance, they solely ask "how are you, Nick?" to gauge his response (62). In gauging his response by proposing such an "existential question," they were given an opportunity to examine his response (62). By "studying" Nick, noting "every thought and action," the Elliots' were in fact fulfilling the role of the performative parents, an act similar to Amy's (62). In fact, "the Elliotts believed that every trait should be considered, judged, categorized" in which "it all means something, it can all be used" (62). This particular example illustrates the overarching idea of Amy's parents in that they pretend to be sympathetic and caring in an effort to pass a judgement, particularly with respect to Nick. However, Nick's perception of them passing judgment is influenced by the fact that the Elliots' are trained psychologists. This causes Nick to think he's always being analyzed--by them or their daughter. Simultaneously, Amy's parents successfully carve out a particular spot in their daughter's relationship that is terribly parasitic and provoking in nature. This creates a situation in which a significant portion of their relationship is dedicated to fulfilling the expectations elicited by Amy's parents while also distancing themselves from the qualities of Nick's father. However, it's important to note that Nick's situation with the Elliots' takes place after the substantiation of Nick and Amy's courtship. Yet, their involvement particularly with respect to Nick's life following Amy's disappearance continues to impact Nick's opinions surrounding their courtship. In fact, it seems as though Nick experiences an equally taxing amount of influence from the Elliots' during Amy's disappearance. In fact, it's almost as though Nick feels like they're gauging his responses with respect to their missing daughter in an effort to draw their own conclusions about Amy's disappearance. Thus, this source of parental influence continues to perpetuate a nightmarish depiction of courtship during Amy's disappearance. This unfortunate

portrayal of courtship is met with unfulfilled expectations and a distinct pressure to pretend to be the man the Elliots' want to see. Embedded within this frustration includes a performative gesture that Amy's parents simultaneously evoke.

After Amy disappears, a kind of reversal of the roles Amy and her parents play takes place. This reversal presents itself following Amy's disappearance in which Flynn reveals to her readers that Amy is in fact very much alive. This reveal is primarily illustrated through Amy's diary entries in which we, as the reader, are rather abruptly notified that Amy actually faked her deathly disappearance. Yet, these diary entries quickly switch to actual accounts of her reality in which Amy is no longer Diary Amy. In one particular account, we learn of the detailed methods that she planned and subsequently acted upon in order to conceive. We're initially led to believe that Amy is in fact pregnant, with the help of her friend Noelle Hawthorne. As the naïve reader that I am, I interpreted this confession to be one in which Noelle perhaps assisted Amy in conceiving. However, I quickly learned that Amy's methods were far more sinister for she stole and utilized Noelle's urine for her pregnancy test, a pregnancy that would further encourage the accusatory characterization of Nick as the husband who abused and killed his pregnant wife. As Amy quickly fell into her performative role as the "sweet missing pregnant lady" she consequently allowed her parents to "suffer even more" (259).

In observing the stress that Amy's parents endure through her disappearance, Amy experiences her own unique form of operant conditioning, described by Dr. Melvin Konner. The term "operant conditioning," established by B.F. Skinner in 1938, functions upon the development of a "naturally occurring act" (410). Skinner classifies this as the "operant" while associating the periodic nature of this operant with "certain stimuli" or "reinforcers" (410). Reinforcers are then broken down into two specific categories including those that increase the

likelihood of the event known as rewards as well as those that discourage the likelihood of the event known as punishments (410). Through this particular source of conditioning, humans as well as animals can derive some sort of learning experience. In essence, “schedules of reinforcement affect the rate and stability of learning” (410). As a result, the learning process is ultimately facilitated by the extent of reinforcement that occurs. The more reinforcement, the more learning that takes place. The less reinforcement, the less learning that takes place.

In constructing this theory of operant conditioning, nearly all human behaviors can be analyzed through this source of reward or punishment that ultimately leads to a defining set of learning experiences. While operant conditioning is usually associated with various animal models such as the famous rat lever experimental set-up, this theory can also be applied to the very behaviors that make us human. Thus, in the case of Amy, her own form of operant conditioning is taking place through the source of reward that she experiences following the construction of her disappearance. While this reward is delivered through multiple different scenarios, a rather defining moment that perpetuates the presence of operant conditioning includes the personal relationship that Amy has with her parents.

Throughout the course of the novel, Flynn constructs the impression that while Amy lived a rather privileged life, her development as a young woman was continually foreshadowed by her fictional form--Amazing Amy. This fictional form served as a method of comparison with respect to Amy's development causing her to feel as though she simply was not good enough. To make matters worse, this Amazing Amy persona was created by her parents while frequently utilized as the source of income that helped establish the Elliots' economic empire. While the Elliots' continually try to make the argument that they did not want Amy to compare herself to Amazing Amy, their verbal efforts prove to be irrelevant as Amy details the negative impact that

this persona had on her childhood and subsequent development. This sets an integral premise regarding the actions of Amy in that Amy purposely wanted to impact both Nick as well as her parents through her disappearance. Thus, within the context of operant conditioning, the operant or “naturally occurring act” includes the fabricated disappearance of Amy. The subsequent source of stress that Amy’s parents experience following her disappearance serves as a reinforcing reward which further lengthened Amy’s naturally occurring act or disappearance. Amy ultimately experiences this reinforcing reward when watching her parents through the lens of the media, portraying two parents who despite their “special treatment,” continued to wither away under the tension of Amy’s disappearance (259). Therefore, Amy ultimately receives a source of reward with respect to her own contrived operant through the pain provoked inside of her parents in part because of their daughter’s vanishment. While sadistic at best, the situation that Amy ultimately creates serves as a method of positive reward or reinforcement for the hatred that Amy harbors for her parents. This particular example of operant conditioning therefore serves as a vessel for retaliation in which Amy’s parents begin to experience the stress and pressure that they once inflicted on their own daughter.

In watching her parents, Amy notices that her once perfect, romantically infatuated parents were declining. As her “thin and reedy” mom reflected “cords in her neck like spindly tree branches, always flexed,” her father descended into a man “ruddy with fear” (259). However, within these descriptions, Flynn subtly emphasizes or alludes to an important reversal of roles. These parents that once constructed this Amazing Amy persona begin to resemble the very caricature that they once inadvertently pressured and forced their daughter to become. This transition into a caricature occurred following Amy’s disappearance, allowing Amy to observe their transformation through the lens of the media. While unfortunate, this transformation offers

a poetic approach in some respects in which a situation that plagued Amy is now haunting the individuals who once pressured her to change. In essence, those that encourage some individuals to perform, like Amy, ultimately find themselves transitioning into their very own performative roles. However, it's important to note that in the case of this particular novel, this reversal is also influenced by the presence of the media, a source that inadvertently determined the presentation of these performative characteristics.

Performance and the media also figure heavily into the Nick storyline and the performative characteristics that he invokes. From the initial propagation of this case, Nick found himself presenting an entirely distinct and different person to the media. These performative characteristics assist in constructing an artificial relationship between Amy and Nick in which similar to Amy, Nick too offers a level of pretending. The impact of the media with respect to this artificial, over-exaggerated personality of Nick's is illustrated within one of the initial press conferences in which Nick participates. As the press conference opens, we are led to believe that the entire goal of this conference is to "just get people looking for Amy and knowing she has a family who loves her and wants her back" (62). This statement sets an important precedent for how society seems and/or wants to view a relationship. In fact, this precedent seems to motivate individuals to look for Amy if they know that there is an intact, normal, wholesome family awaiting her return. Darker motives include search efforts for a courtship composed of lies, scandal, abuse and infidelity. This reality not only provokes a false sense of security within Nick but more importantly pressures Nick to perform as both the "young, decent-looking guy" and the adoring, idolizing husband. Thus, despite the fact that Nick felt "like fucking shit" in part because his "hangover was really warming up now," Nick knew that he was "being forced to perform the scene that TV viewers expected" (64). This scene is composed of "the worried but

hopeful family” (64). However, the reality of how Nick felt included “caffeine-dazed eyes and ragdoll arms” (64).

This is where we see the repetition of doll-like characteristics that are almost always presented in conjunction with the news or a specific “news coverage” (259). These repeated patterns suggest that both the Elliott’s as well as Nick are playing house with the media while Amy’s disappearance remains unclear. Additionally, these patterns cause me to question whether the severity of these performative characteristics would be present if the media was not involved with Amy’s case? In essence, to what extent do the characters in this novel feel this need to perform if the media wasn’t always providing or suggesting an audience? Despite this point of questioning, particularly within myself as the reader, it’s important to acknowledge the fact that Nick admits to not even recognizing his own voice when viewing the broadcast special. In fact, Nick reflects upon this unrecognizable “booze floating, sludgelike, just beneath the surface of my skin” which “made me look like a fleshy wastrel” (64). This description reflects the level of disgust that Nick has for himself within the reality of the media.

I find Nick’s apparent disgust for himself oddly inspiring and respectable. Nick is able to draw attention to his artificial personality of himself when presented through the lens of the media. Thus, in my opinion, it’s easy to perhaps conclude that the media encourages an insurmountable level of disguise with respect to the presentation of who Nick truly is. This disguise therefore infiltrates the presentation of Nick and Amy’s courtship as something entirely distant and distinct from the reality of their marriage. While this conclusion is not entirely wrong, I find myself wanting to appreciate Nick’s ability to honestly admit to the audience that this husband that the media wants to present is not him. While this appreciation might seem a bit exaggerated, I feel as though it would’ve been much easier for Nick to fall into a comfortable

role of complacency with respect to his portrayal. Instead, Nick recognizes this self-absorbed husband who stood “metallically next to his father-in law” with “eyes glazed,” an appearance that concluded with “a killer smile” (64).

The role that the media plays in continually establishing and re-legitimizing the status of their courtship is one that Nick is entirely too concerned about. This concern is simply Nick’s paranoia that the media is out to make him look guilty. This phrasing is illustrated within one particular interview in which Detective Rhonda Boney, when inquiring about their “move back to Missouri,” poses the following question: “you moved Amy here against her wishes” (179). When answering this question, Nick states that “No. We did what we had to do. I had no job, Amy had no job, my mom was sick. I’d do the same for Amy” (179). However, Nick’s answer began with an italicized question, “*against her wishes?*” a question which emphasizes the source of confusion that the media provokes inside of Nick more often than not (179). Despite this confusion, Nick immediately errs towards the side of caution and defense, providing several concrete reasons why they ultimately chose to move back to Missouri. In addition to this defense, Nick continually reiterates his compassion for Amy in an effort to defend himself or counter this narrative, primarily as an effort to prevent the media from “turning up items of concern” (189). Nick goes on to describe the formation of two distinct stories that the media either supports or undermines. When shaping these stories, “the media loved the *Amazing Amy* angle and the long-married Elliott’s,” despite the fact that Rand “was unraveling and Marybeth had taken to self-medication” (189, 191). This angle was one in which a smart, well-meaning and intelligent young woman blossomed from. Contrastingly, the media hyper-focuses on Nick’s “personality traits” in an attempt to convey the angle of an unhealthy, abusive familial dynamic. This angle was one in which a self-absorbed, lazy, murderous husband blossomed from. Through

the construction of these two distinct sides, Nick falls into a game of overcompensation in which following every mocking or critical question came a detailed response filled with words of compassion and concern for Amy and her family. Thus, this source of overcompensation derived from the dynamic portrayal of Amy's disappearance further perpetuates the artificial façade of their courtship. Underlying the façade of their courtship includes a routine game between overcompensation and an accompanying source of paranoia that audiences would somehow catch onto the unrealistic portrayal of Nick.

This source of paranoia is further perpetuated by the misrepresentation of Nick in the media. The method of misrepresentation seems to continually morph itself into a rather one-sided portrayal of Nick. Instead of presenting Nick as a multifaceted source offering reassurance for audiences while also requiring his own source of reassurance from the investigative team, the media does the exact opposite. Instead, audiences are made acutely aware of Nick's shortcomings as a husband, a portrayal that seems to offer an argument that Flynn could potentially be making with respect to courtship. In fact, oftentimes when I hear stories about problematic relationships, I inherently and rather immediately associate the male partner as being the physical aggressor. While this is not necessarily the case with respect to all relationships, the commonality associated with this stereotypic predicament offers an important point of reflection. In the context of this novel, the disappearance of Amy is quickly associated with Nick. Perhaps this is due to the fact that he is her husband and as such, he maintains the most amount of contact with her. However, I feel as though Flynn is encouraging her audiences to examine this issue via our very own biases within courtships and relationships. Within the context of courtship, why are certain individuals often associated with distinct categories and verbiage, actions and stereotypes? Although Flynn doesn't present a concrete or explicit answer to this question, she

continually dances around the topic through the actions of Amy, including the artificial portrayal of Amy's disappearance.

As we learn that Amy is in fact alive, we also learn just how well she has managed to frame Nick. For example, Nick is first informed that Amy has gone missing after receiving a call from his neighbor Carl who in a concerned tone states that the "door is wide open, and that cat of yours is outside" (22). After concluding that "Amy was gone," we see the media and its viewers turn against Nick. This shift in opinions for Nick are illustrated within the interaction that Nick has with the police. The police remark that when talking with several witnesses, Nick was in fact at the beach creating a source of surprise as witnesses "said that didn't sound like you" (174). This minor inquiry serves as a clear indication of the police's distrust for Nick that appears within some of the smallest encounters that the investigators have. However, this distrust is further reiterated within the examination of the crime scene that, according to Gilpin and Boney, the two main investigators, "the whole thing looked staged" (175). This presents an important idea surrounding Flynn's construction of courtship within her novel. While we, as readers, gather that Nick is not at fault for his wife's disappearance, several characters throughout the novel by in or essentially fall for the scheme that Amy constructs. This scheme operates upon the idea that publicized domestic disputes or faulty relationships more often than not point a finger of skepticism and distrust towards the male partner. Therefore, the dismantling of a courtship quickly places an immediate source of blame on the male, regardless of probable evidence. Perhaps this particular tendency is rooted in biology in that men biologically fulfill the dominant role. This role is one in which "man is aggressive and universally dominant because of his genes," as defined by Ruth Bleier (138). Based upon this source of blame, Amy seems to utilize this common assumption as ammunition against Nick. In doing so, Amy paints a scene that the

police can very easily bite at. By making use of this unfortunate reality, Amy knows that in cases like this in which the wife disappears, conclusions will be reached regarding the male's position. Thus, Amy takes advantage of this ideology of courtship which primes police and investigators into thinking that the male is inherently guilty. In doing so, Amy baits the police by skillfully spilling and mopping up her blood on the kitchen floor, constructing a crime scene that metaphorically picks up the investigator's finger, straightens it out and turns it directly towards Nick. And as predicted, when the police subsequently discover that Amy's blood was "carefully mopped up," they take the bait that Amy has planted by asking Nick the following question: "how's your marriage, Nick" (177).

Although the investigative team seems to take the bait that Amy carefully planted for them, they also apply a level of questioning surrounding the construction of the crime scene. Through this source of questioning, the investigators honestly recognize a potentially manipulative scenario in which the wife utilizes these stereotypes as a way in which to encourage others to blame Nick. Thus, the police serve as an interesting point of reference with respect to perhaps the dismantling of these notions that often circulate within the ideology of courtship. In fact, the investigative team asks the following question: "You think she might have run off? Made this look like a crime scene and took off?" (177). While the answer is actually yes, the structural placement of this question seems inappropriate at best. Instead of approaching Nick with the idea that his wife staged the crime scene to frame Nick, they purposely operate between two states--an inherent distrust for Nick or a confusing source of loyalty in wanting to ensure that he's "in the hundred percent clear" (183). In fact, by raising this possibility, the police seem to further Nick's confused and frustrated state of mind that the investigators inadvertently wanted to provoke. It seems as though the police are simultaneously taking two steps forward and two

steps backward. Here, we see that despite their recognition of an unfortunate situation that's a result of a potential fabrication of her disappearance on behalf of Amy, the police continue to lead Nick down a path of confession. This illustrated within the suggestive question that Amy in fact fabricated her disappearance, Gilpin and Boney reveal Noelle Hawthorn as a main source of contact during the investigation. Through this contact, Gilpin and Boney learn that Noelle believes that Amy was "extremely troubled by the marriage...worried about your temper" (181). However, in talking to Nick, they also learn that Nick feels as though Noelle has been "all over town, wailing about Amy," a statement that preceded the reveal of Noelle's opinions surrounding the supposed reality of Nick and Amy's courtship. Therefore, the police present two approaches towards the case that inevitably contradict each other. Yet, this very contradiction acts as a stimulus in perpetuating this stereotype that continues to occupy perceptions of courtship.

Through this confusing sequence of events, an apparent yet confounded and contradictory push and pull relationship is substantiated between Nick and the investigative team. While the investigators seem as though they're suggesting that Nick is in fact not guilty for the disappearance of his wife, they also simultaneously seem to suggest that Nick is not necessarily the most guilt-free individual in this entire debacle. Due to these contradictory suggestions, various responses are inadvertently encouraged within Nick. This therefore establishes a situation in which Nick is in some respects poked and prodded into responses deemed questionable or perhaps inappropriate by the investigative team. And to make matters entirely more drastic, Nick is simultaneously poked and prodded by Amy, the individual who established this artificial crime scene reflective of the façade of their relationship. Thus, the artificial portrayal of Amy's disappearance offers an unconventional yet important approach to the accusatory categorization of Nick. This therefore encourages a need to pay attention to this

investigative approach. Upon closer inspection, we come to realize that the investigation is now a dark double of Amy and Nick's initial courtship. Both of these situations were entirely orchestrated by Amy, featuring skeptical investigations into Nick's character and psyche.

This categorization of Nick as the murderous, self-conscious husband even reflects itself within the lawyer, Tanner Bolt, that Nick hires. This particular lawyer is referred to as the "Hubby Hawk" in which "his specialty was swooping down in the high-profile cases to represent men accused of murdering their wives" (206). After hiring this lawyer, Nick is further categorized into a husband who needs to get out of a sticky situation. Thus, Nick's reality is reiterated to him as he continues to fall into the stereotype that's been constructed for him. From resourcing "the very lawyer I didn't want and absolutely needed," Nick was in a sense facing his reality with a matter of fact mentality despite the fact that he knew that those accused were "extremely unlikable" (207). This is due to the fact that they were "cheaters, narcissists, sociopaths" represented by the "Dickhead Defender" (207). However, despite the fact that Nick "resented being associated with him in any way," he knew that he would have to source someone who wouldn't apply this stereotype to his case (207). Yet, the issue here is that Tanner Bolt is a TV lawyer. He understands the law as partially defined by the roles played out in television. His notion of a defense is to change the television narrative regarding Nick's relation to the disappearance of Amy. By sourcing this particular lawyer, we see that Nick is willing to not only recognize what's occurring but is not willing to succumb or remain complacent in the categorization of his supposed actions. However, within Nick's interesting descriptions of the interactions with his lawyer, he cannot escape the emotions that he felt when he was with Amy. With that being said, when examining these emotions, it seems as though Nick felt inadvertently pressured to perform within the context of his courtship with Amy.

This inherent need to perform is initially reflected within Nick's primary insecurity that he is not the husband that Amy desires or really needs. This insecurity seems to rear its ugly head within the various men that seem to be tied to Amy's hip. These men, "the men who were always rattling behind Amy" were capable of filling in the empty spots and actions that Nick describes as the duties of a husband (46). In this, these men were rather "eager to do the husbandly things that her husband failed to do," thus establishing an almost hierarchical dynamic within Nick and Amy's courtship. While "Amy kept them at exactly an arm's distance—far enough that I couldn't get too annoyed," an important precedent was established for Nick fairly early in their relationship as though there was a standard that Nick needed to uphold (46). This precedent includes one in which Nick is unable to fulfill all of his husbandly roles and knows that Amy can easily replace his inabilities with other men.

The primary insecurity that Nick feels within the context of his relationship can be further understood through Ruth Bleier's analysis of dualisms and the substantiation of a patriarchy that follows within her piece titled *Science and Gender: A Critique of Biology and Its Theories on Women*. The duality between the roles that both men and women fulfill within society is what Bleier attributes as the catalyst for the formation of "oppositional categories" (197). These categories successfully place both men and women in antagonistic positions towards one another. Through this source of opposition comes the formation of a dominant, subordinate relationship that exists between members of the opposite sex. Therefore, the encouragement of a duality between men and women forms a hierarchical relationship. This hierarchy is similar to the mental chess game that Amy employs to successfully beat her opponent, a process that continues to place her at the top of the hierarchy. While this mental chess game seemingly suggests that it's fair and possible to lose, it establishes a profound sense of competition between

both Amy and Nick. Yet, the implications of this game are severe in that neither individual is invested in the best interest of the other. This substantiates a level of toxicity between Nick and Amy in that both individuals are constantly seeking sources of thought or action to undermine the other individual. As a result, Nick begins to feel insecure with respect to his ability to “solve” and subsequently beat Amy within her own chess game. This insecurity further encourages a competitive and prevailing source of discourse between Nick and Amy, a situation that seems to occupy their methods of engaging with the ideologies of courtship.

In addition to this prevailing insecurity, Nick felt as though it was entirely impossible to actually “solve Amy” (49). Despite his attempts to potentially solve her, Amy promptly “tallied all my deficiencies, forever noting disappointments, frailties, shortcomings” (49). Thus, Amy’s ability to in essence track all of Nick’s wrongdoings or failures created a standard of comparison for Nick’s actions. This pressures Nick into behaving or performing in a certain way while offering a source of comparison between the Amy he’s currently with and the Amy he originally fell in love with. When reminiscing about his relationship with Amy, Nick states that he’d “fallen in love with Amy because I was the ultimate Nick with her” (214). I interpret the “ultimate Nick” as the individual that Amy inadvertently encouraged the development and performance of. This “ultimate Nick” demanded a sort of confidence, knowing that this particular version of Nick was the version that fulfilled each and every husbandly role that Amy ever wanted. Thus, this version of Nick made specific for Amy, gave Amy the “man with a little fight in him” while simultaneously distancing himself from the “pathetic monkey-dancing scenarios” (39, 56). In this, the delicate balance in personality that Nick was capable of portraying to Amy allowed him to ascend to a “superhuman” status despite the difficulty of maintaining this character (214). In a similar manner to Amy, Nick “makes a massive list of

things he's always meant to do," an action that nearly mirrors Amy's "working, working, working" pace (83, 214). This description of Nick, derived from Amy's diary entry written on August 23, 2010, offers an interesting similarity to Nick's description of Amy as the woman with a mind "both wide and deep" (214). The overarching structure of both descriptions are quite similar. When reflecting upon the visual structure of these descriptions, both descriptions are slightly overwhelming to both visualize and read. Although the sentences composing these descriptions are short, the information contained in these descriptions describes two individuals that seem to be constantly moving, going and doing things, never stopping, always working.

These descriptions allude to an overpowering source of ambition associated with both individuals while offering structure and explanations that are strikingly similar. This sort of speaks for itself in that when both individuals are describing the other, both descriptions seem rather one in the same. In this, the extent of this performance for both individuals seems to serve as an equalizing characteristic. In essence, both Nick and Amy felt as though they needed to morph themselves into the individual that the other wanted to be with. This inadvertently led to the development of a sort of performance or dance between both Nick and Amy, a dance that developed in an effort to please or satisfy the other person. However, this dance was strenuous for both individuals, requiring maintenance in an effort to not crack under pressure. For example, the maintenance associated with Nick's "superhuman" mentality became difficult to manage causing Nick to reveal the true reality of his character that Amy was not accustomed to seeing. What initially reflected a subtle reality became the actual, genuine character of Nick, one in which Nick began to lose "all interest" in Amy causing Amy to "worry that Nick and I were not meant to be matched" (141). Thus, in an effort to satisfy Amy, Nick ultimately finds himself fulfilling a sort of performative identity at the expense of not being true to his partner. This

implies that within the context of Nick and Amy's relationship, the success of their courtship was derived entirely from performative identities that later shaped the demise of their relationship. While Nick played a primary role in the development of this performative identity, so too did Amy and to a certain extent, she developed her fabricated identity in a much more severe and vindictive manner.

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion* argues that gender identity is performative. Butler's definition of this performative identity plays itself out within the initial fabrication of Amy's identity. This fabrication within the context of their courtship is illustrated through an inherent pressure to pretend in order to secure a relationship. Butler establishes the overarching idea that you, as an individual, are always acting to yourself. In fact, Butler argues that there's no non-performative identity in that we are continually acting with respect to both sexuality and identity (68). Within this non-performative identity, Butler draws attention to the fact that gender identity is subject to the position in time with which certain ideologies are founded under. Thus, gender identity oftentimes operates upon the assumption that certain acts are acceptable while other acts are unacceptable. Therefore, an individual's environment plays a pivotal role in the attitude and eventual identity that they portray. As a result, gender identity is entirely receptive to environmental input rendering it dynamic in nature, shifting through time and experience. Thus, when relating Butler's approach to the performative identity and Flynn's construction of courtship, I find that Flynn's depiction of identity and performance seems to largely resemble that claimed by Butler.

Thus, in the context of a courtship including Amy and Nick's, the identity associated with both individuals is subject to input from shifts in their environment and their courtship. In this, a fluid source of communication occurs between the portrayed identity of both Amy and Nick and

the illustration of their courtship. As a result, this fluid relationship is subject to shift over time causing the performative identity to incorporate different needs or requests from the environment. This leads me to a conundrum regarding the dynamic between the individual and their performative identity. Does the need to create a façade ultimately dictate the gendered identity and subsequent behavior produced? Contrastingly, does the gender identity or behavior ultimately provoke some sort of performative gesture? This question is one that Flynn does not necessarily explicitly address but is important to consider within the context of the courtship between Amy and Nick.

Butler may offer some help here as she argues that an individual's gender is inadvertently substantiated through this pressure to perform. Once a performance ensues, gender begins to operate under this inherent pressure in an effort to create an identity out of this performance. Butler breaks this down through her explanation that an individual's gender is performed and must be continually performed. This therefore implies that gender is neither a figment nor a natural or stable category and fails to exist without this performed act. Thus, for Butler, the gender only exists via a performance. It cannot come before the performance. Therefore, on a broader scale, "gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity" which, in my opinion, positions gender identity as this umbrella and under this umbrella includes the actual acts or behaviors that are performed by the individual (33). If we're to apply Butler's statements to the context of *Gone Girl*, Butler would argue that the acts and behaviors that Amy displays presents an identity embedded in a performative act. It need not be stable, uniform or consistent. While Amy might actually believe that she perhaps has a true self, Butler's argument suggests that the self is always constructed through a performance. As a result, this gender identity ultimately performs the roles that the preceding acts encouraged it to perform. However, this

particular reaction in which particular acts therefore lead to the development of a gender identity is ambiguous at best. There's no concrete situation in which this equation perfectly plays out or aligns itself with the surrounding environment.

In this, Butler seems to also argue the fact that this ambiguity plays a pivotal role in how these particular acts and behaviors produce an exercised level of identity. Butler goes on to detail this particular point within an additional piece titled *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* in which she states that “gender is not exactly what one *is* nor is it precisely what one *has* (42). In fact, gender can “take place along the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes” (42). In other words, Butler suggests that gender takes into account multiple sources of influence and is not solely a binary “masculine” and “feminine” (42). The overarching and most influential factor with respect to the development of a gendered identity includes the performed acts that ultimately lead to the development of a performative identity. Thus, in the context of *Gone Girl*, the initial construction of Amy's performed and subsequently fabricated identity within the context of their courtship is illustrated through an inherent pressure to pretend in order to secure a relationship.

Flynn initially hints at this pressure to pretend within Amy's frustrations regarding Nick's dismissal of their “third wedding anniversary,” an anniversary that Amy spent “alone in our apartment, my face all mask-tight from tears” after receiving a voicemail from Nick (65). Despite Amy's anger, she masks her hurt and anxieties into the wife who simply doesn't care, who doesn't address her emotions with Nick for fear that she was acting like “a girl” (66). Yet, this fear is confusing for it's described by diary Amy. This makes it hard to actually know if she's describing a performance or the diary itself is a performance. Despite this discrepancy, Amy's ability to bury her frustrations within the façade of the aloof, caring wife continues to

manifest itself within her fear of becoming a “nag” (85). While she’s “always been proud of my un-nagginess,” Nick’s very actions seem to encourage Amy to abandon the act. Thus, Amy complains that Nick “pisses me off, that Nick is forcing me to be a nag” despite the fact that Amy is willing to “live with a certain amount of sloppiness, of laziness, of the lackadaisical life” (85). Yes, this frustration is a common characteristic of domestic life, a domestic life derived from the establishment of a courtship. This domestic life includes the famous scenario in which one partner perhaps continually trips over the other’s pair of pants or is bothered by the fact that the bed never gets made. However, Amy’s frustration speaks to a larger, fundamental aspect of their courtship in that Nick’s rather seemingly normal actions continue to break down the performative barrier that Amy has skillfully put into place. In fact, Nick’s actions make it continually more and more difficult for Amy to lie about the way that she’s feeling, lies that Amy routinely relies upon to pretend to be someone else. Therefore, in an effort to not reveal to Nick who she truly is, Amy attempts to be “careful not to inflict my neat-freaky, to-do list nature on him” due to the fact that Nick “truly doesn’t see” what Amy sees (85). This is ultimately where we see the blossoming of Amy’s performative roles as well as the expectation that Nick will also fulfill his performative role, a role that ultimately conserves the safety and success of their courtship. Yet Nick is less concerned about ensuring the viability of his performative gender identity. Nick is not nearly as invested in the conservation of his artificial exterior. Thus, we see that a large majority of Amy’s frustrations are derived from the fact that Nick is not nearly as invested in the act. As a result, Nick is “turning me into what I never have been and never wanted to be, a nag” (85). This transformation is occurring, from Amy’s perspective, due to the fact that Nick is “not living up to your end of a very basic compact” (85). Through this

initial situation, it seems as though Flynn sets a precedent for the success of their courtship in that its preservation is dependent upon the fulfillment of these performative roles.

Because the success of Nick and Amy's courtship was built on performing false identities, its success is dependent on perpetuating those performances. Perhaps Amy felt as though she needed to pretend in order to initially secure the relationship; however, as their relationship continues to develop, it seems as though Amy's performance begins to increase in transparency. As this transparency continues to build, Amy seems to experience a sort of difficulty fulfilling the role that Nick had grown accustomed to yet inadvertently expected her to fulfill. Nick notes the "fairy-tale reverse transformation" as one in which the "Amy of today was abrasive enough to want to hurt" does not reflect the Amy "who was only remotely like the woman I fell in love with" (49). Yet, it's important to recognize the fact that this seemingly new Amy was, according to Amy, her real self. In fact, Amy abandoned "the girl of the big laugh and the easy ways" for the "new, brittle, bitter Amy" (49). Thus, Amy "shed herself" leaving a "pile of skin and soul on the floor," embracing her new skin. Unfortunately, this is not the Amy that Nick was accustomed to being around. This situation ultimately causes Nick to crave the artificial, performative Amy, the Amy who "was funny, who made me laugh" who "laughed, from the bottom of her throat" (49). However, this Amy ultimately settled for the idea that pretending was simply as good as reality after shedding her once previous self. Based upon this reality, I, as the reader, am left wondering exactly what this performative Amy looked like. Although Amy depicts this version in her earlier journal entries, I'd like to offer a more concrete understanding regarding this performative identity. Therefore, what exactly was Amy pretending to be and why was this performance easy to abandon?

I find myself returning to an overarching idea regarding the pressure that Amy felt to pretend in order to secure a relationship as well as her insecurities embedded into the courtship. This pressure, while residing from multiple sources, ultimately manifests itself into what Amy refers to as the “cool girl.” This is the girl that Nick “loooooooved” (222). Instead, Nick “loved a girl who doesn’t exist” (222). Amy rather clearly yet abruptly admits to the fact that she was “pretending...pretending to have a personality” because that’s “what I’ve always done” (222). This is where we see a source of discrepancy between diary and non-diary versions of Amy. While the diary version of Amy would’ve conveyed a source of happiness in embodying the girl that Nick ultimately wanted, non-diary Amy admits to the depressing, farcical nature of this girl. This is what Amy felt she ultimately had to do to entice Nick to be with her, an enticement that ultimately led to the development of a courtship founded upon lies. However, this is the girl that Amy worked so hard to be perfect and subsequently form as though she’d been rehearsing her lines and mannerisms, her outfits and smiles in the mirror. This method of perfection seems to offer Amy an interesting platform for her readers to gawk at her in severe confusion while simultaneously admiring the vast amount of skill and time that this entire personality took to craft. In fact, Amy seems almost proud of her performance judging by how much energy she puts into theorizing the cool girl.

Amid this confession to the reader, Amy describes the cool girl as a characteristic that presented itself as “the defining compliment” when men are describing their ideal partner or “the cool girl” (222). This girl is the girl who’s “hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping, who plays video games, drinks cheap beer, loves threesomes and anal sex...cool girls are above all hot” (222). However, most importantly, the cool girls “never get angry...they let their men do whatever they want” (222). In essence, the cool girl is a girl

who's not necessarily complex yet is able to engage in stereotypical activities dominated by men. She's a guy's girl and can "hang with the bros" as I've heard amidst conversations between college men. With that being said, this is the type of girl that men can simultaneously walk all over while routinely return to for sex and supposed "deep" conversations. As a result, men, like Nick, feel "superhuman" when they are surrounded by this cool girl due to the fact that the cool girl is attractive and overpowering in some respects yet ensures that the male can still retain a sort of confidence both physically and intellectually when engaging in a relationship with this cool girl. This cool girl effortlessly caters to the desires of the man--both reiterating his taste while challenging his heterosexuality. However, from a woman's perspective, this cool girl mentality that men crave within the context of a relationship is difficult to construct as well as maintain. In fact, this difficulty is illustrated within the actual structure of Amy's description.

The description of this cool girl is slightly overwhelming. Flynn's purposeful utilization of run-on sentences to describe this cool girl offers a description that's almost tiring to read. The form of illustration echoes the very strain of performing the "cool girl" persona. Additionally, the tiring nature of this description simultaneously entraps or envelopes the reader into the notion of the cool girl. This source of structural entrapment offers an interesting approach to the very concern that Amy has with respect to her own performative entrapment. In essence, Amy is concerned about being confined or imprisoned within the role of the cool girl. Therefore, this description not only provides a rather clear outline regarding the expectations of a cool girl but overlays each of the confining, performative characteristics that women, like Amy, must maintain in order to embody this particular individual. However, it's important to note that this cool girl mentality is not shared by Nick. In fact, it seems as though Flynn completely excludes any source of description regarding the "cool guy" and belittles the expectations that women

might have for men. Therefore, there's no pressing need to be the cool guy because of the inherent construction of the patriarchy and the ritualistic expectations that are pushed onto women. In this, there are a series of criteria that are brought to the table of courtship that aren't necessarily present for men and these expectations are perfectly defined within the cool girl's character. These expectations offer an intriguing, prominent source of connection with respect to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* through the source of communication between criteria and accomplishment.

Throughout Austen's novel, we frequently return to the necessity of accomplishment with respect to the success of a courtship. This idea of an accomplished female includes a woman who is capable of satisfying her husband while beautifully maintaining and handling an impressive household. She can knit or crochet beautiful pieces of art, impressively play the piano particularly while guests are visiting, raise intelligent and knowledgeable children while satisfying the needs and incorporating advice provided by her in-laws. In short, the accomplished woman is preparing to *perform* the role of wife and hostess. While this description of accomplishment reflects a terribly outdated ideology, the cool girl mentality offers a more modern, culturally relevant embodiment of an accomplished woman. In this, the accomplished woman attempts every version of the cool girl in an attempt to become connected to the man's taste. In becoming connected to his taste, the cool girl can effectively represent both him and his taste while routinely conforming to his desires. The important and prevailing difference is where and how this takes place. Thus, instead of knitting a work of art, the cool girl can hold a stimulating and competitive conversation about football at a tailgate, replacing piano skills with the ability to gorge herself on food without gaining a single pound. As her partner parades her

around social functions, other men inherently doubt the woman that they're with, secretly wanting to have the cool girl on their arm.

Despite this fascinating similarity between novels written from two distinct times, this similarity speaks to the ridiculous terms that women are pressured to abide by within the context of a courtship. These terms are not only expected but serve as a mere representation of the man within the realm of courtship. Nevertheless, the cool girl differs between courtships and relationships. While one version of the cool girl reflects a vegan, blonde haired tree hugger who will argue about climate change with every relative at the Christmas dinner table, another might reflect the exact opposite. Perhaps this cool girl is the young woman who routinely parties every Friday night and enjoys downing shots with the boys following each home football game. However, despite variations of the cool girl within various courtships, a trailing point of similarity resides between each and every individual: the cool girl continually embraces the tastes of men. Whether this requires or implies that the cool girl adopts the pornographic sexual roles that their male counterpart desires, the notion of the cool girl continually changes depending upon the context of the courtship. However, the cool girl consistently reflects a fantasy figure for men to secure within a long-term courtship and is capable of manifesting itself through multiple versions depending upon the guy. Because the cool girl ultimately conforms and adjusts her tastes to that of her partner, this situation inadvertently lets the feminine critique off the hook because Amy conforms to this misogynist stereotype. Regardless, the notion of the cool girl resonates with modern day courtship rituals and when absent from a relationship can lead individuals, like Nick, to source the cool girl via an outside source.

The inherent pressure or need to conform to the interests and values of a man who the cool girl experiences is more clearly illustrated by Dr. Melvin Konner in his book titled *The*

Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints on the Human Spirit. (175). He describes a situation in which a “young man is in love with a woman” but is “rejected” which causes him to lose “control of his emotions” (177). After meditating on his plan of action, the young man “brutally bludgeons her with a hammer, striking many hard blows” (177). The young man attributes his actions to “extreme agitation” while simultaneously introducing “culturally appropriate explanations” (177). Despite these explanations, both “receive the maximum allowable sentence” (177). Konner’s descriptions seem entirely too familiar as stories similar to this one have and continue to decorate the news. As a young woman, my parents consistently discouraged me from ending unsatisfactory relationships for fear that my male partner was mentally unstable. This instability rendered him unable or ill equipped to handle such a drastic change within his life. As a result, my junior year of high school was spent with a young man who I found to be boring and uninteresting. Yet, despite my unhappiness, I heeded the extent of my parents advice, putting it into practice until I felt as though I could no longer fulfill this charade. The unfortunate reality of this situation is that I, like other young women, was afraid of the potential aftermath, afraid that the individual I was with would seek a source of revenge that caused my parents to cry within mere discussions. However, Konner informs his readers that this is rarely the case yet the possibility of this occurring continues to inform the actions and attitudes that women embody. I find this reality to be depressing while simultaneously eye opening in that we, as women, oftentimes pass judgment on the actions pursued by other women. In essence, we truly are unable to reach a valid and realistic conclusion without knowing the potential environment or context that a woman is operating under.

Upon Amy’s introduction of the cool girl, I found myself arriving at a series of terribly judgemental thoughts regarding the women that employ this particular persona. I immediately

placed myself at the top of the dualistic hierarchy in that I, as a young woman, would never be the “cool girl.” However, Konner draws our attention towards a much more tangible, noticeable reality in that some women feel as though they must conform to the wants and desires of their male partner. This need to conform is derived solely from a place of fear regarding their failure to conform. “When the woman’s affections do not mirror the man’s,” what repercussions will the woman ultimately experience? (177). While it’s impossible to define exactly what these repercussions would look like, the fear associated with the repercussions themselves is enough to prevent them from happening. Thus, within the context of *Gone Girl*, Amy eventually denies any association with a cool girl after playing her own version of the cool girl for a sufficient period of time. However, after abandoning this cool girl identity, the success of Amy and Nick’s courtship quickly dissipates. This denial of the cool girl inadvertently reveals the source of privilege that Amy continually utilizes within her relationship with Nick. Konner offers his own definition of the cool girl. This cool girl embodies a woman whose inherent fear of retaliation and death ultimately causes her to abandon her own identity to remain loyal to the identity of her partner. While Amy’s perception of the cool girl is not nearly as drastic as Konner’s, Amy seems to suggest that her fear is rooted in the fact that to not conform is to end up alone. The cool girl is simply desperate for her own source of safety. Therefore, Amy is rather privileged. This privilege encompasses the fact that Amy doesn’t feel as though physical punishment will result if she doesn’t mold her tastes to that of Nick. In fact, it seems as though Nick appreciates Amy’s source of charisma that she projects as a result of denying this cool girl mentality. Despite Amy’s ability to act in the exact manner that she desires, Nick finds a source of comfort within the cool girl. This therefore leads him down his own path to find his personal cool girl.

Within the context of *Gone Girl*, Nick effectively finds a new cool girl through the character of Andie, Nick's previous student who he ends up engaging with romantically. The incorporation of this particular character offers a unique yet stark contrast to the character of Amy as Andie represents the emotionally immature, dependent young woman who engages in the activities of a cool girl. "She's needy. Clingy. Needs lots of reassurance." yet this need for comfort and consolation is what ultimately drives Nick to engage with Andie (213). While needy, Andie's neediness communicates to Nick that he feels wanted and needed, a neediness entirely devoid from the relationship between Nick and Amy. She's the sexually liberal damsel in distress who simultaneously engages in some of the characteristics of the cool girl. These characteristics ultimately imply the fulfillment of pornographic sexual roles that Andie ultimately welcomes or embraces for Nick. In this, while Andie most importantly engages in suggestive intercourse, she also speaks sparingly to ensure that Nick and her remain together. While perhaps her actions are in an effort to sustain Nick's upper-hand in their relationship, it's impossible to tell exactly what this relationship looks like due to the fact that she is not granted interiority from a narrative point-of-view. Yet, Flynn's incorporation of Andie's character presents a predominant femme fatal mentality. In this, the character of Andie interacts with and uses gender stereotypes to ultimately gain power and influence over Nick. Perhaps this power in large part resides from her intense methods of sexual coercion, her power continues to grow as she plays this damsel in distress. This ultimately makes her an incredibly cunning character.

In addition to Andie, Nick continually gravitates towards his sister Margo in an effort to retain the presence of cool girls within his life. While Margo presents several similar characteristics to Amy, Margo engages with Nick in a much more comfortable, relaxed manner in comparison to the oddly competitive, sterile environment of his courtship with Amy. Margo

offers Nick a relationship reminiscent of a bromance. She inherently facilitates this bromance through her physically tomboyish characteristics as Flynn indicates when she pulls her hair back with “nerdy-girl barrettes” (15). While “her features just take a moment to make sense,” her unfeminine characteristics are in fact quite striking when considering her “broad jaw; the pinched, pretty nose; the dark globe eyes” (15). However, this bro-like relationship ultimately manifests itself within the jokes that Margo and Nick continually exchange. These jokes do not shy away from the sexual relationships that Nick routinely engages in, allowing Margo to go so far as to say “go home, fuck her brains out” (20). This, in turn, places Margo as the “alpha girl” within Nick’s life (20). This alpha girl is entirely “too territorial” yet Nick seems to enjoy this due to the fact that the situation makes him continually feel wanted and needed (20).

Additionally, Flynn abbreviates Margo’s name as “Go.” This in turn makes Margo read more androgynously on the page, thus furthering her tomboy characteristics. Thus, although both Amy and Margo “flitted in and out of my life” reminiscent of “well-timed stage actors,” this situation continually feeds Nick with the stream of his ego. In return, his ego is perpetuated by two women who routinely pine away for his attention. Thus, through both of Nick’s relationships with Andie and Margo, he surrounds himself with women that share similar tastes despite the artificiality associated with the origin of these tastes. In doing so, Nick ultimately receives an immense amount of satisfaction being the man who surrounds himself with women quite similar to himself. This entire situation paints Nick as an overt misogynist who wreaks of toxic masculinity. His desire for the cool girl and his ability to simply turn a blind eye to infidelity in order to fulfill his fantasies of obtaining the cool girl inadvertently speaks for itself. However, Nick’s actions present an obvious uncomfortable source of disapproval on behalf of Amy. Thus, after learning that Nick has been unfaithful, engaging in a relationship with one of his students,

Amy's resentment continues to build and ultimately presents itself through her narcissistic scheme to fake her disappearance and apparent death.

This narcissistic scheme ultimately rewards Amy with a palpable satisfaction and relief in that Nick ultimately got what he deserved. Though seemingly outlandish, Amy's process of revenge ultimately operates within Carl Lange's theory, described by Dr. Melvin Konner as the James-Lange theory. Here, Konner states that "the role of bodily organs in both the subjective experience and the expression of emotions" (125). In this, "our natural way of thinking" actually informs our emotions off of "what we see or hear" (126). Thus, according to Konner, the feelings that we experience as a result of a particular action is in fact an emotion perpetuated by the occurrence of an event. Yet, Lange also says that this "sequence" of emotions is not necessarily correct in that the sequence is subject to shifts and changes. The redistribution of this "sequence" encompasses situations in which "we feel sorry because we cry" or we feel "angry because we strike" (126). While this conclusion seems relatively simple, the overarching point that Konner seems to suggest is that our actions inform the emotions and feelings that we subsequently experience. Whether we consciously perform certain actions to experience an emotion is debatable, depending upon the context. Despite this conclusion, Konner draws attention to a rather clear objective in that individuals experience the emotion or feeling without actually following through on the action. Emotional maturity therefore acts as a barrier between the emotions that we encounter and our desire to give in to inclinations or "tendencies" in order to "create sensations in the body" (126). Therefore, "restraining ourselves from these actions" while receiving the desired emotion acts as a conduit for emotional maturity (126). Based upon these conclusions drawn by both Konner and Lange, I would argue that the way in which both men and women engage with courtship is in fact dictated by the emotional experience following an

action. In this, while Amy's actions seem far fetched, they're actually more understanding or realistic than most readers might initially think. This argument serves as the basis for Amy's process of revenge. Amy's narcissistic scheme, while inappropriate and criminal, functions as the action that ultimately produced a feeling of deep satisfaction within Amy.

Within this narcissistic scheme, to punish Nick, Amy lists each of the strategic steps that she takes to manufacture this artificial crime scene. When constructing this scene, Amy creates a "checklist for today" composed of a series of "items" including "item 22" in which Amy cuts herself to shed a sufficient amount of blood onto the kitchen floor (219). While self-mutilation most definitely hurts, Amy concedes that "the self-mutilation was worth it" (220). Extending beyond this, Amy continues to "stage the living room" under "item 18" in addition to saying her "goodbye to Bleecker," listed as "item 29" (220). Amy's efforts to construct her artificial disappearance were all in an effort to abandon this performative role that she continually embodied throughout the duration of their marriage.

However, I find this conclusion to be insufficient at best as Amy's return to Nick mimics the same performative role that Amy evoked prior to her disappearance. In this, Amy seems to almost beg Nick to sleep in the same bed as her, enticing him through her want for him to "sleep in the same house" (385). Amy continues to beg and appeal to Nick through her want "to be with my husband" and to ultimately provide Nick "the chance to be the kind of husband you want to be" (385). Through this conversation, I get the impression that Amy is still interested in pretending or maintaining this charade. As a result, Amy's return to her performative personality ultimately implies that courtship can only produce a happy domestic life if the couple continues to pretend to be the people they were in courtship. However, Nick's frustrations and vehement denial of any sort of act further feeds into the punishment that Amy continues to provide for

Nick. In essence, Amy initially punishes Nick for his actions by setting him for her disappearance. Upon her return, Amy continues to penalize Nick through her embodiment of an exterior appearance that Nick clearly recognizes as fake. With that being said, despite Nick's continual frustrations, Amy ensured that Nick knew she was pretending, that Nick knew that the real Amy was never truly there and was never coming back. Nonetheless, while Amy fails to present to Nick who she truly is, she clearly reveals to her reader the *real* Amy after the "diary Amy," the Amy we, as readers, only ever knew (220).

Despite these gruesome descriptions outlining a plot to ultimately seek an immense amount of revenge on Nick, Amy ensures that she tells her audience who she really is, as though we weren't already passing a sufficient amount of judgment. It's as if Amy is placing her audience on a higher platform than her own husband, communicating to her audience that they're special enough to know who the real Amy is. Thus, Amy successfully creates a division within her audience causing the formation of two spheres that either support or severely oppose her actions. As a result, Amy masterfully manipulates her audience into admiring her conviction and determination to execute this detailed plan. After describing the story of her birth, Amy confesses that her mother Marybeth "had five miscarriages and two stillbirths" (220). Although you'd think that upon Amy's arrival her parents would be spilling out love and gratitude for Amy, Amy seems to describe the exact opposite. Despite the fact that Amy "was the one who made it," she found it rather tiring to live under the cloud of these "seven dead dancing princesses" (222). In this, Amy identifies her situation as a rather "exhausting way to live" thus perpetuating an effort to prove to both her parents and Nick just how valuable she is (222). While Amy is most definitely a narcissist, I feel as though it's important to recognize the sheer impact that this storytelling has on the reader-response approach to this novel. In this, the power of

storytelling informs my perception of their courtship and the subsequent impact of Amy's narcissism within the relationship.

Throughout the large majority of this novel, we are presented with two entirely distinct sides of a story. On the one hand, we see Nick as a rather lazy, unfulfilling husband who expects certain behaviors from Amy. On the other hand, we learn of Amy, a wife who no longer reflects the personality that Nick grew accustomed to when they first met. This is the pattern that we, as readers, grow accustomed to both detecting and expecting with each chapter that we read. This pattern is what Jonathen Gottschall describes as a "bias towards false positives rather than false negatives" in his book titled *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (103). Due to the fact that we as humans reflect a "mind design that helps us perceive meaningful patterns," these patterns provoke a sort of discovery within the stories that we read. In essence, these patterns "translate into a hunger for story" (104). However, what happens when those patterns begin to disappear and the story elicits an unfamiliar and/or confusing path? This is the central question that I eventually arrived from Flynn's novel due to the extreme storytelling reversal that we experience halfway through the novel. This reversal is revealed to us through the predicament of Amy's disappearance, a disappearance that we learn is entirely planned and executed as a method of punishment. To remedy this confusion as readers, we inherently "extract stories from the information that we receive" regardless of how puzzling or confusing the information might be (104).

While yes, I agree with Gottschall that no matter how confounded the information might be, we as readers naturally attempt to continue to construct a story within our minds. With that being said, I would argue that the framework of this continual story is subject to the complexity and method of presentation on behalf of the author, the overarching storyteller. In this, Flynn

doesn't necessarily provide the easy way out in terms of formulating a story that's predictable and easy to follow. This provokes a source of uncertainty with respect to the main character Amy in that despite her narcissistic personality, she also serves as a figure of sympathy. This sympathy is inadvertently encouraged due to the situation that she finds herself in: a wife who in an attempt to secure a relationship pretends to be someone that she's not. As a result, she attempts to invoke the notion of the cool girl, the girl who molds her tastes to that of her male counterpart in order to be loved and accepted. Yet, this pressure that Amy experiences truly speaks to the nightmarish vision of their courtship in that the successful longevity of their courtship involves this façade. Thus, while the novel is rather dark in this regard, it suggests that a) there's a performative role that both partners must fulfill and b) completing these roles ensures a happy courtship. Therefore, in recognizing that this is what the novel ultimately seems to suggest regarding the idea of courtship, the book offers an important critique regarding what truly constitutes a valuable courtship. However, the novel makes this critique through a character that's not normal which inadvertently forces the reader to draw their own conclusions regarding the implications of courtship. In short, Flynn both offers a stinging cultural critique of courtship while simultaneously offering a means of undermining that critique.

For some, these conclusions might potentially pertain to the sort of sympathetic appeal that we experience for Amy causing some readers to strangely support her as a character. Other readers might merely conclude that Amy is in fact crazy, taking the easy way out through a rather simplistic explanation. However, I find Flynn's purposeful evaluation or assessment of a courtship through the lens of a highly problematic character as a mere tactic. This tactic illustrates the sheer complexity of courtship and the gender relationships embedded within courtships. The struggles embedded within courtship are oftentimes compounded with other

factors making it incredibly difficult to discern between the façade or performative identity dictated by romantic pressure and the reality of one's personality. In doing so, Flynn ultimately constructs a novel that allows her to play around with the notions of gender behaviors that women ultimately undertake in an effort to secure a fruitful courtship. However, the methods that each partner undertakes to ensure their ideal courtship can ultimately cause each individual to succumb to their own version of a performative, artificial identity.

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