AN EXAMINATION OF STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY FEMALE PROTAGONISTS TO CONFRONT VICTIMHOOD IN DOMESTIC NOIR

by

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Abstract

This research examines how the female protagonists of domestic noir shed their victimhood and regain their agency, exploring how the concepts of female victimhood, female violence and female agency are portrayed in domestic noir. As domestic noir is a relatively new subgenre that emerged in 2012, there is still little research to be found, especially in terms of female victimhood and the depiction of femininities and masculinities of its protagonists. This study analyses the heterosexual marriages in three domestic noir novels, *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn (2012), *The Silent Wife* by A. S. A. Harrison (2013) and *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins (2015), exploring how the four major aspects of inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, gender performance and masquerade, female victimhood and agency, and the relationship between gender and violence are portrayed in these novels. In exploring these aspects, this research aims to identify whether the female protagonists of domestic noir actually subvert patriarchal gender norms and the norms of traditional crime fiction, if they successfully shed their victimhood and whether their victimhood and violence categorise them as heroines, anti-heroines or villainesses.

Drawn from the existing literature on domestic noir and the reading of many domestic noir novels, this study suggests that the female protagonists of domestic noir employ five main strategies when seeking to escape their victimhood and regain their agency: gender performance, masquerade, inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, recognising their victimhood, and violence. This study indicates that the female protagonists enact hegemonic masculinities, thereby threatening their male partners and the patriarchy, and are

therefore labelled as pariah femininities, which results in male spousal abuse. To avoid this, the female protagonists engage in gender performances and masquerades of hegemonic femininity/hyperfemininity. However, despite being victims, the female protagonists are often simultaneously perpetrators of violence too. Furthermore, while the female protagonists do not employ the five strategies in a linear manner, they must do so to successfully shed their victimhood and regain their agency, and recognising their victimhood is the most crucial step in this process. Nevertheless, all female protagonists do not successfully shed their victimhood and regain their agency, and of the ones that do, the degree to which they become agentic varies from female protagonist to protagonist.

My research provides a framework to analyse domestic noir novels that focus on heterosexual marriages and romantic relationships, by analysing the inter-connected aspects of femininities and masculinities in domestic noir, the use of gender performance and masquerade, the concepts of female victimhood and agency and the relationship between gender and violence through examining how they employ the five strategies of gender performance, masquerade, inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, recognising their victimhood and violence. While these aspects have been explored in the existing literature, this research provides a more in-depth analysis, by focussing on the intersections between the four major aspects of femininities and masculinities, gender performance, masquerade, female victimhood and agency, and violence in domestic noir.

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Chapter One – Introduction

1.1   Background to the Study

1.1.1   Preamble

As an avid reader, I have always been fascinated by crime fiction. However, the level of violence directed at women in it made me uncomfortable and, dissatisfied with how women were always victims and never heroes, I sought out mysteries and thrillers with female protagonists and discovered Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2012). I found domestic noir interesting because of how different the subgenre was from the mysteries I had read. The traditional crime fiction novels I had read almost always contained a predictable pattern with a clearly defined hero, victim, and villain, whereas in domestic noir, these lines are blurred. I prefer the complexity of the characters and how no one in domestic noir is completely 'good' or 'bad', and rightly so, because people are complicated. In fact, the subgenre provides interesting portrayals of both victimhood and villainy for both female and male characters that is different from other subgenres of crime fiction which usually feature stereotypical heroes, victims, and villains. Not only does domestic noir feature agentic female protagonists, but the stories are also female-oriented, both rarities among crime fiction subgenres. Additionally, domestic noir deals with difficult women's issues and reflects women's lived experiences. This is one of the appeals of the subgenre, as it demonstrates, often dramatically, the dangers within the home, illustrating how the home is not as safe as is often believed.

I first decided to research domestic noir as part of my dissertation in my master's degree. Intrigued by the agentic female characters that subverted gender norms and stereotypes and surprised at how little research could be found on the subgenre, I chose to study Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* and A. S. A. Harrison's *The Silent Wife* (2013), exploring the concepts of violence and victimhood in the novels. However, I felt that I could examine these concepts in more depth in a doctoral thesis. Therefore, in this thesis, my intention is to analyse domestic noir novels to explore the intersections between gender, violence, victimhood, and agency, focusing specifically on the subversive female protagonists.

1.1.2   *About Domestic Noir*

In 2013, author Julia Crouch used the term 'domestic noir' to describe a new subgenre of crime fiction that featured primarily female protagonists (Crouch, 2013, 2018; Joyce, 2018). The term, previously used in the film genre to describe a type of film noir (e.g., *In a Lonely Place*, *Sunset Boulevard*), was adapted to refer to the newer crime fiction subgenre by Crouch (Ray, 1950; Wilder, 1950; Lloydville, 2007; Renzi, 2012; Crouch, 2013; Paszkiewicz, 2019). While the domestic noir of the film genre included conflicts between married couples or romantic partners, the primary focus was still on the male protagonists as it was in traditional crime fiction, and therefore, markedly different from the domestic noir of fiction (Lloydville, 2007; Renzi, 2012; Marling, 2013). For the purposes of this research, the term 'domestic noir' will refer only to the new crime fiction subgenre from this point onwards.

Domestic noir deviates from the practices of traditional crime fiction. Often starring male characters, women in traditional crime fiction are mainly relegated to a few roles, specifically those of the victim/corpse or of constantly-mistreated law enforcement officers (Reddy, 1988, 2003; Crouch, 2018; Joyce, 2018; Miller, 2018). This has changed with domestic noir, where the focus is on women and the storylines reflect women's lived experiences (Crouch, 2013, 2018; Kennedy, 2017; Joyce, 2018). The subgenre became popular with the commercially successful and critically acclaimed *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn (2012) (Joyce, 2018). Noted for its suspenseful and twisted storyline about a devolving marriage, *Gone Girl* has become the epitome of this new era in crime fiction in which female characters could be more than long-suffering victims of the patriarchy (Kennedy, 2017). While domestic noir's storylines are reminiscent of classics such as Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, the treatment of the female characters is vastly different in domestic noir, and women often appear victorious over their male abusers (Crouch, 2018). Despite the bleakness depicted in domestic noir, its female characters have "happier" endings than most of their female counterparts in other subgenres of crime fiction. However, this concept of "happier endings" in domestic noir differs from the commonly accepted meaning of the term and instead relates specifically to the female protagonists achieving their desired goals, usually punishing or eliminating their male abusers. This is in stark contrast to most other subgenres of crime fiction such as serial killer crime fiction where the female protagonists and characters often do not gain any agency and are violently assaulted and/or murdered by their male abusers with little recourse for justice. In comparison, the majority of female protagonists of

domestic noir punish or murder their male abusers, thereby implementing their own concept of justice, and, in doing so, succeed in regaining their lost agency.

The term 'domestic noir' highlights the focus of the subgenre: the *domestic* sphere (Crouch, 2013, 2018). Situated within the larger genre of crime fiction, domestic noir explores dysfunctional families and the complexity of human relationships. Staying true to the crime fiction genre, domestic noir features abuse, abduction, sexual assault and murder, however the primary focus is on the characters' relationships, while the crime-solving becomes secondary. The subgenre mainly focuses on two types of relationships: marital and parent-child.

Domestic noir novels are female-centric in terms of plot and characters, and the subgenre "puts the female experience at the centre of the narrative, rather than just allowing it to support or decorate or provide the springboard for the main, male story" (Crouch, 2013, 2018, p. viii). Domestic noir authors are mainly concerned with women's relationships, thus this subgenre primarily deals with themes such as "family, motherhood, children, marriage, love, sex and betrayal" (Crouch, 2018, p. vii). With the heavy focus on family dynamics, domestic noir novels are both explorations and critiques of the concept of "home as sanctuary" (Crouch, 2018, p. vii). While the home is commonly considered a safe space, domestic noir challenges this assumption by presenting subversive stories (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 3; Crouch, 2018, p. vii). Delving into abusive marriages and parent-child relationships, domestic noir is an attempt to emphasise how the perceived safety of the home can also be dangerous to its inhabitants (Crouch, 2013, 2018, p. vii). The alarming statistics of domestic violence and child abuse are evidence of how the "[h]ome can also be a cage, a

place of torment, of psychological tyranny, of violence" (Domestic violence is discussed in Section 1.2.1) (Crouch, 2018, p. vii).

Within the last decade, domestic noir-themed television shows have gained more acceptance within the mainstream, following the success of Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*, which attracted attention to the budding subgenre (Joyce, 2018, p. 3). The subsequent film adaptation of the novel grossed US$369 million worldwide (Box Office Mojo, n.d.). Television shows such as *Doctor Foster* (2015-2017), *The Replacement* (2017) and *Apple Tree Yard* (2017) have been given prime-time slots on BBC, indicating that these series are becoming increasingly popular and have serious potential for success (Joyce, 2018, p. 3). More movie and television adaptations of domestic noir novels continue to be released by major media companies with additions like Liane Moriarty's *Big Little Lies* as an HBO television series (2017-2019) (Vallée and Arnold, 2017, 2019), Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects* as an HBO miniseries (2018) (Vallée, 2018), *Truth Be Told* (2019 to present) (Spellman *et al.*, 2019, 2020, 2021) based on Kathleen Barber's *Are You Sleeping* by Apple and Celeste Ng's *Little Fires Everywhere* by Hulu (2020) (Tigelaar *et al.*, 2020), among many others. In addition, the 2015 indie videogame *Her Story*, featuring a wife who is suspected of murdering her husband, sold over 100,000 copies (Joyce, 2018, p. 3).

1.2   Relevance of Domestic Noir in Contemporary Society

Julia Crouch noted that the stories in domestic noir have been told before (Crouch, 2018). From Euripides' *Medea*, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The*

Yellow Wall-Paper and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, stories of oppressed or mistreated women and their struggles to escape have been written before (Dugdall, 2015; Crouch, 2018, p. viii). This begs the question why these stories merit an entire subgenre within crime fiction and why they have become so popular. One reason is that women are able to relate on a personal level to these novels because domestic noir captures the challenges of familial and spousal relationships despite domestic noir being rather more dramatic in its representation of ordinary family life and marriages with its plots containing serial killers, abductions and murders-for-hire (Abbott, 2018a; Crouch, 2018). However, these plots containing twisted crimes against women are also representative of the challenges women face in society in terms of gender-based violence (Abbott, 2018a; Crouch, 2018; Joyce, 2018). From abduction to rape and other forms of sexual crimes, domestic noir explores women's issues (Joyce, 2018; Crouch, 2018; Abbott, 2018a).

Another reason for domestic noir's popularity is its relevance in contemporary society. In a sense, domestic noir can be called a response to the male-on-female violence that has reached epidemic levels (Kennedy, 2017; Abbott, 2018a). Factors such as the #MeToo movement which brought global attention to sexual assault and harassment of girls and women, Fourth-wave feminism which started in approximately 2012, misogynistic comments made by the US President Donald Trump, an overall rise in gender-based violence (due in part to the rise of the alt-right [the Alternative Right/Far- Right] in the West and the 'incel' [involuntary celibates] culture) have all contributed towards bringing women's issues to the foreground (EEOC Investigation, 2018; Zacharek, Dockterman, and Sweetland Edwards, 2017; Dean and Aune, 2015;

Munro, 2013, pp. 22-25; Wrye, 2009; Cochrane, 2003; Rivers, 2017; Makela, 2016; Lyons, 2018; Nagle, 2017; Zimmerman, Ryan, and Duriesmith, 2018; Tolentino, 2018; Williams, 2018; Oppenheim, 2018).

1.2.1   Domestic Violence

Crime fiction is a dynamic genre that is capable of holding up a mirror to society, bringing attention to contemporary social issues (Crouch, 2018). In light of the global changes that have occurred within the past few decades, domestic noir's "stories of women and children inhabiting unsafe homes are important" because "[t]hey are stories that readers relate to" (Couch, 2018, p. viii). Domestic noir novels are as relevant in the twenty-first century as during any other period because the concerns regarding women's experiences remain the same, especially in terms of women's rights. This subgenre is heavily focused on the injustices women face due to the patriarchy and are explorations of women's issues that arise out of the patriarchy itself, such as women's rights in terms of career, family life, education, reproduction and child-rearing. Within these themes, domestic noir highlights an ongoing issue that affects women globally: domestic violence (DV)/intimate partner violence (IPV). Domestic violence has become an epidemic due to patriarchal values promoting unhealthy types of masculinity (e.g., fragile masculinity that led to the formation of 'incel' culture) that encourage devaluing women (Connell, 2005; Oppenheim, 2018; Tolentino, 2018; Williams, 2018; Zimmerman, Ryan and Duriesmith, 2018; DiMuccio and Knowles, 2020).

In England and Wales alone, two women are murdered by either their partner or ex-partner each week, domestic violence accounts for 8% of crimes committed, and on average, police receive a domestic abuse-related emergency call every 30 seconds (Women's Aid, n.d.; Smith, Fowler and Niolon, 2014). In the United States, 20 individuals are physically abused every 20 minutes by an intimate partner and 15% of all violent crimes are caused by intimate partners (Women's Aid, n.d.; Smith, Fowler and Niolon, 2014). Globally, it is estimated that 38% of femicides are committed by a current or previous male intimate partner and 35% of women worldwide experience either physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate male partner or male non-partner in their lifetime (several national studies indicate that this figure may be as high as 70%) (UN WOMEN, 2017; World Health Organization, 2017). This is the reality that domestic noir novels attempt to mirror to highlight the difficulties faced by women within the domestic sphere.

1.3   Aims of the Study

The identification of domestic noir as a subgenre marks a shift in the crime fiction genre (Joyce, 2018; Miller, 2018). Its heavy focus on women, with female protagonists and a primarily female cast is not the norm in crime fiction. The crime fiction genre has generally been male-dominated, with male characters playing the heroes and the villains, while female characters had a set of limited roles or made little to no appearance, often treated as "an object to be looked at and desired" (Scaggs, 2005, pp. 81, 100; Joyce, 2018; Miller, 2018). Female characters in crime fiction are usually restricted to the following:

corpses, victims, tired law enforcement officers/crime experts/amateur sleuths trying to succeed in a male-dominated profession, sex workers and seductive *femmes fatales* who almost always meet a gruesome end (Reddy, 1988, pp. 70, 72, 73; Scaggs, 2005, pp. 102-104; Crouch, 2018; Miller, 2018). However, in domestic noir, not only are the female characters the focal point, but the content itself focuses on women's lived experiences (Crouch, 2018). Thus, domestic noir marks a feminist turn in crime fiction, by giving its female characters more depth (Miller, 2018). This turn towards featuring women in female-centric storylines is unusual in traditional crime fiction and is an important aspect to explore.

This research aims to study the domestic noir subgenre in terms of the heterosexual marriages within them through a study of the following four aspects: the inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour; gender performance and masquerade; female victimhood and agency, and the relationship between gender and violence. Based on these four aspects, the aims of this research are to:

1. Identify how the conventional stereotypes of feminine and masculine behaviour are subverted within the subgenre.
2. Explore how female protagonists of domestic noir engage in gender performance and masquerade.
3. Analyse how women's victimhood is portrayed within the subgenre.
4. Examine how female and male violence are portrayed within the subgenre.

1.4   Methodology

This study will focus on four major aspects in domestic noir: the inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, the gender performance and masquerade in which its female protagonists engage, the relationship between gender and violence and the concepts of female victimhood and agency. The theories used to examine these aspects are discussed below.

1.4.1   *Femininities and Masculinities in Domestic Noir*

This aspect will be examined using Raewyn Connell's Gender Order Theory and the Concept of Multiple Masculinities as well as Mimi Schippers' Theory of Gender Hegemony and Multiple Masculinities and Femininities (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Schippers, 2007).

Connell's Gender Order Theory discusses the different types of masculinities and explores how power is distributed in society (Connell, 2000, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Schippers, 2007). Hegemonic masculinity, the most dominant masculinity, is described as a practice that asserts and legitimises men's social and political dominance over women and minorities, clarifying how and why men can retain power over other groups (Connell, 2005, p. 77; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). As this theory also sheds light on damaging types of masculinities that both actively and indirectly oppress women and other marginalised groups, it will provide a framework to explore masculinities and gender hierarchy in domestic noir.

Due to the lack of theories discussing multiple and hierarchical femininities in detail, Mimi Schippers offers a framework that expands upon Connell's theory by introducing a concept of multiple femininities and gender

hegemony, considering crucial factors such as race, providing a more detailed conception of the social hierarchy between various genders (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Martin, 1998; Pyke and Johnson, 2003; Schippers, 2007). This will allow an examination of the types of masculinities and femininities in domestic noir and aid in understanding the female protagonists' motivations.

1.4.2   *Gender Performance and Masquerade*

The aspects of gender performance and masquerade are closely connected within domestic noir, often used together by the female protagonists. Thus, both aspects will be analysed together, using Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity and Joan Riviere's Concept of Womanliness as a Masquerade to explore gender performance and masquerade respectively (Riviere, 1929; Butler, 2006). As gender is a prominent component of domestic noir as gender norms and differences play active roles in the subgenre, Butler's theory can be used to explore domestic noir's female and male protagonists' conscious and unconscious performances of gender by examining how gender is reinforced through their actions. The concept of masquerade is intertwined with these performances of gender, as the female protagonists often engage in a hyperfemininity (or 'womanliness') that functions as a mask (masquerade) to avoid censure from men and society for their non-conformance (Riviere, 1929).

While Butler's theory is used to explore gender performance in domestic noir, for the analysis on masquerade, both Riviere's and Butler's discussions on masquerade will be used. Analysis using these theories will provide a better

understanding of the relationships between women and men and the gender norms that force them into certain types of roles and behaviour.

1.4.3 Gender and Violence

Within domestic noir, both women and men commit violence with the female protagonists engaging in violent acts against their husbands to retaliate against their abuse, therefore, a study of female violence must consider external factors that cause the female characters to resort to violence. Thus, Swan and Snow's Theory of Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Relationships will be used to analyse female violence as a response to male violence (Swan and Snow, 2006). The theory's model lists a comprehensive set of factors that lead women to commit acts of violence against their partners (Swan and Snow, 2006, p. 1029). This model takes into account factors such as women's victimisation (by their spouses), childhood trauma and defensive motivations that will provide a better understanding of the characters' turn to violence (Swan and Snow, 2006).

To analyse male violence, Connell's Gender Order Theory and the Concept of Multiple Masculinities is used (Connell, 2000; Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). While most male abusers in domestic noir embody hegemonic masculinity, there are also characters that take advantage of their privileged male position to abuse their wives. Thus, this theory will be used to analyse male violence in domestic noir.

1.4.4 Female Victimhood and Agency

The aspects of female victimhood and agency will be analysed through Schippers' Theory of Gender Hegemony and Multiple Masculinities and Femininities and Swan and Snow's Theory of Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Relationships (Swan and Snow, 2006). Schippers's theory helps to identify the types of femininities present within domestic noir and examine how the female protagonists move from the role of victim to perpetrator (Schippers, 2007). Swan and Snow's theory will be used to explore the violence committed by the female protagonists.

1.5   Significance of the Study

Domestic noir marks a shift in the types of roles that women play within the crime fiction genre (Scaggs, 2005; Valdrè, 2017). Traditional crime fiction usually relies on male characters to drive the plot and its protagonists are almost always male (Scaggs, 2005). However, this does not mean that women do not feature prominently in crime fiction. Female detectives and amateur sleuths have become increasingly common and appear as early as 1864 (Reddy, 1988, 2003; Scaggs, 2005; Andre, 2013). From amateur sleuths like Agatha Christie's Miss Marple and Janet Evanovich's bounty hunter Stephanie Plum to professionals such as Andrew Forrester's undercover agent Mrs Gladden and Patricia Cornwell's Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Kay Scarpetta, detective fiction does feature female protagonists (Reddy, 2003; Scaggs, 2005; Braithwaite, 2011; Andre, 2013; Waters and Worthington, 2018). However, prominent female characters in crime fiction are often limited to amateurs and professionals

(Reddy, 1988; Scaggs, 2005). Though numerous, female characters playing main roles are still outnumbered by male detectives, and the female detectives are always operating within a male-dominated profession where they can achieve some success only by becoming 'one of the guys' (Reddy, 1988; Scaggs, 2005). Despite these female characters' prominence within these stories, the novels are still "heavily populated by men" (Braithwaite, 2011, p. 418).

In contrast, domestic noir almost always features a predominantly female cast and the primary focus is on the women's lived experiences (Crouch, 2018). Whereas stories with female detectives are essentially detective fiction with a female protagonist instead of a male one (Reddy, 1988, 2003; Scaggs, 2005), domestic noir's plots are designed *for* women, highlighting the challenges of being a woman (Kennedy, 2017; Abbott, 2018a; Crouch, 2018; Joyce, 2018). By keeping the spotlight on women and their relationships, domestic noir authors tell stories that are unique to women, instead of switching the sex and maintaining similar storylines (Miller, 2018; Crouch, 2018; Joyce, 2018; Abbott, 2018a). This type of female-centric crime fiction has paved the way for more active and diverse roles for women (Miller, 2018). Considering the large readership, the popularity of the subgenre and how domestic noir resonates with many women, it is important to explore how this shift affects the representation of women and the message it sends its readers about femininity and masculinity. Thus, research on this area will expand existing knowledge on the new active role of women within crime fiction and make a new contribution to the field in terms of domestic noir.

1.5.1   Current Research on Domestic Noir

In addition to the roles of female characters, the role that violence plays in traditional crime fiction has also undergone a change in domestic noir. As opposed to female characters in most other types of crime fiction, in domestic noir, women transition from being victims to becoming the perpetrators of violence (Kennedy, 2017; Crouch, 2018; Peters, 2018). This change is a new phenomenon and warrants analysis into the shift of gendered violence within crime fiction. Analysis of this shift will add to current limited knowledge of the workings of gendered violence within domestic noir.

In this research, I also explore how conventional ideas of femininity and masculinity are subverted within domestic noir. With the shifts in the role of women and gendered violence, there is also a change in how femininity and masculinity are portrayed. What it means to be a woman and a man has changed in the past two decades, with the rise of fourth-wave feminism and the fight for equality for LGBTQ+ people (Munro, 2013). These movements have redefined the meaning of gender, affecting women's and LGBTQ+ rights, familial structures, representations of gender in media and acceptable fashion choices (Munro, 2013; Cochrane, 2003; Rivers, 2017). As these changes affected the representations of femininities and masculinities and changed the face of crime fiction, it is important to explore the portrayals of gender in these novels. Identifying how the subgenre inverts conventional femininities and masculinities in traditional crime fiction can add to the limited existing knowledge about its representation of gender.

Domestic noir, by virtue of being a relatively new subgenre, has been little researched. Its popularity and, more importantly, the radical changes it has brought to crime fiction, merit an exploration of the subgenre. Thus, through this research, I intend to contribute to expanding the limited knowledge in the field regarding domestic noir, in terms of female violence, femininities and masculinities, gender performativity and masquerade, and female victimhood.

There is relatively little research conducted on domestic noir and the sub-type that is being explored in this study, and much of this work focusses on one of the most popular novels of the subgenre, Gillian Flynn's novel *Gone Girl*. Apart from this, others have explored Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*, Liane Moriarty's *Little Lies*, A.S.A. Harrison's *The Silent Wife* and novels by Tana French and Pierre Lemaitre. Most studies analyse the aspects of female violence and victimhood, noting the significance of the shift from victim to perpetrator in the female protagonists and their use of violence as a response to male violence.

Laura Joyce and Henry Sutton's (2018) collection of essays, *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction*, includes a significant portion of the work that can be found on the subgenre. Of these, only a few focus on the aspects discussed within this study. In it, Eva Burke (2018) analyses Flynn's *Gone Girl* and its female protagonist Amy's use of multiple personas and self-victimisation in her attempts at manipulating narratives of female victimhood, maintaining that Flynn's novel is an exploration of female victimhood and its fetishisation as a cultural phenomenon. Emma V. Miller's (2018) chapter explores the themes of female victimhood, media narratives of victimhood, violence, masquerade and subversion in acts of violence in Flynn's *Gone Girl*

and Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*, highlighting the significance of the female protagonists' shift from victim to perpetrator, the subversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour when they engage in violence as revenge and how the novels' female protagonists employ masquerade as a response to social pressures arising from gender norms. Elena Avanzas Álvarez (2018) also focusses on the aspects of female victimhood, violence and masquerade, noting the significance of the shift from male-on-female to female-on-male violence. In addition, Rosemary Erickson Johnsen (2018) examines the role of the supernatural in Tana French's novels, exploring themes of violence and female victimhood while Andrea Hynynen (2018) explores the theme of violence in Pierre Lemaitre's novels.

Apart from these, several other works can be found on domestic noir. Victoria Kennedy (2017) offers a brief introduction to domestic noir, highlighting the subgenre's focus on the dangers within the domestic sphere and the role of the female protagonist as a a modern version of the noir archetype of the femme fatale. Ruth Cain (2016) too focusses on these aspects, while examining how neoliberalism and the expectations of motherhood affect the female protagonists. Patrick Osborne (2017) briefly analyses many important aspects of domestic noir in *Gone Girl*, exploring female violence as retribution, Raewyn Connell's concepts of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, and how consumer culture and neoliberalism affected the female and male protagonists. Stephanie Gwin (2017) also explores neoliberal concerns in Flynn's *Gone Girl* and Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train* and examines how this affects femininity when functioning within the patriarchy. She focusses on cultural anxiety around the concept of ideal femininity and how this puts women

in competition with each other, the concept of masquerade in performing the idealised femininity and the role of the femme fatale in domestic noir. Katarzyna Paszkiewicz (2019) focusses on the effects of neoliberalism on women, femininity and motherhood in Hawkins' *Girl on the Train*, examining how women navigate being a 'working woman' and a mother in a capitalistic society that treats women as mostly worthless. Meanwhile, Stephanie Orman (2016) explores the concepts of female victimhood and violence and the dichotomy of 'the whore' and 'the virgin' in relation to social and media narratives of female victims and perpetrators in *Gone Girl*. Meredith Jeffers (2015) also explores similar aspects, emphasising the role of social and media narratives of victimhood and violence due to the pervasiveness of the true crime genre in Flynn's *Gone Girl* and Emma Donoghue's *Room*. Deanne Martin (2019) too explores the power and effects of true crime and social media on societal norms in terms of Flynn's *Gone Girl*. In it, she also briefly examines the concepts of female victimhood and violence, Nick's expressions of masculinity, Amy and Nick's use of masquerade and the effect of having unreliable narrators. In her book, Rossella Valdrè (2017) engages in a psycholanalytic examination of narcissism of the female and male protagonists of Flynn's *Gone Girl* and A.S.A. Harrison's *The Silent Wife*, analysing the envy and idealisation in *Gone Girl* and the power of silence in *The Silent Wife*.

Much of the work on the subgenre is on Gillian Flyn''s *Gone Girl*, with much focus on her similarity to the femme fatale of noir fiction. Emily Johansen (2016), Kenneth Lota (2016), Stephanie Orman (2016), Cannon Elder Lane (2018), and Elina Cederfeldt Vahlne (2017) all explore female violence in domestic noir, interpreting the female protagonists as villains and monsters.

Ashley E. Christensen (2020) highlights how *Gone Girl*'s Amy is a modern iteration of the angel vs. monster dynamic with Amy's gender performance of the 'Cool Girl', adding that this novel is a revision of such female stereotypes "to fit them in a postmodern socio-historical context" (p. 86). Additionally, Christensen (2020) makes the interesting point that, in their marriage, both Amy and Nick represent the angel and the monster (p. 86). Kelsey Argent (2020) also notes the the presence of the binary of angel and monster in the female protagonists of domestic noir, especially in *Gone Girl* and *The Girl on the Train*, suggesting that these female protagonists are essentially the femmes fatales of noir fiction appearing essentially unchanged in twentieth and twenty-first century neo-chick noir, further accentuating the gender binaries as the female protagonists of domestic noir exhibit both feminine and masculine traits (p. ii). Similarly, Bernice M. Murphy (2017) asserts that Amy from *Gone Girl* "represents a highly meta twenty-first century take on the traditional *femme fatale* archetype" (pp. 159-160). Rosie Couch (2021) also focusses on the similarities between femmes fatales and *Gone Girl*'s Amy while Cristin Alsina (2019) views *Gone Girl* as an example of how the home is an unsafe space by equating the concept of the nuclear family to that of a torture device.

1.5.2   Gaps in the Research

The most researched themes of domestic noir are its most overt ones, namely female violence and female victimhood. In terms of violence, these works explore the female protagonists' use of violence in their attempts to escape abusive relationships and regain agency (Jeffers, 2015; Cain, 2016; Orman,

2016; Gwin, 2017; Kennedy, 2017; Osborne, 2017; Vahlne, 2017; Álvarez, 2018; Miller, 2018; Martin, 2019). They highlight the importance of having predominantly female protagonists in crime fiction with some measure of agency and the shift from primarily male-on-female violence to female-on-male violence (Jeffers, 2015; Orman, 2016; Johansen, 2016; Osborne, 2017; Gwin, 2017; Kennedy, 2017; Álvarez, 2018; Burke, 2018; Miller, 2018; Waters and Worthington, 2018; Hynynen, 2018; Johnsen, 2018; Joyce, 2018; Martin, 2019). These new agentic female protagonists redefine the roles of female-identifying characters within the male-centric crime genre, thereby redefining the concept of female victimhood. As both victims and perpetrators of violence, they complicate the narrative of the domestic noir female protagonists being only villainesses, challenging the dichotomy of the 'the whore' and 'the virgin' (Jeffers, 2015; Johansen, 2016; Orman, 2016; Vahlne, 2017; Gwin, 2017; Kennedy, 2017; Osborne, 2017; Álvarez, 2018; Burke, 2018; Johnsen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

While these works discuss female violence as a tool used to change their victim status and achieve agency for the female protagonists, they do not discuss in depth the types of violence employed by both the female and male protagonists throughout the novels and how these affect the narratives. In addition, the aspect of female protagonists engaging in acts of violence throughout the course of their relationships before they mete out their final punishment to their partners is not discussed in depth, considering that the female protagonists engage in multiple types of abuse directed at their spouses in response to the abuse they face.

Apart from a few researchers, others have not explored the types of femininities and masculinities at play within the novel and how the inversion of these normative behaviours affect the dynamic between the spouses. This challenging of gender norms by the female protagonists is a key feature within the subgenre. Although Jeffers (2015) briefly examines how inversion of normative masculine and feminine behaviour occurs in *Gone Girl* and how this affects Nick's insecurities about his masculinity and their marriage, this aspect is not fully explored in many works, despite Amy's enactment of masculinity negatively affecting their marriage. Miller (2018) analyses this aspect primarily in terms of the subversion of feminine and masculine types of violence, pointing out that the Rachel and Anna from Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train* employ masculine types of violence that mimic the abuse usually directed at female victims in crime fiction upon their male abuser. While Osborne (2017) makes the point that Amy uses male violence in *Gone Girl*, this is not analysed in-depth in conjunction with other related concepts such as femininities and masculinities as well as the types of violence used by both protagonists.

Other aspects such as the concept of female agency, masquerade and gender performance have been discussed in some works, either in passing or in some depth. While most works discuss the concept of female agency in terms of the inclusion of female characters as protagonists, their use of violence as a strategy to regain their agency and change their position from victim to perpetrator have not been analysed in depth, especially in relation to how they invert normative feminine and masculine behaviour throughout their marriages. Although masquerade is directly referenced in the works of Osborne (2017), Miller (2018), Álvarez (2018) and Martin (2019), masquerade's connection to

and reliance upon gender performance is not addressed in-depth, although they discuss how the female protagonists manipulate certain gender norms and social and media narratives to engage in a successful masquerade. This discussion of masquerade only in relation to gender conformance and patriarchal expectations of women is incomplete without exploring normative feminine and masculine behaviour and the conscious and unconscious performances of gender, how the female protagonists flout gender norms (inversion), how they employ these tactics within their masquerade and how they use a combination of masquerade and gender performance along with violence to punish their male abusers to regain agency.

It is also important to note that, while the existing literature on domestic noir analyse the themes and concepts of violence, female victimhood, female agency, masquerade, gender performance and inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, all these aspects are often not discussed together and in depth, despite being intricately connected. Therefore, it is important to explore all four aspects together to examine how they influence each other.

1.6   Limitations of the Study

The domestic noir subgenre has two major sub-types: the first focusses on marital and romantic relationships (mainly heterosexual), and the second focusses on parent-child relationships, specifically the relationship between mothers and daughters. However, this research will only be limited to analysing novels that explore the complexities of marriages as parent-child relationships is a larger topic of its own that cannot be analysed thoroughly along with novels

about marriages in this research. Thus, this study will focus only on the sub-type of domestic noir that explores the relationship between spouses in heterosexual marriages through the analysis of three novels.

Although many of the novels within this sub-type focus almost exclusively on the relationship between spouses, there are some variations to be found within it. These include novels that focus on heterosexual marriages with the protagonists' children playing a prominent role in the plot (e.g., Samantha Hayes' *In Too Deep*), and novels where the female protagonists complete suicide (e.g., Emma Chapman's *How to be a Good Wife*). As with the sub-type that focusses on the mother-child relationship, novels that include the protagonists' children playing a significant role have not been included as the relationship between the parents and their children is an added layer that must be analysed and is beyond the scope of this research. In terms of the novels that feature the female protagonist completing suicide, these have not been included as they comprise only a few novels and offer a different concept of victimhood that is beyond the aims of this research.

While the large readership of domestic noir has contributed to its popularity as many find it easy to relate to the themes within (Abbott, 2018a), this study will focus primarily on only three domestic noir novels. These will be analysed in terms of four main aspects (femininities and masculinities in domestic noir, gender performance and masquerade, the relationship between gender and violence, and female victimhood and agency), and address only the aims of this study as listed in Section 1.3 of this chapter.

1.7   Operationalised Definitions of Key Terms

This section contains definitions of key terms and how they will be used in this thesis.

1.7.1   Traditional Crime Fiction

This is a label used to refer to various subgenres of crime fiction that give prominence to storylines involving the macho male stereotype (an example of toxic masculinity) (Porter, 2003; Abbott, 2002; Crouch, 2013, 2018; Joyce, 2018). The crime fiction genre is dominated by novels featuring this male stereotype and has continued to be the norm (Abbott, 2002; Reddy, 2003; McCann, 2010, pp. 42–57; Crouch, 2013, 2018; Joyce, 2018; Abbott, 2018). Some examples of traditional crime fiction are the hard-boiled detective subgenre and noir fiction (Porter, 2003; Abbott, 2002; McCann, 2010). Traditional crime fiction actively promotes conventional stereotypes of masculinity such as the use of violence, disrespect of authority and misogyny (David and Brannon, 1976; Connell, 2000, 2005; Abbott, 2002; Porter, 2003; Reddy, 2003; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Levant and Richmond, 2007; McCann, 2010; Nickerson, 2010).

1.7.2   Inversion

This term refers to how the domestic noir female and male protagonists violate gender norms by inverting normative/stereotypical feminine and masculine behaviour. While this is also referred to as subversion, the term

'inversion' is used in this thesis, as subversion of patriarchal values is a result of the inversion of normative gendered behaviour (Álvarez, 2018; Miller, 2018).

1.7.3   *Gender Performance and Masquerade*

1.7.3.1 Gender Performance

Judith Butler claimed that one is not born into a gender, but that gender is the result of a sequence of actions, with gender being performative (Butler, 2006, p. 34; Salih, 2007). Essentially, gender identities are created and constituted through language, leading to behaviours that society attributes to the female and male sexes (normative/stereotypical feminine and masculine behaviour) (Butler, 2006).

While Butler uses the term 'gender performativity', the female protagonists of domestic noir engaging in certain gendered behaviour is referred to as 'gender performance' throughout this thesis. The use of the term 'gender performance' in reference to the female protagonists' attempts at mimicking idealised femininities is meant to bring attention to their inauthentic expressions of gender that take advantage of pre-established gender norms. Their gender performance of hegemonic femininity/hyperfemininity is solely a performance, and is also intricately connected to the concept of masquerade (discussed below) and hence it is connected to, but different from, gender performativity.

1.7.3.2 Masquerade

Joan Riviere described "womanliness" as something that "could be assumed and worn as a mask" and that womanliness is "the same thing" as "the masquerade" (Riviere, 1929, p. 306). She wrote that women engaged in masquerade by putting on a "mask of womanliness" in order to "avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men" (Riviere, 1929, p. 306) by "transform[ing] aggression and the fear of reprisal into seduction and flirtation" (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 65). Women wear this mask to appear more feminine to "hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it" (Riviere, 1929, p. 304).

While both Riviere and Butler used the term 'masquerade' to primarily refer to female/feminine masquerade, in this research, this term is also used to describe men enacting specific types of masculinities. Although the male protagonists engage in gender performance when enacting hegemonic masculinity/hypermasculinity, their intention is to mask their non-hegemonic masculinity, thereby making their gender performance a masquerade too.[1] Therefore, in this research, the term 'masquerade' is used to refer to the masking behaviour employed by women *and* men.

1.7.4   Recognising Victimhood

This refers to the point at which domestic noir's female protagonists reconcile with the idea that they are victims of domestic violence/intimate

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[1] The concept of male/masculine masquerade has been somewhat explored in film studies, particularly by Chris Holmlund (1993).

partner violence. There is no one term to be found in current research to refer to this point in the female protagonists' journey to regaining their agency, therefore, 'recognising victimhood' will be used in this thesis. It must be noted that the behaviour and coping mechanisms associated with recognising their victimhood are not uniform and can change based on the novel and the female protagonist.

1.7.5   Escaping Victimhood

Used in the phrase 'escaping victimhood', this term refers to the female protagonists' shift away from the role of victim to the role of perpetrator. The word 'escape' is not a reference to the female protagonists' physical escape from their abusers (although some female protagonists regain agency through physical escape), the term refers to their moving away from or shedding the role of 'victim'.

1.8   Summary

Domestic noir was recognised as a subgenre of its own in the 2010s and marks a significant change within the crime fiction genre, where female characters have more roles to play and regain their agency despite the abuse and violence they have endured. The subgenre also highlights the dangers inherent within the home, a space that is generally considered safe, and with this, sparks important discussions about women's issues such as domestic violence and concerns over social issues such as child abuse and toxic masculinity. With the resurgence of feminism, women's issues have returned to the foreground and

domestic noir is indicative of the social, political, economic and legal forces that have helped achieve this.

This chapter serves to provide a background to this research and discusses the aims and significance of this study. The research itself is focused on analysing heterosexual marriages within domestic noir novels through the exploration of four major aspects: the inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour; gender performance and masquerade by the female protagonists; the connection between gender and violence in this subgenre, and the concepts of female victimhood and agency. The texts will be analysed using R. W. Connell's Gender Order Theory and Multiple Masculinities; Mimi Schippers' Theory of Gender Hegemony and Multiple Masculinities and Femininities; Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity; Joan Riviere's Concept of Womanliness as a Masquerade; and Suzanne C. Swan and David L. Snow's Theory of Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Relationships. Due to the newness of the subgenre and the paucity of the amount of research, this study will add to existing knowledge about domestic noir and the crime fiction genre.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

This chapter provides a review of literature on domestic noir, discusses the definition of the term, the defining characteristics of the subgenre and a discussion of the genres and authors that have influenced domestic noir. The review of literature focuses on the four major aspects of this study: femininities and masculinities in domestic noir; gender performance and masquerade; the relationship between gender and violence; and female victimhood and agency. It also serves to provide a critical review of the theories that will be used for the analysis and the theoretical framework for this research.

2.2   What is Domestic Noir?

2.2.1   Defining Domestic Noir

Domestic noir was recognised as a subgenre within crime fiction in the early 2010s (Crouch, 2013, 2018; Joyce, 2018). Dissatisfied with calling her novels 'thrillers', Julia Crouch began using the term 'domestic noir', adapting it from the film genre (Lloydville, 2007; Renzi, 2012; Crouch, 2013). Typically used to identify novels with action-packed mysteries featuring sinister plots and themes, the term 'thriller' is usually applied to novels by James Patterson, Ken Follett and Robert Ludlum (Patterson, 2006; Crouch, 2013, 2018). Crouch felt that her novels, with their focus on women's domestic lives, would not fit comfortably within this category (Crouch, 2013, 2018, p. vii). Despite "car

chases, crashes, fights, even the odd gun" being featured in her novels, Crouch felt that the type of "high-octane effect" that authors like Patterson strove for in their novels was different from the effect she wished to create, which was "more about the build-up, rather than the climax" (Patterson, 2006; Crouch, 2013, 2018, p. vii). To Emma Chapman, author of *How to Be a Good Wife* (2013), the reason readers are attracted to the subgenre is that domestic noir allows their audience to imagine and experience their worst fears and explore how the trust we place in others can be manipulated by those closest to us (East, 2016). B. A. Paris, author of *Behind Closed Doors* (2016) and *The Breakdown* (2017), says that the 'thriller' aspect of domestic noir comes from the tension created and sustained in relationships which are often built upon lies and have some degree of physical and/or psychological abuse (East, 2016). Paris' editor, Sally Williamson, believes that the more relatable the characters and situations are, the more the reader suspects that this could happen to her too, tapping into their worst fears about their relationships (East, 2016).

Domestic noir can also be perceived as a response "to the threatened home", especially in light of the 2008 global economic recession and that the subgenre "takes the enclosed setting to claustrophobic extremes" (Waters and Worthington, 2018, p. 210), where, "while female characters may spend much time in the house, they are not at home there" (Joyce, 2018, p. 6). The recession plays a significant role in these novels even if not stated explicitly, as the subgenre offers a commentary on how women's worth is evaluated under capitalism and neoliberalism. Thus, domestic noir is also an exploration of the changing roles of women in contemporary society and reflects the challenges of women's roles as wives and mothers in this socio-political climate (Johansen,

2016; Rabinowitz, 2016; Gwin, 2017; Kennedy, 2017; Osborne, 2017; Martin, 2019; Paszkiewicz, 2019). Additionally, the claustrophobic feel achieved by the toxic relationships and a "brilliant twist or two" make the novels both terrifying, yet strangely compelling, guaranteeing reader satisfaction (East, 2016).

Crouch defines the term 'domestic noir' as a subgenre that focuses on women's lived experiences, and despite the focus on the home, the novels are feminist in that they recognise that the home may be fraught with danger for women and their families, thus rejecting the acceptance of the home as always being a safe space (Crouch, 2013, 2018). She defines 'domestic noir' as a subgenre that:

> takes place primarily in homes and workplaces, concerns itself largely (but not exclusively) with the female experience, is based around relationships and takes as its base a broadly feminist view that the domestic sphere is a challenging and sometimes dangerous prospect for its inhabitants (Crouch, 2013)

Laura Joyce (2018) describes the subgenre as being flexible as it is realistic in terms of women's issues such as domestic violence and women's rights, yet the novels may have fantastical or supernatural themes for suspense and added effect (p. 3).

The subgenre has two major variations. One is where the subgenre focuses on heterosexual marriages, taking a close look at the deterioration of a once-loving relationship. These novels almost always end in the husband's death. A minority of books of this variation end in the female protagonist's

suicide as she is unable to escape her victimisation by her husband and gain/regain her agency. Emma Chapman's *How to Be a Good Wife* is an example, where no one believes the protagonist (Marta) when she claims she has been abused by her husband for decades, is then committed to an asylum, after which she manages to escape and die by suicide (Chapman, 2013). While her suicide is an act of 'giving up', indicating that she is beaten by her husband, in a sense, she is also victorious as he can no longer subject her to abuse. However, most domestic noir novels end with the female protagonist emerging victorious, either murdering or meting out severe punishment to their abusive husbands. The second variation is focused on the sometimes-fraught relationship between mothers and their children, often between mothers and their young daughters (prepubescent and teenaged). These often feature narcissistic, over-ambitious and perfectionist mothers who desire 'only the best for their children' (di Ciolla and Pasolini, 2018). These mothers have unrealistic expectations of their children, putting them under immense pressure to realise their own dreams and ambitions for their children. Such novels often include the death of a child, most often by the mother. Koren Zailckas' *Mother, Mother* (2013) and Paula Daly's *The Trophy Child* (2017) are examples of this variation.

Despite the acceptance of the term 'domestic noir' for these novels being relatively universal now, Crouch's term did meet with resistance initially (Crouch, 2018, p. viii). There were concerns that the word 'domestic' would trivialise the extent of the women's roles within the novels and ignore other aspects of women's lives, such as their careers. When questioned whether the term could be considered anti-feminist as it apparently restricts women to the

domestic sphere, thereby aligning with traditional gender roles, Crouch (2018) responded with:

> writing about the domestic is as much a feminist act as writing about women who are captains of industry. … [Domestic noir] puts the female experience at the centre of the narrative, rather than just allowing it to support or decorate or provide the springboard for the main, male story. (p. viii)

Prior to and since Crouch's 'domestic noir', attempts were made to define and label novels that focussed on disturbances in the domestic sphere. Some of the more popular suggestions were 'psychological thriller', 'marriage thriller', 'chick noir' and 'domestic gothic' (Dugdall, 2015; Kennedy, 2017, pp. 19-21; Lima, 2021, p. 841). Although the terms have their proponents, many felt that these terms did not accurately reflect the subject matter of the subgenre, leading to 'domestic noir' being widely adopted as a label (Dugdall, 2015; East, 2016; Kennedy, 2017, pp. 19-21). These terms are discussed in Section 2.3 of this chapter.

Although the subgenre is relatively newly recognised, the themes discussed are not new. While aspects such as the setting and plots may have changed (but not by much), the stories of women and children living in unsafe homes are as relevant now as they were before (Crouch, 2018, p. viii; Joyce, 2018, pp. 1-2). Their stories have been told before because women relate to them as it reflects their lived experiences (Abbott, 2018a; Crouch, 2018, p. viii). Works such as Euripides' *Medea* (431 BC), Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), Charlotte Perkins

Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) feature plots and themes similar to those of domestic noir novels (Hardy, 1891; du Maurier, 1938; Ibsen, 1999; Gilman, 2009; Euripides, 1976; Dugdall, 2015; Crouch, 2018). However, the primary difference between the above works and modern domestic noir is that in domestic noir, women are not always only victims; sometimes, they become the perpetrators too (Cain, 2016; Crouch, 2018). Domestic noir actively challenges the idea that women have to be 'good' and 'pure', instead they are "flawed, damaged, sometimes beaten by events, sometimes victorious" (Kennedy, 2017; Valdrè, 2017; Crouch, 2018, p. viii). Most crucially, the stories in domestic noir are "seen subjectively"; the reader experiences the unravelling of the stories "through the eyes of the female protagonists" (Crouch, 2018, p. viii).

2.2.2   *Characteristics of Domestic Noir*

Due to the relative newness of the subgenre, there is little work on domestic noir. As a result, a comprehensive discussion of the subgenre's characteristics is not available. However, certain aspects that characterise domestic noir are discussed and analysed in some articles and books, and these are used with author interviews and personal observations.

One of the most prominent features of domestic noir is its female-centric nature: women take centre-stage and play an active role in terms of the plot (Kennedy, 2017; Crouch, 2018; Joyce, 2018; Miller, 2018). In contrast, women in other types of crime fiction play more passive roles: brief appearances as corpses (victims of gender-based violence), hysterical or catatonic victims of

gender-based crimes, or the harassed female police officer/detective/amateur sleuth trying to succeed in a male-dominated workplace/profession (law enforcement is considered a traditionally masculine occupation and an overwhelming majority of crime fiction features male sleuths across many subgenres) (Reddy, 1988, 2003; Scaggs, 2005; Miller, 2018).

Due to its female-centric nature, domestic noir has been called feminist (Kennedy, 2017; Crouch, 2018; Miller, 2018; Peters, 2018). While female characters are playing roles that are central to the plot, the characters have more depth and subvert patriarchal ideas of gender roles and ideals of femininity (Crouch, 2018; Peters, 2018). Many have also applauded the villainy and the boldness of these female characters as a response to male violence and the patriarchy (Abbott, 2018a; Crouch, 2018; Peters, 2018). However, domestic noir has faced backlash for this same reason and its critics deride the subgenre as being anti-feminist and misogynistic for its depiction of women as 'man-haters' due to the prevalence of mariticide in the subgenre (Crouch, 2018; Peters, 2018).

Domestic noir is known for its use of unreliable narrators (Jeffers, 2015; Orman, 2016; Martin, 2019). Many of the subgenre's novels switch between the perspectives of the two main protagonists, most often the husband and wife, and both provide different versions of the truth for personal benefit. This is found in some of the subgenre's most popular examples, such as *Gone Girl* (2012) and *The Silent Wife* (2013). Others feature the perspectives of multiple female characters, again offering up different versions of the truth, as found in *The Girl on the Train* (2015). In contrast, novels such as *How to Be a Good Wife* (2013) and *The Breakdown* (2017) have a female protagonist who is in a confused state

of mind, constantly suffering from hallucinations and flashbacks she cannot understand, thus, both the character herself and the reader cannot trust her.

Violence is an important aspect of domestic noir. Whereas in most other types of crime fiction men exert violence upon women, in domestic noir, female characters are often more violent than the male characters (Priestman, 1998; Scaggs, 2005). Violence directed towards men is prevalent in domestic noir just as male-on-female violence is in traditional crime fiction (Kennedy, 2017; Peters, 2018). In domestic noir, the male gaze and gendered (male) violence of traditional crime fiction is subverted by introducing a predominantly feminine perspective (the female gaze), and it is women who silence men through violence in response to male abuse (Kennedy, 2017; Crouch, 2018; Miller, 2018; Peters, 2018).

2.2.3   Domestic Noir Novels in Other Countries

The majority of domestic noir novels are by Western authors and feature mostly White characters based in the United States, England and Scandinavian countries such as Norway (some domestic noir novels are also set in Canada, Australia and other European countries) (Kennedy, 2017; Crouch, 2018; Joyce, 2018). One of the main reasons the subgenre includes mostly Western works is because the subgenre has officially been recognised as a separate subgenre of crime fiction[2] only in the West (Kennedy, 2017; Álvarez, 2018; Catoira, 2018; Crouch, 2018; Joyce, 2018). This is not to say that these stories of women

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[2] Although domestic noir is also considered to be a subgenre of women's fiction due to its focus on women's issues such as intimate partner violence and child abuse, its inclusion of the mystery/thriller aspect and the accompanying violence has cemented the subgenre's place in the larger genre of crime fiction.

overcoming abuse through violence directed towards their male abusers is solely a Western concept (Álvarez, 2018; Catoira, 2018). Novels from countries around the world feature this theme, however, they are often categorised as women's fiction or simply as a psychological thriller if it includes some suspense and violence.[3] Thus, although Sri Lankan novels such as Ru Freeman's *A Disobedient Girl* (2009) and Karen Roberts' *The Lament of the Dhobi Woman* (2010) feature storylines similar to Emma Chapman's *How to Be a Good Wife* (which is categorised as a domestic noir novel), they are not classified as domestic noir novels but only as women's fiction and as literary fiction.

2.3   The Emergence of Domestic Noir

2.3.1   *Popular Antecedents of Domestic Noir*

According to Crouch (2018), the following works have preceded domestic noir and contain similar themes: Euripides' *Medea* (1976) (first performed in 431 BC), Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1999) (first published in 1879), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (2009) (first published in 1892) and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938).

While many female protagonists in domestic noir avenge the injustices they have faced (e.g., Amy from *Gone Girl*), others succumb to the abuse (e.g., Marta from *How to Be a Good Wife*) (Flynn, 2013; Chapman, 2013). Similarly, the above five works mirror the range within domestic noir, from female

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[3] Depending on the content and its treatment by the author, novels with these same themes may be categorised as literary fiction.

protagonists that punish the men who wronged them (e.g., Medea and Tess) and women who gain their independence (e.g., Nora from *A Doll's House*) to the women who fail to regain their freedom (e.g., Tess and *The Yellow Wallpaper*'s narrator) (Euripides, 1976; Hardy, 1891; Ibsen, 1999; Gilman, 2009). These works also focus on the power dynamics between women and men in heterosexual unions, where men are more powerful than the women, and highlight how these power imbalances can lead to abuse and the continued oppression of women. In these works, just as in domestic noir, power dynamics are a significant aspect, and they demonstrate how patriarchy encourages the continued oppression of women.

Apart from these works, domestic noir has also been influenced by and emerged from two major genres: romance and traditional crime fiction. The following two subsections explore these genres and discuss how domestic noir emerged from each genre.

2.3.2   *From Romance Novels and Chick Lit to Domestic Noir*

While there are significant differences in the three genres in terms of plot and tone, romance novels, chick lit and domestic noir share similar female protagonists battling the same demons (Radway, 1983; Gill and Herdieckerhoff, 2006; Kennedy, 2017). Although romance novels and chick lit focus more on the romantic aspects of relationships while domestic noir emphasises the dangers in relationships, all three genres are responses and challenges to the patriarchy (Radway, 1983; Gill and Herdieckerhoff, 2006; Kennedy, 2017). Of the three genres, romance and domestic noir can be considered almost opposites in terms

of feminist discourse, with romance being considered more conservative and domestic noir more liberal. Within this spectrum, chick lit can be placed in the middle, as it celebrates independent women yet subscribes to heterosexual romance tropes found in the romance genre.

The romance genre dates back to ancient Greece and novels centre around the romantic love of the two protagonists (Romance Writers of America, n.d.; Reardon, 1989). Jane Austen is generally credited as having pioneered the genre with *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), although this is up for debate. Other classic novels such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) are also considered major influencers of the genre (Harzewski, 2006; Wells, 2006).

Chick lit falls under the broad category of women's fiction (Gormley, 2009). Written by women for women, chick lit are stories of women looking for love and 'trying to have it all' (Gormley, 2009; Kennedy, 2017). Chick lit protagonists are always female and are often young and single women in an urban setting (Gormley, 2009). While concerns such as financial independence, body image and self-esteem, consumer culture, sexual freedom, marriage and its challenges, and the difficulties of motherhood are present within chick lit, a typical plot focusses on the struggles in the female protagonist's search for true love (Whelehan, 2000, 2002, 2005; Chambers, 2004; Knowles (ed.), 2004; Smith, 2008, 2005; Ferriss and Young, 2006; Hewett, 2006; Slooten, 2006; Gill, 2007a, 2007b; Gormley, 2009; Kennedy, 2017). Despite the serious nature of the themes discussed, chick lit employs light comedy and self-deprecating humour (Gormley, 2009; Kennedy, 2017). While domestic noir too deals with the same

type of protagonists and themes as in chick lit, the tone and the way the subject matter is dealt with is significantly darker in domestic noir (Kennedy, 2017).

This shift from the 'damsel in distress' in romance novels towards the more financially and sexually independent woman in chick lit reflects contemporary Western society's more liberal approach to sex and relationships. However, some have suggested that romance writers have created more assertive and independent heroines due to feminism, indicating that the genre is capable of responding to changes in society and readers' preferences (Jones, 1986; Pearce and Stacey, 1995). However, the rise of chick lit and the shift to chick lit from the romance genre indicates that the latter is lacking in some sense. The romance genre and chick lit differ mainly in terms of the heroines' careers and financial independence, and chick lit is a more accurate reflection of the "contemporary female experience" (Gill and Herdieckerhoff, 2006; Isbister, 2009, p. 9). Chick lit heroines are career-driven and economically independent as opposed to romance heroines who seek "advancement and power through romantic alliance with a man" (Gill and Herdieckerhoff, 2006). Essentially, chick lit's protagonists exhibit "postfeminist ideals of empowered femininity" and reflect women's lived experiences by exploring themes of "personal autonomy, career, family, friendship and love", making it easier to relate to the characters and the plot (Isbister, 2009, p. 9).

However, the subgenre does not stray too far from the romance genre, as evidenced by the role of the male hero (Isbister, 2009). While the chick lit heroine is often sexually active, she is re-virginised by Mr. Right who rescues her when she is in trouble (Gill and Herdieckerhoff, 2006). Thus, chick lit allows

women to read novels that celebrate their financial and sexual independence while allowing them to indulge in romantic fantasies of white knights.

Nevertheless, there is also a thriving market for "crime, thriller, and detective novels that deal with broken relationships, suburbia, and focalize around modern-day female characters" and this interest has not waned since the arrival of the successful *Gone Girl* (Kennedy, 2017, p. 20). By mixing "noir detective and crime narratives with chick lit narratives" together, domestic noir manages to "effectively interrogate many of the notions and perils of women in modern literature … in contemporary society" (Kennedy, 2017, p. 21). While both chick lit and domestic noir focus on the "contemporary female experience", chick lit does so in a light-hearted manner while domestic noir takes an edgier approach (Gill and Herdieckerhoff, 2006; Isbister, 2009, p. 9; Crouch, 2018). To Kennedy (2017), domestic noir can be viewed as what happens to the chick lit heroine after marriage.

While chick lit still remains popular, there is the consensus that, following the global economic recession in 2008, women readers gradually turned to darker fiction like domestic noir, partly due to the fact that chick lit's focus on light-hearted comedy and plots were not sufficient to help women come to terms with their reality (Rabinowitz, 2016; Waters and Worthington, 2018). Domestic noir reflects the realities of many women in contemporary society, with its depiction of domestic violence and other abuses women face in the domestic sphere and the challenges of balancing a career, marriage and motherhood with limited support from their male partners (Kennedy, 2017; Crouch, 2018; Joyce, 2018). In fact, domestic noir can be read as "a manifestation of feminist anger and anxiety", both of which are "responses to

the contemporary pressure to be "wonder women"" (Kennedy, 2017, p. 19). The rise of crimes against women and increasing social demands for perfection in the past two decades have made women's lives more difficult, and being able to relate to the struggles of the protagonists have contributed to the shift from chick lit to domestic noir and the latter's popularity (Kennedy, 2017; Crouch, 2018; Joyce, 2018).

2.3.3   *From Hard-Boiled and Feminist Detective Fiction to Domestic Noir*

In hard-boiled detective and noir fiction, women often make appearances only as either victims/'damsels in distress' or as femmes fatales (Kennedy, 2017; Álvarez, 2018). While damsels in distress and femmes fatales are both secondary characters, only femmes fatales play a significant role in the plot (Kennedy, 2017). Often a staple of hard-boiled and noir fiction and film noir, the femme fatale is often characterised as a mysterious, cunning and manipulative seductress (Scaggs, 2005; Kennedy, 2017; Valdrè, 2017). Due to this duplicity, they are often stereotyped as villainesses (Scaggs, 2005; Kennedy, 2017). However, femmes fatales are often victims of domestic violence and their villainy is a result of them fighting against their male abusers (Kennedy, 2017). While some femmes fatales are truly evil, they are often characterised only as beautiful temptresses (Milliken, 1976 cited in Abbott, 2002; Hillier and Phillips, 2009; Marling, 2013). This negative representation indicates the social expectations of women from the 1930s to the 1960s: the femme fatale is inherently antithetical to the 'ideal woman' who is meant to be 'pure' and a 'good' wife and mother (Waldman, 1984; Valdrè, 2017).

The role itself was a response to the active role women played during and after the First and Second World Wars (Abbott, 2002; Tasker, 2013). Women's unwillingness to surrender the independence they had experienced after joining the workforce during the wars caused a social crisis as gender roles were redefined, gradually removing restrictions placed upon women (Waldman, 1984). While marriage thrillers exposed male-on-female domestic violence and authors such as Daphne du Maurier and Patricia Highsmith have explored power dynamics between men and women in heterosexual unions, the role of the 'evil' femme fatale was used to demonise women who enjoyed their new independence, thus communicating to the public that such women were immoral (Waldman, 1984; Scaggs, 2005; Hillier and Phillips, 2009; Rzepka, 2005 cited in Kennedy, 2017; Joyce, 2018; Peters, 2018). This paranoia of women becoming less passive and more powerful, thereby challenging the dominance of heterosexual white masculinity, is exhibited in the sexist representations of women in hard-boiled fiction and film noir (Waldman, 1984; Abbott, 2002; Rzepka, 2005; Hillier and Phillips, 2009; Kennedy, 2017).

The introduction of female detectives and medical experts into the crime fiction genre was an attempt to include more female roles. With more female authors entering the genre, iconic female characters such as Agatha Christie's amateur detective Miss Marple and Patricia Cornwell's medical expert Dr. Kay Scarpetta were born (Andre, 2013; Miller, 2018). However, despite these advancements, female characters have been limited to the intensely sexualised female corpse or the long-suffering female detective (Miller, 2018). For example, Kay Scarpetta is an intelligent and capable woman, yet is subject to intense physical and verbal abuse and misogynistic treatment from her male

colleagues (Gavin, 2010). Her skills and qualifications offer her zero immunity from abuse as she operates within the patriarchy that is threatened by strong women, and the only way to become somewhat successful is to become 'one of the guys' (Reddy, 1988, 2003; Scaggs, 2005; Miller, 2018). Moreover, the primary concern within feminist detective fiction is violence towards women, especially sexual crimes (Gavin, 2010). While the victims of the crimes they investigate are primarily female, the detectives themselves do not escape sexual violence (Gavin, 2010). Many prominent female detectives such as Karin Slaughter's Sara Linton and Lena Adams *and* their female loved ones have been raped (Gavin, 2010; Miller, 2018). This begs the question whether experiencing brutal violence is a prerequisite for a female detective within this subgenre (Gavin, 2010). Gavin (2010) asserts that feminist detective fiction's emphasis on violence against women "makes a gendered protest", and questioning whether justice is possible if the detective herself is unsafe from gender-based crimes (p. 268). While this violence has been criticised as authors either capitalising on violent imagery or condoning gender-based crimes, others argue that these descriptions allow feminist detectives and their authors to "[tell] it like it is", allowing them the opportunity to assert some control over the violence, giving them "power to express it in their terms" (Gavin, 2010). Despite this argument, while feminist detective fiction is reflective of women's lived experiences, the subgenre has largely been unable to alter the existing gendered narratives within crime fiction (Gavin, 2010; Miller, 2018, p. 90).

This gradually led to the emergence of domestic noir, where the female protagonists experience male violence but retaliate instead of attempting to continue on as the women in feminist detective fiction do (Gavin, 2010; Miller,

2018). While the female protagonists of feminist detective fiction operate within and are restrained by the patriarchy, domestic noir protagonists manipulate patriarchal norms to escape and exert violence upon their abusers as punishment (Joyce, 2018; Miller, 2018). That domestic noir protagonists are able to regain their agency while the protagonists of feminist detective fiction are often left struggling as victims of male violence may have greatly contributed to domestic noir's success (Gavin, 2010; Joyce, 2018).

The popularity of the subgenre has led to television shows such as *The Fall* (2013-2016), which is an example of the success of the active turn in domestic noir (*The* Fall, 2013; *The Fall, Series* 2; The *Fall, Series 3*; Miller, 2018). The third season features "women in motion", and the female characters are involved in dramatic action that is "less violent and more associated with female agency" than earlier in the series (Miller, 2018, p. 94). This shift resulted in laments on the lack of action and violence, and ratings had decreased significantly (McGonagle, 2016; Miller, 2016; Travers, 2016). This begs the question whether female action counts as less dramatic and interesting to audiences in comparison with male action, perhaps indicating that female agency and violence are less popular than male-on-female violence.

2.3.4   *Summary*

While domestic noir's themes have been present in works dating back to 431 BC (Crouch, 2018), domestic noir in its present form has emerged as a result of two branches of fiction: traditional crime fiction and the romance genre (Kennedy, 2017; Peters, 2018). The mystery/thriller aspect of domestic noir

novels places the subgenre firmly within the crime fiction genre, and its influencers range from hard-boiled detective fiction and noir fiction to the marriage thriller and feminist detective fiction (Kennedy, 2017; Peters, 2018). Domestic noir is often considered a subversion of traditional crime fiction due to its female-centric nature (Álvarez, 2018; Burke, 2018; Miller, 2018). Although the crime fiction genre gradually evolved to include feminist detective fiction, female characters are still functioning within the patriarchy (Gavin, 2010; Miller, 2018). Thus, domestic noir marks a departure from traditional and feminist detective fiction in its treatment of female protagonists (Kennedy, 2017; Álvarez, 2018; Burke, 2018; Miller, 2018).

This difference also exists between domestic noir and its other major influencer, the romance novel (Kennedy, 2017). Although the romance genre still remains popular, it also led to the creation of chick lit, and then to domestic noir, as readers searched for novels that more accurately reflect their lived experiences (Rabinowitz, 2016; Kennedy, 2017). While the romance genre sells a romantic fantasy and chick lit explores certain challenges of being a woman in contemporary society, both genres reinforce marriage and motherhood as goals for women (Radway, 1984; Jones, 1986; Assiter, 1988; Gill and Herdieckerhoff, 2006; Gormley, 2009; Isbister, 2009; Kennedy, 2017). In contrast, domestic noir displays the danger inherent within the home, exploring how gender norms can be damaging to both women and men (Crouch, 2013, 2018; Abbott, 2018a; Álvarez, 2018; Joyce, 2018; Waters and Worthington, 2018).

The diagram below visually represents the influences on domestic noir and how these genres and authors are connected to each other, leading to the emergence of the subgenre.
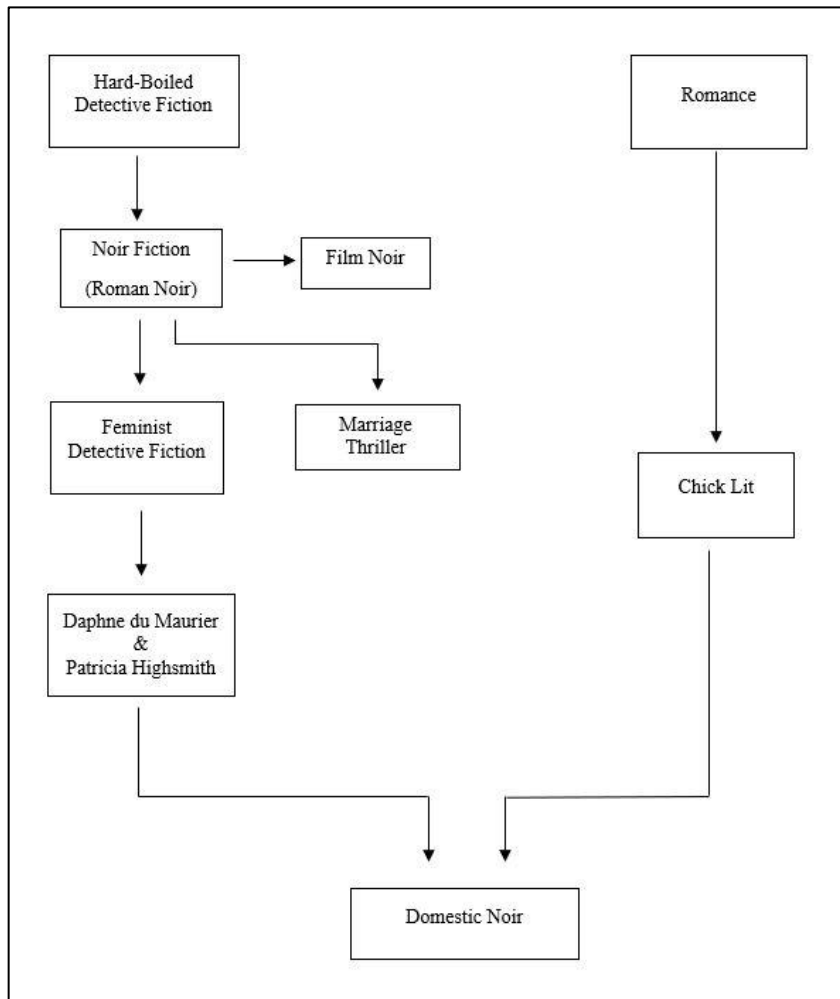
Figure 1: Influences on Domestic Noir

The next sections will include a review of the literature on the domestic noir subgenre in terms of the four aspects that will be analysed in this research: femininities and masculinities in domestic noir; gender performance and masquerade; gender and violence; and female victimhood and agency. These will introduce other work done on the subgenre, providing insight into domestic noir and the gaps in the existing knowledge that this study aims to fill.

2.4   Important Concepts in this Research

2.4.1   Femininities and Masculinities

Femininities and masculinities play a significant role within domestic noir as the subgenre focuses primarily on relationships. A range of femininities and masculinities exist within domestic noir, affected by the gender norms of the time and the society to which they belong. These gender norms dictate how women and men should behave and have an accepted set of normative feminine and masculine behaviour to which both women and men must adhere to avoid negative social sanctions (Schippers, 2007). Therefore, it is important to examine the types of femininities and masculinities found within the subgenre to understand the behaviour of the female protagonists and their male abusers.

2.4.1.1 Normative Masculinity Behaviour/Masculinity Ideologies

Masculinity ideology is defined as "an individual's internalization of cultural belief systems and attitudes toward masculinity and men's roles" (Levant and Richmond, 2007, p. 131). It includes masculinity norms boys and men must conform to, referred to as traditional masculinity ideology or hegemonic masculinity which assert the heterosexual male's dominance over women and minorities (Levant, 1996; Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Levant and Richmond, 2007).

Traditional masculinity ideology dictates that males should be the opposite of what it constitutes to be female, as evidenced by the "four norms of traditional masculinity": men must avoid "feminine things", "strive for success

and achievement", "should not show weakness" and "should seek adventure, even if violence is necessary" (David and Brannon, 1976, p. 31; Connell, 2005; Levant and Richmond, 2007).

Most cultures believe that masculinity is fixed, reflected in the terms 'true masculinity' and 'real men' (Connell, 2005, 2007; van Anders, 2013; Kray *et al.*, 2017). This belief is based on a biological-reductionist theory of masculinity that assumes that 'true masculinity' is natural as it is a product of evolution and that men's genes make them naturally prone to violence, territoriality and promiscuity (Connell, 2005; van Anders, 2013; Kray *et al.*, 2017). This idea of masculinity is also termed hegemonic masculinity, hypermasculinity and toxic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Schippers, 2007).

While these terms are used interchangeably, they are not the same. According to Connell (2005), there are multiple masculinities which exist on a hierarchy, and hegemonic masculinity is the most accepted and dominant form of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity generally aligns with traditional masculinity ideologies, therefore traits such as violence are idealised. Despite its negative connotations, hegemonic masculinity encompasses negative *and* positive masculinity attributes (McMahon, 1993; Connell, 1998; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Negative attributes of hegemonic masculinity are commonly referred to as toxic masculinity due to the harm it causes society and men themselves (Kupers, 2005). Connell's theory is further discussed in Section 2.9.1.1.

Hypermasculinity is an adherence to traditional male gender norms in a highly exaggerated manner (Mosher and Sirkin, 1984), and includes traits such

as aggression, excessive alcohol use and sexual promiscuity (Schippers, 2007; Kimmel, 2008). Essentially, hypermasculinity is a "caricature of masculinity" which functions as a protective mechanism to mask personal insecurities and present a façade of masculine dominance (Kilmartin, 2007, p. 43). Due to its many negative attributes, hypermasculinity has significant overlap with toxic masculinity.

Men who fail to conform risk being censured as 'feminine' and therefore 'unmasculine'. When men are fearful of having their social status as 'real men' revoked, their resultant anxiety is termed 'fragile masculinity' (DiMuccio and Knowles, 2020). In fact, men struggling to cope with fragile masculinity engage in toxic masculinity and hypermasculinity practices to reinforce and safeguard their masculinity (Gökarıksel, Neubert and Smith, 2019; DiMuccio and Knowles, 2020; Rubin, Blackwell and Conley, 2020).

2.4.1.2 Normative Feminine Behaviour/Femininity Ideologies

While research has found that men are far more likely to hold more traditional views of gender as it benefits them directly due to most societies being patriarchal, many girls and women consistently internalise traditional femininity ideology (Levant *et al.*, 1992; Levant and Richmond, 2007). Girls and women are both explicitly and implicitly encouraged to develop normative feminine traits while avoiding certain behaviour that is considered un-feminine (often masculine) (Connell, 2005; Levant *et al.*, 2007; Schippers, 2007).

The following five factors are listed as some of the main traits of traditional femininity ideology: women must conform to "thin body ideals", be

"dependent and deferent" with their husbands, must "take on passive sexual roles", aspire to "motherhood" as it is "women's ultimate fulfilment" and must have "an emotional affinity for domestic" chores and be "sensitive" (Levant *et al.*, 2007, p. 374). These traits are also part of hegemonic femininity and hyperfemininity as it is the idealised version of femininity (Schippers, 2007).

Studies show that both men and women endorse women's role as the primary caretaker (e.g., wife, mother and housewife) (Levant *et al.*, 2007; Schippers, 2007; van Anders, 2013; Kray *et al.*, 2017). While the past decades' feminist movements have allowed more women to enter the workforce, the expectation for women to uphold traditional gender norms as caretaker has not shifted and has become part of the criteria for the "modern feminine role" (Padavic and Reskin, 2002; Connell, 2005; Levant *et al.*, 2007; Schippers, 2007; van Anders, 2013).

Hegemonic femininity is essentially the female counterpart of hegemonic masculinity, although the level of social dominance differs. According to Mimi Schippers (2007), hegemonic femininity has a "hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity" (p. 94), thereby upholding masculine dominance over women. While hegemonic femininity ranks below hegemonic masculinity and other masculinities, it ranks above other femininities (Schippers, 2007). Schippers' theory is further discussed in Section 2.9.1.2.

Defined as an "exaggerated adherence to a stereotypic feminine gender role" (Murnen & Byrne, 1991, p. 480), hyperfemininity actively contributes towards maintaining gender hierarchies of male dominance and female subservience, and it is "a powerless position, one that is defined by the absence

of the power" (Paechter, 2006, p. 256). Hyperfemininity is a type of traditional femininity ideology where women hold patriarchal attitudes about their own rights and roles in society, prioritising wifehood and motherhood and dictating that women's primary value lies in their sexuality which must be used to attract and sustain the romantic and sexual interest of men (Murnen and Byrne, 1991; Matschiner and Murnen, 1999; Cvajner, 2011).

2.4.2 *Violence*

The word 'violence' is commonly associated with physical acts of force that result in physical injury (Coady, 1986; Bufacchi, 2005, p. 195). However, this fails to consider non-physical acts of abuse that can also be classified as violence considering the harm caused. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the World Health Organization's (WHO) (Krug *et al.*, 2002) definition and typology of violence will be used, as it offers a broader definition of violence, including acts causing physical and psychological harm:

> The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (p. 5)

The use of the term 'power' broadens the definition of what constitutes a violent act and "expands the conventional understanding of violence to include those acts that result from a power relationship" and "covers a broad range of outcomes" (Krug *et al.*, 2002). Thus, this definition takes into account many

other forms of violence that vulnerable groups such as children, women and the elderly are subjected to that can cause physical, psychological and social issues that do not always result in injury or death, where consequences can be either immediate or latent, even lasting for years following the initial act of violence/abuse. While the "dividing lines between the different types of violence" are not always very clear, this typology offers a framework that provides a better understanding of "the complex patterns of violence taking place around the world" and within families (Krug *et al.*, 2002, p. 5).

2.4.2.1 Domestic Violence

Domestic violence (DV) or Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) occurs in the home between spouses/partners (even ex-spouses/partners) and is an important aspect in domestic noir (Loseke, 1989; Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999; Krug *et al.*, 2002). DV/IPV is generally considered to only include 'extreme violence' such as stabbing and choking directed at one's spouse, often towards a woman by her husband (Loseke, 1989; Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999). Within this narrow definition/conception, consideration is not given for the 'normal violence' that occurs within abusive intimate relationships, thus, rendering 'normal violence' tolerable, even socially acceptable (Loseke, 1989; Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999). Examples of 'normal violence' include "pushing, shoving, and slapping that leaves few, if any, injuries" (Loseke, 1989; Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999, p. 238). This narrow definition allows many "to [abhor] the extreme violence of "wife abuse" while maintaining beliefs that some violence is "tolerable"" (Loseke, 1989, p. 202) and feel sympathetic towards

"pure victims of "wife abuse" while maintaining that other women do not deserve sympathy because they seem implicated in their victimization" (Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999, p. 238). Thus, it is important to recognise the true extent of domestic violence, including the nature of the violence, whether they result in visible injuries or otherwise (e.g., mental illness, fear of spouse/partner) (Loseke, 1989; Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999; Krug *et al.*, 2002).

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines domestic violence as "any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship" (Krug *et al.*, 2002, p. 89). These include physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, sexual abuse and "[v]arious controlling behaviors" (e.g., "monitoring their movements") (Krug *et al.*, 2002, p. 89) as well as economic/financial abuse (restricting and/or taking control over their partner's access to economic/financial resources), religious abuse (using religion to harass, humiliate or instil fear) and reproductive coercion/coerced reproduction (controlling the partner's reproductive health and decision-making) (Wright, 2001; Brewster, 2003; Sanders and Schnabel, 2004; Adams *et al.*, 2008; Chamberlain and Levenson, 2010; Committee on Health Care for Underserved Women).

2.4.3   *Female Victimhood and Agency*

2.4.3.1 Female Victimhood

The term 'victim' itself denotes someone suffering at the hands of an entity other than themselves (Dahl, 2009). The concepts of 'victim' and

'victimhood' mean that the victim cannot be held responsible for their own predicament and that they also lack agency (Gilligan, 2003; Dahl, 2009). According to Dahl, the victim is "depicted as generally lacking 'power', 'inner force', 'responsibility', 'capacity for initiatives' or 'agency'" and are also considered "'weak', and 'passive'" (Dahl, 2009, p. 393).

In the 1990s, feminist theorists began to emphasise the concept of 'female victimhood' to bring attention to 'battered women', and activists have campaigned for these women to be given "legal status as victims" during a time when domestic violence was viewed as a "private matter" (Flood, 1999; Dahl, 2009, p. 393). In addition, the wider use of "victim terminology" made it possible to expose "hidden structures of inequality and oppression" (Agevall, 2001 cited in Dahl, 2009, p. 393). Exposing institutionalised sexism also revealed that, for female victims to be recognised as victims, they are required to "act in ways that preserve gender norms" (Dahl, 2009, p. 395). Thus, those who subvert patriarchal gender norms are considered less credible and believable as victims. They are also stigmatised as they do not align with the narrow definition of the victim as a 'weak' person ("non-aggressive women, children and people who have suffered a long time more easily get recognition as victims") (Christie, 1986; Lamb, 1999, p. 115). As a result, they are almost always held responsible for their victimisation.

Nissim-Sabat states that labels such as 'victim' have been introduced to make sense of and "master the overwhelming feelings of fear and helplessness evoked by human suffering" to both "describe and explain that suffering" (Nissim-Sabat, 2009, p. 4). According to her, the term 'victim' can be divided into three main variants: V1, V-2 and V-3 (Nissim-Sabat, 2009, p. 4). V-1 are

victims of natural disasters and those caused through human failure such as plane crashes (Nissim-Sabat, 2009, p. 4). In contrast, V-2 are victims due to "self-imposed suffering" and includes "women who are abused by their husbands" (Nissim-Sabat, 2009, p. 5). They are considered to possess a 'victim mentality', placing blame upon the victims for their plight (Ryan, 1976; Nissim-Sabat, 2009, pp. 5–6). The third category, V-3, is a victim concept that is frequently used by "progressive theoreticians, feminists, civil rights activists, and others in reaction against V-2" and is the focus of this study (Nissim-Sabat, 2009, p. 6). For those who recognise V-3, "the deployers of V-2 *are* blaming the victims; they *are* unjustly holding victims responsible for their own suffering", especially so in terms of "certain types of victims" (Nissim-Sabat, 2009, p. 6). These victims can include women of minority groups, women without financial security and women who do not adhere to stereotypically feminine behaviour (see Section 2.4.1.2) (Agevall, 2001 cited in Dahl, 2009, p. 395). V-3 is an attempt by women's liberation activists to "destigmatize rape victims and victims of marital psychological, physical, and sexual abuse who have murdered" their partners (Nissim-Sabat, 2009, p. 7). Here, these women are not viewed as "self-victimizing" but as victims of violent partners (Nissim-Sabat, 2009, p. 7). Essentially, V-3 attempts to counteract the victim-blaming conducted by deployers of V-2 (Nissim-Sabat, 2009). According to V-3 advocates, victims of spousal abuse who murder their partners have been brainwashed, contending that violence is the only possible recourse to their partners' violence (Healthtalk.org, n.d.; Noonan, 1997; Davis, 2002; Nissim-Sabat, 2009).

Domestic noir female protagonists are often viewed through the lens of V-3 due to the abuse they experience from their husbands. It is the men's

behaviour that eventually propels the women to commit violent crimes against the men to exact revenge and to escape these abusive relationships. While these female protagonists are clearly victims of their male spouses, they are also victims of the patriarchy as these women are forced to conform to gender norms regardless of their wishes.

2.4.3.2 Agency

While the term 'agency' has multiple definitions with no consensus on its meaning, it can be widely characterised as relating to "the capacity to make appropriate choices of action within a particular spatio-temporal and culturally defined context" and to "rationality" (Giddens, 1979, 1993 cited in Giri, 2017, p. 179; Dahl, 2009). Essentially, "'[a]gency' is a facility used as soon as there is a choice" (Giddens, 1979, 1993 cited in Giri, 2017, p. 179). Mostly used within social science, the term's definitions are mainly based on "intentionality" and are discussed in conjunction with "accountability and responsibility" (Dahl, 2009, p. 398). Considering the connection drawn between agency and action, definitions involve discussions of "the propensity to act or the efficiency of action" (Dahl, 2009).

According to the "humanist or individualistic model of the person", agency is defined as "a feature of each sane, adult human being" which is "synonymous with being a person" (Davies, 2000, p. 55). By this definition, "[t]hose who are generally not constituted as agentic, such as women" and "children" are "by definition within that model, not fully human" (Davies, 2000, p. 55). For these groups, agency is "the exception rather than the rule" (Davies,

2000, p. 55). In a poststructuralist framework, agency is also an individual's right "to speak and be heard" (Davies, 2000, p. 66). Agency is not only having autonomy, but is a way in which an individual can counter and even change patriarchal discourse, and to achieve this, oppressed groups (e.g., women) can use their voices to challenge the existing discourse (Davies, 2000, p. 67). Judith Butler also emphasised the importance of agency as a concept as it would provide opportunities to subvert the law (Salih, 2007; Butler, 2011).

Within domestic noir, female protagonists often have little agency as they are abused by their husbands and forced to conform to gender norms that restrict their choices. Thus, the characters are operating within a patriarchal power structure and must often choose violence as a means of escape.

2.4.4   Classifications of Violent Female Protagonists

While domestic noir is a feminist subgenre that recognises the many types of abuse that women experience and their use of violence to exact vengeance, it can be difficult to determine whether a female protagonist is a heroine, an anti-heroine or a villainess. Often, the criteria within these categories are subjective and open to interpretation, making classification biased. Thus, many of these women could be classified as villainesses according to social norms, while according to a feminist perspective, they may be anti-heroines or even heroines. Considering that domestic noir female protagonists are often perceived as modern versions of the villainous archetype of the femme fatale of traditional crime fiction, it is important to explore whether the former can be classified as heroines, anti-heroines or villainesses based on their portrayals

(Nica, 2009; Simkin, 2014; Kennedy, 2017). The following subsections include brief discussions of the archetypes of the heroine, the anti-heroine and the villainess as applicable to this research.

2.4.4.1 Heroine

While the role of the hero has long been a celebrated archetype, there is little research on its female counterpart (Covington, 2016). As such, the term 'heroine' is widely considered to be no more than the female version of 'hero' (Hume, 1997; Covington, 2016). While 'hero' has specific characteristics such as "brave", "noble" and "fearless" attributed to it ('Hero', 2016; Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.; Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.), a heroine is defined mainly as either a female hero who has achieved something "brave" or as the female protagonist in fictional works (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.; Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). The gender disparity is evident.

However, Covington makes a distinction between 'female hero' and 'heroine'. She defines the female hero as a "woman warrior whose battles take place within the male world", with her femaleness being completely incidental, and examples include "Boudicca and Jeanne d'Arc" (2016, p. 70). While the female hero is "characterised by sacrifice", she is different from the heroine of Gothic and romantic fiction where she is "often portrayed as a social victim" (e.g., "Medea and Antigone") (Covington, 2016, p. 70.). A heroine "sacrifices her life to uphold patriarchal authority and a higher moral order" (Covington, 2016, p. 70). These women actively work towards the preservation of the

patriarchy and their actions classify them as being heroic and as heroines, but not as female heroes.

According to these definitions, the female protagonists of domestic noir would technically classify as heroines as they are the chief characters within the novels. However, as these female protagonists both consciously and unconsciously challenge the patriarchy and the stereotypical femininities that they are restricted to, they would classify not as heroines but as female heroes.

2.4.4.2 Anti-heroine

Similar to 'heroine', the 'anti-heroine' is the female version of the 'anti-hero' (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.; Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, n.d.). Defined as a central male character who lacks stereotypically heroic characteristics, a key component of being an anti-hero is that he eventually performs actions that are morally right for non-heroic reasons (Abbott, 2002; Porter, 2003; Priestman, 2003; McCann, 2010; Oxford English Dictionary, 2010; 'Antihero', 2016; Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, 2020). Common in traditional crime fiction, these characters are usually symbols of hegemonic masculinity (e.g., Walter Huff in *Double Indemnity* (1943) and James Bond) (Cain, 1943; Abbott, 2002; Porter, 2003; Priestman, 2003; McCann, 2010; Jonason *et al.*, 2012).

Essentially, an anti-heroine is a central female character that behaves immorally and is not a heroine. However, as with the heroine, there is little research on the role. Nevertheless, some research can be found on the anti-heroine of television and film. Regarding the distinction between the 'anti-

heroine' and the 'female anti-hero', the antihero's appeal is partly their likeability and relatability, but this would not apply to female characters as women in less-than-virtuous roles are considered villainesses for flouting moral codes (Selvik, 2016; Buonanno, 2017). Therefore, it is almost impossible for female anti-heroes to exist (Buonanno, 2017). Instead of attempting to classify such "deviant femininities" into the narrow conception of "female anti-hero", anti-heroines can be interpreted as being representative of a "new" type of "imagery of female power and subjectivity" performed using the conventional trope of the (traditionally male) anti-hero (Buonanno, 2017, para. 2).

Considering the traditional portrayals of 'bad women' in fiction and the media, the anti-heroine has since changed significantly (Tally, 2016; Buonanno, 2017; Negra and Lagerway, 2017). 'Bad women' have continued to evolve from "the often one-dimensional 'strong female character' or 'ass-kicking babe' stereotypes' and away from the 'necessity for women' 'to be 'good'" (the 'whore-virgin complex') (Negra and Lagerway, 2017, para. 5). Television's anti-heroine is often found in "female-centred shows" where they attempt to "negotiate femininity", "trying to cope" with "contradictory demands made on women" (Buonanno, 2017, para. 5). Thus, while the heroine and anti-heroine are both at odds in terms of their moral compasses, both types are different ways of addressing feminist issues (Buonanno, 2017). This makes the anti-heroine more than just a female anti-hero; while the heroine upholds patriarchal values, the anti-heroine overtly challenges hegemonic masculinity and the patriarchy (Tally, 2016; Buonanno, 2017).

This discussion suggests that domestic noir's female protagonists could be interpreted as anti-heroines instead of as female anti-heroes due to their

unlikability arising from their challenges to the patriarchy and their non-conformity to gender norms.

2.4.4.3 Villainess

Female characters in villainous roles too have two classifications: the 'female villain' and the 'villainess' (Creed, 2007; Kuskin, 2014; Guerrero, 2016). The 'villain' is generally defined as an immoral male character that causes harm to others, is typically a criminal and hero's opponent (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.; Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.; Eury and Sanderson, 2017). Depending on the character and how he is portrayed, a villain could also be considered an antihero (Eury and Sanderson, 2017). Therefore, a 'villainess' is the female nemesis of the hero or heroine and is an immoral and criminal character (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.; Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.; Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, n.d.). The research suggests that the 'villainess' differs from the 'female villain' in that the villainess employs powers and exhibits traits that are specifically coded and associated with female identity (Creed, 2007; Kuskin, 2014; Guerrero, 2016). This includes female sexuality, and a female character using their beauty and sensuality to seduce and manipulate is considered a villainess (Creed, 2007). Thus, the femme fatale is perceived as a villainess (Huston, 1941; Hillier and Phillips, 2009; Doane, 2013; Tasker, 2013; Simkin, 2014; Lindop, 2016; Kennedy, 2017). Other aspects that are coded as being feminine or part of the female identity, such as giving birth, menstruation and virginity, are also factors that characterise villainesses as in

Stephen King's novel *Carrie* and the film *Jennifer's Body* (King, 1974; Creed, 2007; Kusama, 2009).

Most popular villainesses were created by men and are portrayed as sexual objects attempting to entrap men with their beauty, with some being "barely contained in their clothes" (Kuskin, 2014, p. 8). Domestic violence often features heavily in their storylines, and, despite being victims, are punished for challenging the patriarchy (Hillier and Phillips, 2009; Tasker, 2013; Kuskin, 2014; Kennedy, 2017). While female heroes and heroines are often rewarded for their suffering in an oppressive social order, female villains and villainesses (also female anti-heroes and anti-heroines) existing within the same social order are punished (Hillier and Phillips, 2009; Tasker, 2013; Kuskin, 2014; Kennedy, 2017). Such characters often die excessively violent deaths and are often "portrayed as usurpers of masculinity and as foils to morality and value" (Waldman, 1984; Scaggs, 2005; Guerrero, 2016, p. vi; Kennedy, 2017; Valdrè, 2017; Redhead, 2018).

This research indicates that domestic noir's female protagonists could be interpreted as villainesses due to their use of traits coded as feminine to challenge the patriarchy by challenging masculinities and their refusal to conform to traditional femininity. However, unlike most villainesses, domestic noir's female protagonists mostly remain unpunished for their crimes.

2.5   Femininities and Masculinities in Domestic Noir

Eva Burke (2018) discusses the different personas of Amy Dunne from *Gone Girl* that display different types of femininity, demonstrating Amy's

attempts to conform to patriarchal gender norms. Her masquerade of Diary Amy and her gender performance of Cool Girl indicate her dissatisfaction with gender performance itself and the patriarchy that forced her to engage in them. Her tirade on the Cool Girl ideal "serves as a vivid articulation of the dissatisfaction and self-deception at the heart of such gendered performances, and the context in which the monologue emerges further hints at the hypocrisy therein" (Burke, 2018, p. 73). This is further evident in her comments about her Diary Amy masquerade (discussed in Section 2.6), where Amy engaged in "the type of idealised femininity which she actually so vehemently opposes" (Burke, 2018, p. 73). Nevertheless, none of her performances brought her closer to "living an authentic existence" and she remained "unable to escape the often stifling symbolic confines of femininity in spite of her machinations" (Burke, 2018, pp. 73-74).

Stephanie Gwin (2017) views Rachel Watson from Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train* as a "darker version of Bridget Jones" (Gwin, 2017, p. 51) and also explores the effects of patriarchal gender norms on the female protagonists. The similarities between domestic noir and chick lit is apparent in *The Girl on the Train*, which explores the female protagonists' attempts to balance their identities as wives, mothers and 'working/professional/career women', with Rachel mourning her marriage, infertility and lack of meaningful employment, Megan feeling restless as a wife, and Anna's nostalgia for the independence she had before marriage. Domestic noir "brings feminist concerns of violence against women and institutional misogyny back into focus", challenging chick lit's positive attitude towards marriage and motherhood by highlighting these institutions as a "source of pain and suffering for women" (Gwin, 2017, p. 53).

While the three women initially expect fulfilment from marriage and motherhood, they "fail to experience pure marital and maternal bliss", becoming "disillusioned with their roles as wives and mothers" (Gwin, 2017, p. 53).

Elena Avanzas Álvarez (2018) examines the subversion found in Liane Moriarty's *Little Lies* (2014), especially in terms of Madelein, who struggles with identifying her authentic femininity. Madeleine does not fit perfectly into "a traditional and binary distribution of roles in crime fiction": while she monologues about her "unsuitability to be a proper victim", she refers to Jane who helped her as her "knight in shining armour. [Her] knight-ess", yet, Madeline also saves Celeste's child from drowning (Moriarty, 2014, p. 20; Álvarez, 2018). Madeleine struggles with "pin[ning] down her identity to society's expectations of her", attempting to reconcile her identities as a mother and a professional (Álvarez, 2018, p. 186). However, she does not identify as a working mother, often negatively comparing herself to other professional women, and neither does she conform to traditional ideals of motherhood. Although she dresses in a 'girly girl' aesthetic that aligns with traditional ideals of femininity, she refuses to engage in stereotypical feminine and motherly duties like baking (Moriarty, 2014, p. 83; Álvarez, 2018, p. 187). Essentially, Madeleine exists in a state of ambiguity, allowing her to "escape traditional gender roles" and "[h]er fluidity" is evident "in her feminine aesthetics and her refusal to also perform the roles associated with that femininity" (Álvarez, 2018, p. 187).

Patrick Osborne (2017) examines Amy Dunne's personas in *Gone Girl*, noting that they "are shaped by patriarchal social structures that define femininity in America" and that "Diary Amy is the embodiment of emphasized

femininity" (p. 16). While identifying as a feminist, Amy nevertheless attempted to cater to Nick's ideals of femininity, demonstrating that Amy's "desires for self-actualization therefore conform to the gendered expectations of female fulfillment through marriage" (Osborne, 2017, pp. 16-17). However, her disillusionment with American consumer and postfeminist media cultures is evident in her criticism of the "Cool Girl" as it "represents a revised patriarchal model in which a conflict between embedded feminism and enlightened sexism is developed" (Osborne, 2017, p. 18), further criticising the "postfeminist sensibility that demands self-surveillance in accordance with the male gaze" (Osborne, 2017, p. 19). Essentially, the patriarchy entitles men to embody hegemonic masculinity while women must perform an "'inauthentic' model of femininity" (Osborne, 2017, p. 20).

Osborne (2017) also explores Nick Dunne's masculinity in *Gone Girl*, positing that his loss of employment fuelled his self-dissatisfaction as he "perceives himself as obsolete and believes that only his career can bolster a sense of wholeness and self-actualization" (p. 13). Neoliberalism dictates that one's worth is tied to one's wealth, and unable to achieve the American Dream, Nick directs his anger at Amy "who now maintains financial superiority over him and [Nick] ultimately falls into a state of depression because of his loss of masculine status" (Osborne, 2017, p. 13). His subsequent affair with Andie and opening a bar are attempts to "reclaim his masculinity and loss of identity" (Osborne, 2017, p. 13, 14). These "male coping strategies" are "in line with discourses concerning America's crisis of masculinity" (Osborne, 2017, p. 14), with excessive consumption of alcohol enabling "men to reclaim power in a culture experiencing a crisis of masculinity" (Osborne, 2017, p. 15) as "[i]t

allows [men] to prove their manhood and hold onto their boyhood [simultaneously]. All the freedom and none of the responsibility" (Kimmel, 2008, p. 109).

Stephanie Gwin (2017) analyses the antagonism between Rachel, Megan and Anna in *The Girl on the Train*, exploring how rigid patriarchal gender norms affect the women's relationships with each other. Despite their envy of each other's real or perceived idealised femininity, Gwin posits that all three women "are bad examples of idealized femininity" and that their failures to perform idealised femininity indicates that "the problem [may be] the idealized vision of femininity that these women are trying to achieve" (Gwin, 2017, p. 63). Therefore, envy becomes "a politically motivated emotion because it functions as the catalyst for interrogation", and they "begin to question, reevaluate, and redefine idealized femininity after they envied a female subject who turned out to be a bad example", ultimately exposing idealised femininity as a "myth" (Gwin, 2017, p. 63).

The inversion of normative femininities and masculinities also occurs in the violence exhibited by the female and male protagonists and this aspect has been explored by Patrick Osborne, Emma V. Miller, Stephanie Gwin. These are discussed in Section 2.8 of this chapter.

2.6   Gender Performance and Masquerade

Stephanie Gwin, Patrick Osborne, Eva Burke, Phillippa Deanne Martin explore female victimhood in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* in how Amy Dunne manipulated social and media narratives of female victimhood to lend

authenticity to her gender performance and masquerade of idealised femininity (Gwin, 2017; Osborne, 2017; Burke, 2018; Martin, 2019). Despite her initial gender performance and masquerade as the "Cool Girl" being an "unsustainable performance of femininity", she successfully manipulated social norms to enact Diary Amy (Osborne, 2017, p. 21). A largely fictitious account of her relationship with Nick, Amy created a persona that she knew would garner more sympathy to legitimise her version of truth. By portraying herself as a stereotypically feminine woman when Amy herself was non-conforming, Amy exhibited an in-depth knowledge of social and media narratives of female victimhood. "Magpie-like, Amy borrows a new personality, patched together from the remnants of her departed forerunners" designed to increase her credibility, even "[testing] this affable character on friends and neighbours" to ensure its efficiency (Burke, 2018, pp. 74–75). Amy's use of idealised femininity as her mask of womanliness (masquerade) signals her recognition of gender roles as "merely social constructions" that she can use to "dismantle the system" for her benefit (Gwin, 2017, p. 43). Nick too engages in masquerade and both characters' use of masks "to portray an image of themselves shows both a deep level of characterisation and a commentary on contemporary society that is full of masks and people projecting false images of themselves" as the masquerade and gender performance are direct results of gender norms (Martin, 2019, p. 45).

Megan in *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins also engaged in masquerade, wearing "masks of femininity" to cope with her dissatisfaction (Miller, 2018, p. 101). Megan "considers herself "a mistress of self-reinvention"", however, unlike Amy, Megan "never progresses from imagining another life to actually making it happen, her actions are all about trying to make

her existence in Witney more exciting" (Miller, 2018, p. 101). Even Megan's masks are "traditional feminine roles", indicating her awareness of the "requirement for female masks in a patriarchal economy as Amy is" (Miller, 2018, p. 101). However, unlike Amy, Megan is unwilling to face "her essential self"; "Amy has an essential persona aside from her masks" but underneath her masks, "Megan is even more traditionally feminine than her external persona allows" (Miller, 2018, p. 101). Unlike Amy, Megan's mask of womanliness is not meant to hide "attributes of masculinity or socially recognised power" (Miller, 2018, p. 101). While Megan's masks were "not about liberation", she wished to escape but "recognises the futility of her efforts even as she describes them" (Miller, 2018, p. 101). Therefore, she remained trapped behind masks, exchanging one for the other while desiring "escape" and "action", ultimately rendered powerless, never gaining agency (Miller, 2018, p. 101). Unlike Megan, Rachel "succeeds in regaining control of her narrative" after uncovering her ex-husband's abuse, although her control of the narrative is not as complete as Amy's (Miller, 2018, p. 102).

The importance of masquerade and gender performance in Liane Moriarty's 2014 novel *Little Lies* is discussed by Elena Avanzas Álvarez (2018). The novel explores themes of domestic violence and female victimhood. In *Little Lies*, gender performance and masquerade are closely related to victimhood, as seen in Celeste White. She engages in masquerade to hide her victimhood from society and herself because social perceptions of her 'perfect' life restrict her choices concerning dealing with the abuse (Álvarez, 2018). Celeste appears to have a perfect life, with her handsome and successful husband and their charming children. Moreover, Celeste also "embodies contemporary beauty

standards by being "tall, blonde, and beautiful"" (Moriarty, 2014, p. 19; Álvarez, 2018, p. 183). However, her seemingly perfect marriage and life is a façade as she is being emotionally and physically abused by her husband, Perry. To prevent potential humiliation if her secret is revealed, Celeste lies about her marriage, maintaining a façade (Álvarez, 2018, p. 183). These lies are also borne out of "her inability to accept her identity as a victim and escape her marriage" even once she understands the nature of domestic violence (Walker, 2016; Álvarez, 2018, p. 183). Despite the abuse, she decides to stay with her husband as she loved him and and because of the social perception of her marriage: "the Whites are incarnations of the ideal white, heterosexual, WASP, upper-middle class and beautiful couple" and "They were admired and envied. They had all the privileges in the world" (Moriarty, 2014, p. 74; Álvarez, 2018, p. 185). Perry was aware of this and used social media as a tool to "[craft] a façade of happiness and marital bliss … actively playing the good husband, father, and friend to his wife's friends" (Moriarty, 2014, p. 57; Álvarez, 2018, p. 185). Perry's masquerade manipulates prejudices of social class, therefore others could not "see or recognise the violence behind the Whites' superficial, heteronormative, and capitalist success" (Álvarez, 2018, p. 185). As society perceives domestic violence as occurring in poorer social classes and not in affluent families, it becomes difficult for Celeste to "identify herself as a victim of domestic abuse", leading to her masquerade (Álvarez, 2018). Thus, even when seeking help from a counsellor, she distances herself from the image of the "passive, weak, fearful, helpless battered woman" (Walker, 2016, p. 279) by engaging in an elaborate performance: wearing "a beautiful dress Perry bought for her in Paris, wearing make-up, though she never does, and faking a public-school posh voice"

(Álvarez, 2018, p 185). This indicates her awareness of "social and gender stereotypes" and actively attempts to "perform her identity in a way that does not fit society's stereotype of a "battered" woman", a peformance Álvarez notes is almost similar to drag (Álvarez, 2018, p 185). Celeste's close friend, Madeleine, also engages in masquerade. Madeleine's lies are engineered to help her "fit into a stable and fixed definition of a middle-aged woman, wife, and mother" (Álvarez, 2018, p 186). This masquerade and gender performance allowed her to give the appearance of conformance to gender norms, avoiding censure for her deviant femininity.

2.7   Female Victimhood and Agency

Domestic noir is considered by some to be crucial in "the war for narrative control" within the crime fiction genre (Miller, 2018, p. 103; Martin, 2019). To Miller, the subgenre signals an active turn in crime fiction, where female characters are no longer limited to passive characters, from fetishised corpses to detectives suffering in a patriarchal judiciary system (Abbott, 2018a; Crouch, 2018; Joyce, 2018; Miller, 2018). According to Miller (2018), domestic noir, with its more diverse and active roles for women, proves that female agency and action are also commercially viable, offering an alternative to the passive nature of women found within traditional crime fiction (Miller, 2018). Moreover, the subgenre also portrays the complex nature of female victimhood by including female characters that are not "victims in a traditional sense" (Paszkiewicz, 2019, p. 32), demonstrating women's "capacity for violence" (Cain, 2016, p. 295).

In Eva Burke's examination of Amy Dunne's exploitation of feminine tropes, she notes that Amy "appropriates a discursive space reserved for victims of male violence, a space legitimately inhabited by Margo [Nick's sister]" (Burke, 2018, p. 75). Burke views this as a "calculated attempt to exploit the virtues of victimhood while maintaining narrative dominance", where Amy is framing herself as the victim, and her ability to frame this narrative indicates that she has agency. Therefore, her gendered performance as the Dead Girl is self-victimisation, marking her departure from "the cloying perfection of Amazing Amy", another of Amy's personas (Burke, 2018, p. 76). The Diary Amy masquerade was "contingent on the co-operation of the media" and she "relies on certain gendered cultural signifiers as a means of influencing their interpretation of her narrative", especially as the abused wife of a dangerous man (Burke, 2018, p. 73). Both Diary Amy and Flynn rely on their readers' knowledge of true crime narratives of female victimhood and male violence to interpret Amy as the victim and Nick as the abusive husband based on Diary Amy's account (Jeffers, 2015; Burke, 2018). Therefore, through Diary Amy, Amy engaged in a "masterful exploitation of certain well-worn feminine tropes" (Burke, 2018, p. 73). While Flynn's novel explores "female victimhood as a cultural phenomenon" and that a significant amount of the discussion about the novel has focussed on "whether or not it seeks to deconstruct or reinforce a patriarchal narrative of victimisation and disempowerment", Burke notes that it is more critical to analyse "Flynn's treatment of female likeability and female vulnerability and the ways in which we, as a culture, interact with and respond to the victimisation of certain women" (2018, p. 80).

In *Little Lies*, Celeste is systematically abused by her husband and is reluctant to leave even once she recognises the abuse. While she wants to maintain their masquerade of the perfect family, she stays because she is dependent on Perry and has doubts about her abilities (Álvarez, 2018). Celeste "embodies the complex relationship established between the victim and the abuser by feeling unable to imagine a possible self without Perry", thus, she continues her masquerade (Álvarez, 2018, p. 184). However, her choice does not "deprive her of agency or define her as a weak woman" as she fights back against Perry's abuse, "in an effort to assert her own strength and agency inside the relationship" (Snowden, 2011; Álvarez, 2018, p. 185). As mentioned earlier, Celeste's decision to stay with Perry is also due to social perceptions of her family, and the disparity between "social representations of victimhood and Celeste's lived experience" that force her to not recognise her victimisation (Álvarez, 2018, p. 185). However, once she realises that she has some privilege due to her being a "beautiful, white, upper-middle-class, English-speaking woman" (Álvarez, 2018, p. 186) who "was an educated woman with choices, places to go, family and friends who would gather round, lawyers who would represent her" (Moriarty, 2014, pp. 134, 318) and learns about patterns of abuse, she begins to identify that she is a victim and Perry is an abuser. Later, she crafts an escape plan and rents an apartment which she decorates in her preferred style, although Perry had dismissed her tastes as being "cheap and tacky" (Álvarez, 2018, p. 186). Thus, despite Celeste's status as a victim, she finds agency first through recognition of her victimhood.

Jane too has been Perry's victim, having been raped by him five years earlier and giving birth to their son Ziggy. While she keeps her traumatic

experience secret, she frequently revisits it, and, like Celeste, is "unable to see herself as a proper victim, downplaying the attack, and reframing it as one bad sexual experience that she herself had initiated" (Moriarty, 2014, p. 191; Álvarez, 2018, pp. 188–189). She blames herself for the rape as a "strategy to gain control over the traumatic narrative", and "considers her agency that night as something negative", wondering whether she could have avoided the attack if she had altered her behaviour (Moriarty, 2014, p. 83; Álvarez, 2018, p. 189). Following the rape, she loses her self-confidence, "reframes her life as inappropriate, paying special attention to Perry's devaluation of her body during the attack by saying she was fat, disgusting, and wore trashy clothes" (Álvarez, 2018, p. 189). Accordingly, she changes herself, losing her curvy figure to a more androgynous one and wears "plain t-shirts and jeans" (Álvarez, 2018, p. 189). This is a common response in sexual assault victims, with many struggling with their body image (Petrak and Hedge, 2002). Jane is further victimised by negative social perceptions of rape victims and her role as a single mother as she fails to "conform to the heteronormative idea of family" (Álvarez, 2018, p. 189). However, her loved ones "act as an alternative construction of the traditional heteronormative and patriarchal family", allowing her to "reconstruct her lived experience as a victim of sexual assault" and celebrate "her single motherhood" (Álvarez, 2018, p. 189). While both characters become victims, they attempt to reframe their experiences to regain agency over their narratives, and acknowledging their own victimhood allows them to begin this process.

2.8   Female Violence

Violence in traditional crime fiction and domestic noir differ mainly in terms of who is committing violence towards whom. In traditional crime fiction, violent masculinity is idolised and the genre features rampant misogyny and male-on-female violence (Milliken, 1976; Abbott, 2002; Porter, 2003). In domestic noir, the female protagonists endure abuse from their male partners until they eventually retaliate violently towards their husbands and, usually, female violence results in mariticide (Jeffers, 2015; Cain, 2016; Orman, 2016; Osborne, 2017; Gwin, 2017; Kennedy, 2017; Burke, 2018; Crouch, 2018; Joyce, 2018; Miller, 2018; Paszkiewicz, 2019; Martin, 2019).

The misogyny in traditional crime fiction portrays women as either 'the whore' or 'the virgin', a binary that has dominated the concept of female identity in the West (Abbott, 2002; Simkin, 2014; Orman, 2016; Redhead, 2018). "[T]he image of the disobedient woman [the whore] is frequently set against her polar opposite: the maternal, the chaste and the virginal [the virgin]" (Simkin, 2014, p. 6). Women are portrayed either as "the embodiment of socio-cultural feminine ideals, a benignly plucky heroine searching for love, a dutiful mother, an angelic victim" or as "an unruly, deviant, or monstrous woman overstepping her prescribed place in society will usually be knocked back into her rightful place with a fatal blow by the close of her story" (Orman, 2016, p. 4). This binary perception of women can also be interpreted as presenting women as being either "angel" or "monster" (Argent, 2020).

Domestic noir female protagonists' villainy (similar to femmes fatales) has led to their characterisation as monsters (Johansen, 2016; Lota, 2016; Orman, 2016; Gwin, 2017; Osborne, 2017; Vahlne, 2017; Abbott, 2018b; Lane, 2018; Murphy, 2018; Paszkiewicz, 2019). This differs from the monsters from

popular culture and classic literature, where the monsters have been predominantly male (e.g., "Dracula, Frankenstein's Creature, the Wolfman") (Orman, 2016, p. 2). In these, the emphasis has always been on male monsters preying on female victims, suggesting that there are "innate or essential distinctions between the masculine and the feminine, particularly their capacity for—or susceptibility to—evil" (Orman, 2016, p. 2). These examples also indicate misogyny that casts "active and powerful men" against "passive and habitually swooning women" despite the countless "monstrous women" who have been "fixtures of myths, folktales, novels and films since the inception of these mediums" (Orman, 2016, p. 2). Domestic noir has embraced this role of the monster/villain for female protagonists instead of the role of victim that is the norm in crime fiction (Lota, 2016; Orman, 2016, p. 2; Gwin, 2017; Osborne, 2017; Vahlne, 2017; Lane, 2018). While 'the ideal woman' is "seen as a passive, docile and above all *selfless* creature", "the monster woman" "refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, … rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 25; Moi, 2002, p. 57). In the dichotomy of the virgin/the angel and the whore/the monster, the former represents "the male idealization of women" and the latter "the male fear of femininity" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000; Moi, 2002, p. 57).

In traditional crime fiction, the femme fatale is the "unruly, deviant, or monstrous woman" (Orman, 2016, p. 4; Redhead, 2018). While they are described as being beautiful, enigmatic, sexual and ambitious, they are portrayed as being antithetical to social ideals of femininity and always meet a gruesome end, usually punished by the male protagonist (Waldman, 1984; Scaggs, 2005; Kennedy, 2017; Valdrè, 2017; Redhead, 2018). Thus, while they are fetishised

for their looks, society does not approve of women who do not conform to traditional gender roles, therefore they have no place in society, which justifies the violence they endure, resulting in villainification, despite their victimisation (Milliken, 1976 cited in Abbott, 2002; Waldman, 1984; Scaggs, 2005; Marling, 2013; Kennedy, 2017; Valdrè, 2017; Redhead, 2018). This victimisation also applies to other female characters who do not conform, such as feminist detective fiction's female protagonists (Reddy, 1988, 2003; Scaggs, 2005; Gavin, 2010; Miller, 2018). According to Mulvey's concept of "the male gaze", the woman, viewed as the "Other", incites an "anxiety" as she is suggestive of "a threat of castration" (loss of power) and she suggests that the watcher[4] attempts to "escape from this castration anxiety" either by ""demystifying her mystery" or through "devaluation" of the female"" (Mulvey, 2006, p. 348; Miller, 2018, p. 92). The devaluation occurs through either "punishment or saving of the guilty object" or through fetishisation so that the object loses its dangerous nature and becomes reassuring (Mulvey, 2006, p. 348). Punishment of the woman is not necessarily accepted within Western culture and the 'saving' of women is celebrated, which is reflected in crime fiction (Miller, 2018). As traditional crime fiction is based upon male power fantasies, women are depicted according to male fantasies, resulting in non-conforming women being punished because their existence threatens male dominance (Waldman, 1984; Abbott, 2002; Moi, 2002; Rzepka, 2005; Scaggs, 2005; Hillier and Phillips, 2009; Kennedy, 2017; Valdrè, 2017).

Domestic noir subverts the male tradition in terms of violence and the use of the female gaze (Álvarez, 2018; Miller, 2018; Peters, 2018). In the crime

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[4] The watcher here is often male, as the target audience of traditional crime fiction and genres that highly sexualise women (e.g., hard-boiled detective fiction, film noir, noir fiction) are always male (Mulvey, 2006).

fiction genre, "the gaze is the locale, not necessarily of dominance, but of "struggle"" (Butte, 2004, p. 32 cited in Miller, 2018, p. 103). However, while both these characteristics exist within crime fiction, "the struggle is the more forcible image" in domestic noir (Miller, 2018, p. 103). While male sexual criminals in most crime fiction novels use their female victims' bodies to dominate and punish them, in domestic noir, the war between women and men for narrative control is fought on female bodies and through other ways, such as "intellect" and "memory" (Priestman, 2003; Reddy, 2003; Scaggs, 2005; Gwin, 2017; Álvarez, 2018; Burke, 2018; Miller, 2018, p. 103). This is evident in *Gone Girl* and *The Girl on the Train*. *Gone Girl*'s Amy and Nick battle each other using their wits, with Amy undermining and mocking Nick while he unsuccessfully attempts to outsmart her. She sets up a treasure hunt which she knows he will find difficult to solve, then flattering him by calling him "brilliant" and "witty" to lull him into a false sense of security, then mocking him (Flynn, 2013, pp. 84, 123, 82). However, she employs male violence too (Osborne, 2017). Amy avenges Desi's entrapment of her by slashing his throat, effectively silencing him (Flynn, pp. 432–435, 447). Her punishment for Nick resembles Desi's in a metaphorical way: Nick is forced to remain silent (Flynn, 2013, pp. 447, 462–463; Gwin, 2017). She destroys his account of events and traps him in their marriage, forcing him "to conform to the notion of the ideal male" and a "partnership model masculinity" (Flynn, 2013, pp. 458–460; Osborne, 2017, pp. 24, 25). In *The Girl on the Train*, Tom murders Megan through blunt force trauma, then attempts to strangle Rachel (Hawkins, 2015). However, inverting the traditional male violence, Rachel and Anna violently murder Tom: "[t]wisting the corkscrew in, further and further, ripping into his throat", with

the penetration being a mimicry of rape (Miller, 2018, p. 103; Hawkins, 2015, p. 322).

Discussing Amy's use of male violence, Patrick Osborne (2017) suggests that the novel highlights how "patriarchal violence extolled by the consumer culture" has affected "the female psyche" and that "by regendering it, satirically demonstrates the way females have no outlet for violence, as she is deemed a "psycho bitch"", while violence remains an acceptable option for men (p. 24). While it is unusual for women to "express the level of brutal, graphic, and remorseless violence Amy inflicts upon her victims", her violence is neither "justified nor rational", marking a departure from the archetype of the femme fatale (Gwin, 2017, pp. 40, 41). However, while Amy engaged in gender performances and masquerades of idealised femininity, she eventually decides to be her authentic self, choosing to "not suppress her anger", "not ignore her violent nature" nor "allow Nick to exercise power over her", thus avoiding the fates "previous depictions of angry, violent women" have experienced ("being silenced through marriage, punishment, or death") by silencing Nick (Gwin, 2017, p. 46). By forcing Nick to "perform the role of a doting spouse as she has likewise been expected via her gender role", Amy also "deconstructs hegemonic masculinity by appropriating patriarchal violence" (Osborne, 2017, p. 24).

2.9   Critical Theories

This section includes a discussion of the theories that will be used to analyse the texts in terms of the four major aspects in this study: femininities and masculinities in domestic noir; gender performance and masquerade; gender and

violence; and female victimhood and agency. Based on the literature review and these theories, I will develop a theoretical framework which will be discussed in depth in Chapter 3.

2.9.1   *Femininities and Masculinities in Domestic Noir*

This aspect will be examined with Raewyn Connell's Gender Order Theory and Concept of Multiple Masculinities and Mimi Schippers's Gender Hegemony and Multiple Masculinities and Femininities. Both theories explore the different types of masculinities and femininities (predominantly in Western societies) and the power dynamics between them. Thus, these two theories can be used to analyse the types of femininities and masculinities and explore how normative feminine and masculine behaviour have been inverted and subverted within the domestic noir subgenre, especially when the female protagonists attempt to regain their agency, and to explore how this inversion and subversion affect the narratives.

2.9.1.1 Raewyn Connell's Gender Order Theory and Concept of Multiple Masculinities

This theory discusses the social dynamics between men and women, focusing on gender hierarchies that place men in a dominant position and actively oppresses women and other marginalised groups (Connell, 2005). It introduces the idea that there are multiple types of masculinities, with some being more dominant than others (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt,

2005). The concept of ""masculinity" represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves [in relation to other men] through discursive practices" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 841). Therefore, this theory provides a methodology to study the effects of masculinity upon other masculinities and clarifies how social factors such as ethnicity and class contribute to the formation of masculinities and their effects on women and men, taking an intersectional approach. The concept of multiple masculinities also refutes long-held assumptions about gender and masculinity, asserting that there is no fixed type of masculinity, that men do not commit to a particular "pattern of masculinity" (Connell, 2005, p. 77) but "make situationally specific choices from a cultural repertoire of masculine behaviour" (Connell, 2005, p. xix). This is a different approach to gender norms from theories of biological determinism which suggest that masculinity is fixed from birth (Goldberg, 1993; van Anders, 2013). Connell suggests that gender is shaped by social structures (e.g., patriarchy/matriarchy and religion) and that the relationships between various types of masculinities are complex, affected by everything from socio-economic class to colonialism (Connell, 2005).

The most dominant form of masculinity is termed "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 2005, p. 77). This is the "currently accepted" "configuration of gender practice" that keeps men in power while subordinating women (Connell, 2005, p. 77). While often embodied by a minority of men, or even a cultural ideal like a film actor or a fictional character, hegemonic masculinity is normative and requires other men to "position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). However, hegemonic

masculinity is not fixed and does not manifest in the same way across communities (Connell, 2005, pp. 77–78). As "[h]egemony relates to cultural dominance in the society as a whole", when one type of masculinity is dominant, other masculinities are automatically subordinated to it (Connell, 2005, p. 78). Therefore, masculinities that do not conform to normative masculine behaviour are categorised as un-masculine, often marking a similarity between them and femininity, with the implication that they (and women) are inferior to 'real men' (Connell, 2005).

While their authority and position of power mark a particular masculinity as hegemonic, overall, very few men meet normative masculine standards, but they are able to become so powerful because patriarchy is geared towards benefitting men more than others (Connell, 2005, p. 79). Complicit masculinity occurs when men do not actively engage in behaviour that openly oppresses women and minorities but still benefit from hegemonic masculinity practices (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Although these men may not be violent towards women and may share household chores with their partners, they still serve to gain from their position of power as men (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Despite a tendency to view these complicit masculinities as "slackers", factors such as "[m]arriage, fatherhood and community life" result in more complex relationships with women, thus affect men to become complicit instead of hegemonic and it allows them to benefit from the "overall subordination of women" (Connell, 2005, p. 79).

In contrast, both subordinated and marginalised masculinities are always perceived as being less than masculine. The category of subordinated masculinities includes sexual minorities (e.g., homosexual and transgender) and

races, religions and classes, among others (Connell, 2005). Here, it is important to note that gender is linked with "other social structures", thus actively intersecting and interacting with both "race and class" and with "nationality or position in the world order" (Connell, 2005, p. 75). This is directly connected to the concept of marginalised masculinities, a term that refers to the "relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups" (Connell, 2005, p. 80). An example of a marginalised masculinity is black masculinity in the United States. While Black male athletes may be perceived as embodying hegemonic masculinity, this does not translate to social changes in how Black men in general are perceived. This highlights the fact that both marginalisation and subordination are "always relative to the *authorization* of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group" (Connell, 2005, pp. 80-81). Therefore, a wealthy homosexual man may be able to avoid censure and punishment for his homosexuality/gay masculinity due to his wealth and be oppressed for it upon the loss of his wealth, with Oscar Wilde being an example (Connell, 2005, p. 81).

Although Connell's theory focused primarily on men, it briefly discusses the concept of "emphasized femininity", which is "an adaptation to [hegemonic masculinity], while other forms of femininity are defined centrally by strategies of resistance" (Connell, 1987, pp. 186–188 cited in Demetriou, 2001, p. 357). Emphasized femininity is "culturally exalted" as opposed to other femininities, but because men hold much of the power, there is "limited scope for [emphasized femininity] to construct institutionalized power relationships over other kinds of femininity", thereby making "power relationships among femininities … less

acute and noticeable than power relationships between masculinities" (Connell, 1987, pp. 186–188 cited in Demetriou, 2001, p. 357).

A primary shortcoming of this theory is that it only provides a framework to examine various types of masculinities and does not provide an equivalent method to explore femininities (Pyke and Johnson, 2003; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Schippers, 2007). Connell's work on femininities has been focused on how femininity ideologies relate to the formation and reinforcement of masculinities. She has admitted to this shortcoming, suggesting that more research needs to be conducted to explore the concept of multiple femininities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). In response, Mimi Schippers has introduced a framework to study multiple femininities based on Connell's theory (discussed in Section 2.9.1.2) (Schippers, 2007).

Critics argue that the theory's "underlying concept of masculinity is flawed" as it "is blurred, is uncertain in its meaning, and tends to deemphasize issues of power and domination" and "it essentializes the character of men" (Collinson and Hearn, 1994; Hearn, 1996, 2004; Collier, 1998; MacInnes, 1998; Petersen, 1998, 2003; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 836). For them, the concept of masculinity is "framed within a heteronormative conception of gender that essentializes male-female difference and ignores difference and exclusion within gender categories" (Collier, 1998; MacInnes, 1998; Petersen, 1998, 2003; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 836). While the argument that "the concept of gender embeds heteronormativity" is constantly mentioned, it has been proven to be incorrect (Hawkesworth, 1997; Scott, 1997; Walby, 1997; Connell, 2002; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 837).

Another criticism is its negative portrayal of hegemonic masculinity. As hegemonic masculinity results in practices that lead to men's dominance over women, it is always considered in a negative light despite the inclusion of positive practices such as "bringing home a wage, sustaining a sexual relationship, and being a father" (McMahon, 1993; Connell, 1998; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840). While hegemonic masculinity includes toxic practices (e.g., physical violence), these are often viewed as its defining characteristics (Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840). Thus, "[m]en's behavior is reified in a concept of masculinity that then, in a circular argument, becomes the explanation (and the excuse) for the behavior" (McMahon, 1993; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840). In this study, the negative practices of hegemonic masculinity are referred to as 'toxic masculinity'.

2.9.1.2 Mimi Schippers' Gender Hegemony and Multiple Masculinities and Femininities

Schippers' "alternative conceptual framework" attempts to explain "how gender hegemony operates through masculinities and femininities", how it "places men's dominance over women at the center" and "allows for multiple configurations of femininity" that can be utilised for "empirical research across groups and settings" (Schippers, 2007, p. 86). She also highlights the importance of recognising that there are culturally specified characteristics of hegemonic masculinity and femininity within different social groups which "reify hierarchical gender difference and legitimate gender difference" (Schippers,

2007, pp. 98, 100). For her theory, Schippers builds on Connell's theory in *Masculinities* (originally published in 1995) and Connell's and Messerschmidt's 2005 paper 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept' (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Schippers, 2007).

Schippers' theory borrows from Judith Butler's "theoretical framework for the *heterosexual matrix*" (Butler, 2006; Schippers, 2007, p. 89). For Butler, gender is a "socially constructed binary" which defines 'women' and 'men' as "two distinct classes of people" and that "[t]he discursive construction of gender assumes that there are certain bodies, behaviors, personality traits, and desires that neatly match up to one or the other category" (Schippers, 2007, p. 89). Both Butler and Connell agree that 'man' and 'woman' are categories that have a set of symbolic meanings which "establish the *origins …, significance*, and … *quality* characteristics of each category" of gender difference (Connell, 2005; Butler, 2006; Schippers, 2007, p. 90). In her theoretical framework, Schippers argues that "it is in the idealized *quality content* of the categories "man" and "woman" that we find the hegemonic significance of masculinity and femininity" (Schippers, 2007, p. 90). Butler suggests that it is heterosexual desire, a defining characteristic for women and men, that brings the feminine and the masculine into a binary and hierarchical relationship (Butler, 2006). Heterosexual desire is also the "basis of the *difference between and complementarity of* femininity and masculinity" (Connell, 1987; Dowsett, 1993; Anderson, 2002; Garlick, 2003; Kimmel, Hearn and Connell, 2005; Schippers, 2007, p. 90; Fejes, 2009). Schippers believes that this serves as a driving force to establish masculinity as dominant/hegemonic while femininity becomes

submissive/subordinated, leading to the institutionalisation of gender difference and gender relationality (Lorber, 2000; Martin, 2004; Schippers, 2007).

Modifying Connell's definition, Schippers defines hegemonic masculinity as the "*qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity*" which guarantees men the dominant position and simultaneously subordinates women (Connell, 2005; Schippers, 2007, p. 94). Based on this reworked definition, Schippers (2007) defines hegemonic femininity as:

> [consisting] *of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women* (p. 94)

As gender hegemony is produced through the relationship between femininity and masculinity, any configurations of femininities and masculinities are constructed "against the *idealized relationship* between masculinity and femininity" (Schippers, 2007, p. 94). Because hegemonic masculinity is based on "symbolic construction of desire for the feminine object, physical strength, and authority" to differentiate men from women and to legitimate men's superiority over and subordination of women, these characteristics must automatically be unavailable to women (Schippers, 2007, p. 94.). To guarantee "men's exclusive access" to these characteristics, "other configurations of feminine characteristics" have to be stigmatised and marked as deviant (Schippers, 2007, pp. 94-95). This provides the space to define feminine ideals

and to sanction women who embody characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity, thereby enacting it (Schippers, 2007, p. 95). Thus, characteristics such as "sexual desire for other women, being promiscuous, "frigid", or sexually inaccessible, and being aggressive" are socially sanctioned when embodied by women because they are perceived as a threat to hegemonic masculinity as it signals a refusal to be subordinate/submissive as required by gender hegemony (Schippers, 2007, p. 95). Schippers calls these "pariah femininities" (Schippers, 2007, p. 95). Hegemonic femininity ranks higher than "pariah femininities" as the latter are perceived as contaminating the relationship between femininity and masculinity (Schippers, 2007, p. 95). While pariah femininities are "the quality content of hegemonic masculinity enacted by women-desire for the feminine object …, authority …, being physically violent …, taking charge and not being compliant", they are constructed as feminine and never as masculine when enacted by women (Schippers, 2007, p. 95).

When a man enacts characteristics that are associated with hegemonic femininity, he is socially sanctioned as it is considered as contaminating social relations (Schippers, 2007). Having sexual desire for men and acting on these desires "disrupts the assumed naturalized, complementary desire between men and women" and men who are "weak, ineffectual, and compliant" are perceived as dislodging "physical strength and authority from the social position "man"" (Schippers, 2007, p. 96). Therefore, these men are considered to be enacting hegemonic femininity and are feminised (Schippers, 2007). However, these men cannot be termed "pariah masculinities" because, "[m]en's homosexual desire and being and ineffectual are *not* symbolically constructed as problematic *masculine* characteristics", but rather as feminine ones (Schippers, 2007, p. 96).

As femininity is inferior to masculinity and masculinity must never be conflated with a negative aspect, men who embody characteristics of femininity are considered to be feminine, not masculine (Schippers, 2007). This way, there are no problematic masculine characteristics and masculinity can preserve its superiority while maintaining "legitimate possession of those superior characteristics regardless of who is embodying femininity or masculinity" (Schippers, 2007, p. 96).

Like Connell's theory, Schippers' model has been criticised for essentialising masculinity and femininity (Francis *et al.*, 2017; Paechter, 2018). As Schippers uses Butler's concept that the foundation of gender is in sexual desire and that this is responsible for bringing the masculine and the feminine into a binary and hierarchical relationship, Paechter writes that this essentialises masculinity and femininity to male and female bodies (Butler, 2006; Schippers, 2007; Paechter, 2018, p. 122). She claims that this view is problematic in terms of asexual people as they are not motivated by sexual desire (Paechter, 2018). If "the possession of erotic desire for the feminine object is constructed as masculine and being the object of masculine desire is feminine", then does that mean that asexual people "can only be feminine?" (Schippers, 2007, p. 90; Paechter, 2018, p. 122). Moreover, by treating hegemonic masculinity and femininity as complementary, other masculinities and femininities are treated as problematic because they deviate from the norm and Schippers "characterises non-hegemonic forms differently for men and women", which "essentialise masculinity and femininity as tied to male and female bodies" (Francis *et al.*, 2017; Paechter, 2018, p. 122). Schippers' view of hegemonic masculinity and femininity also differs, considering them as both "monolithic and unitary" and

"locally defined", which is often unavoidable but is essentially problematic (Francis *et al.*, 2017; Paechter, 2018, p. 122).

2.9.2   *Gender Performance and Masquerade*

Domestic noir female protagonists' gender performance will be examined by using Judith Butler's theory of performativity and their use of masquerade will be analysed through Joan Riviere's concept of womanliness as masquerade. These female protagonists engage in gender performance and masquerade in their attempts to conform to gender norms as they are pressured into subscribing to traditional gender roles. Both gender performance and masquerade are key components of the female protagonists' gender expressions, therefore these two theories can help analyse how and why these female protagonists engage in gender performance and examine how they use masquerade to manipulate gender norms.

2.9.2.1 Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity

Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity describes gender as "an act that brings into being what it names: in this context, a "masculine" man or a "feminine" woman" (Salih, 2007, p. 56). Gender itself is formed by the repetition of a set of acts "within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance" or a "gendered self" (Butler, 2006, pp. 45, 33). In fact, gender performativity, which is a stylised repetition of a set of acts, is also an imitation of the dominant (and often, oppressive) gender conventions

(Butler, 2006). Society's conception of gender dictates what constitutes a 'man' and a 'woman' as well as what it means to be 'masculine' and 'feminine', which Butler terms as the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2006). According to the heterosexual matrix, gender is a socially constructed binary and has men and women classified as two different types of people with distinct physical and personality traits as well as desires and behaviour that neatly match up to each category (Butler, 2006; Schippers, 2007, p. 89). Both the categories of 'man' and 'woman' have a set of symbolic meanings that seek to explain the difference between the two (Connell, 2005; Butler, 2006; Schippers, 2007, p. 90). These symbolic meanings help to form and dictate social ideals of masculinity and femininity to which everyone must adhere (see Section 2.4.1 of this chapter). Essentially, gender is an act of role-playing and "[w]e act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman" by following the social ideals of masculinity and femininity within our respective societies (Big Think, 2011, 00:33). While we may not be consciously playing the roles nor choosing a different gender or identity each day, our behaviours align with the gender with which we identify, further reinforcing the gender roles of society. This is known as 'performing your gender' or performativity. However, while gender norms may seem natural, this naturalness is only an appearance due to the performative nature of gender and "the iterability of the norm does not fully determine gender production in advance" (Butler, 2004; Schep, 2012, p. 868).

A way of subverting the gender norms of the heterosexual hegemony is by exposing the performative nature of gender (Butler, 2006). One example of how this can be achieved is through drag. A drag queen performance often

consists of a performer dressing in women's clothing and makeup according to feminine gender norms and roles and act in an exaggerated femininity (Barnett and Johnson, 2013). For Butler, drag raises questions about gender identity: when a man dresses in women's clothing, is he essentially a man with the appearance of a woman or is the overt femininity that he is displaying proof that he is essentially feminine despite his male body? (Butler, 2006). Butler views this as proof of the instability between sex and gender and the performative nature of gender identities, particularly masculine and feminine identities. In drag, in much the same way as in society, gender identities are constructed through the repetitive performances of certain behaviours and physical attributes (e.g., clothing), without which there is no sense in making a distinction between 'man' and 'woman' (Butler, 2006). A review of Butler's theory notes that, in this way, drag exposes gender "as a cultural code which relies on imitation and reappearance, lacking any initial, essential truth" (Anon., 2011). Therefore, in parodying gender norms, drag serves to expose the mimicry that is "at the base of any structure of identity, and the absence of any authentic source" (Anon., 2011). Drag attempts to destabilise the 'truth' of gender identity and sexual orientation by pointing out that "there is no obligating reason that necessitates the constant mimicry of performed identities" and by doing so, exposes the role of social coercion that is responsible for the performative nature of gender identity (Butler, 2006; Anon., 2011).

Schep (2012) contends that Butler's theory, despite Butler's attempts to be gender inclusive, has "potentially exclusionary elements" which might be problematic, even leading to the theory itself functioning "as a hegemonic system that attempts to account for all gender relations rather than as an

instrument to be employed in emancipatory struggles" (p. 865). While Butler has attempted to "subvert restrictions and broaden the spectrum of possible genders", the theory of performativity "threatens the possibility of these subjectivities, or, … attributes them to the sedimentation of iterated gender norms that lack all natural or symbolic necessity" (Schep, 2012, p. 868). He writes that, within gender studies, the "theory of performativity has become a hegemonic framework" and has led to the "foreclosure of certain possible gendered identities" (Schep, 2012, p. 864). He discusses this in terms of the transgender community and writes that the theory of performativity can be problematic for the transgender movement due to its reliance on the binary nature of gender as "a set of stable reference points" (Schep, 2012, p. 868). The transgender community refers to the "biologically determined notion of the binary" when transitioning, while for Butler, this is "the more or less contingent iteration of a hegemonic social norm" (Schep, 2012, p. 868). As performativity "denies the foundational status of biology in the constitution of gender norm", it can be interpreted as a threat for those who seek to "understand their bodies and identities" (Schep, 2012, p. 868). Therefore, this theory sometimes does not accommodate the reasons that transgender people choose to transition. The irreconcilable differences between the theory of performativity and the concepts of gender that "underlie and validate certain desires and identities" with Butler's concept of hegemony might serve to delegitimise these "desires and identities" (Schep, 2012, p. 869). Therefore, by "denaturalizing reiterated and essentialist notions of gender and sexuality, and advocating a paradigm that allows for a progressive increase of the range of possible gender identities", Butler's theory has rendered "certain gender expressions impossible" (Schep, 2012, p. 869).

2.9.2.2 Joan Riviere's Concept of Womanliness as a Masquerade

The concept of masquerade is closely connected to gender performance. When a woman's behaviour does not perfectly align with the social ideals of femininity, she threatens men/hegemonic masculinity and disrupts the social order (pariah femininities) (Schippers, 2007). Thus, she is considered a deviant force and must be socially sanctioned. To avoid this, women engage in masquerade to mask their deviancy and to perform their gender according to the social ideals of femininity (Riviere, 1929).

Joan Riviere (1929) introduced the idea that women use "womanliness as a masquerade" to mask their unfeminine characteristics that would threaten men, thus inviting sanctions upon women, by displaying a façade of "womanliness" (p. 303). She equates this masquerade to how homosexual men use a mask of heterosexuality by exaggerating heterosexual characteristics as a "defence" to protect themselves from negative social sanctions for not aligning with hegemonic masculinity (p. 303). Women masquerade "womanliness" (normative feminine behaviour) to give an appearance of femininity to hide their anxiety of being discovered and to avoid the reprisals they will receive from men for possessing masculinity. This "mask of womanliness" (Riviere, 1929, p. 303) is meant to "transform aggression and the fear of reprisal into seduction and flirtation" (Butler, 2006, p. 65) in an attempt to "attract the male gaze" (Doane, 2013, p. 42). While Riviere writes that there is no difference between womanliness and the masquerade, Berk interprets the term womanliness to mean the behaviour men expect of women (Riviere, 1929; Berk, 2014). Thus, Berk

writes that "women's masquerade is based on their understanding of men's perception of women" and that women can then perceive femininity, in itself a "fundamentally male construct", as an entity apart from themselves and use it for their benefit (2014, p. 6189).

Therefore, femininity becomes a powerful tool for women as the effectiveness of womanliness as masquerade lies "in its potential to manufacture a distance from the image, to generate a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible, and readable by the woman" (Doane, 1991, p. 32). Instead of giving into femininity's misogynistic perceptions of women as passive and powerless, women exploit men's perceptions of what a woman should be to their advantage (Berk, 2014, p. 6189). Therefore, by masquerading as "good wives, mothers and attractive co-workers", women are able to be successful while evading the anxiety that arises from a fear of retribution from men "as a result of their visible masculinity" (Berk, 2014, p. 6189). Taking the "indirect route of the masquerade", women are also able to reduce the risk of damaging the male ego, lulling men into a "false feeling of security", thereby being able to "possess his power without facing serious consequences" (Berk, 2014, p. 6190). Thus, the masquerade that women perform can be said to function as "a veiled mechanism of survival and struggle at a time of social change, when the ideas of it are yet to be embraced in their entirety by the whole society" (Berk, 2014, p. 6189). For Riviere (1929), masquerade signals liberation because women can embrace their masculinity and safeguard it without facing censure or negative social sanctions. However, for Luce Irigaray (1991), masquerade is "what women do in order to recuperate some element of desire, to participate in man's desire, but at the price of renouncing their own" (p. 133). Therefore, women are

forced to continue the 'masquerade of femininity' because it is what is expected of them.

An issue with this theory is that, while feminine masquerade may appear to be efficient, it is at most a temporary solution to the power struggles existing in society (Berk, 2014). The concept of masquerade is itself problematic due to its perception of women as inherently deceitful, therefore extremely damaging for the perception of women. In addition, although Riviere viewed feminine masquerade as liberating and as a way to avoid censure for the masculinity she possesses, Doane writes that, in Riviere's description of the masquerade, "femininity is in actuality non-existent—it serves only as a disguise" (Riviere, 1929; Doane, 2013, p. 43), essentially "femininity is a mask, a lie" (Riviere, 1929 cited in Machelidon, 2000, p. 104). Therefore, both femininity and the mask are essentially the same thing, something that women engage in to "participate in man's desire" at the cost of their own (Riviere, 1929 cited in Machelidon, 2000, p. 104).

Furthermore, it is important to point out that Riviere's paper on using "womanliness as a masquerade" was published in 1929, during which time power was almost synonymous with masculinity, "at least in terms of the symbolic" (Miller, 2018, p. 101). During this period, women had markedly less opportunities to be independent and embark on a career of their choosing, with more barriers in place for them. Thus, the power dynamics between men and women were significantly different in comparison with those of contemporary times. While contemporary society has more gender equality than during Riviere's time, Emma V. Miller (2018) writes that this theory remains relevant.

2.9.3   Gender and Violence

Swan and Snow's Theory of Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Relationships will be used to explore the relationship between gender and violence in domestic noir. This theory can be used to examine the types of violence used by the female protagonists and the rationale behind their violence. Combining this theory with Connell's concept of multiple masculinities can provide insight into male and female violence and examine how violence is portrayed within the subgenre. These two theories can also help determine if violence within domestic noir is gendered as it is in traditional crime fiction.

2.9.3.1 Swan and Snow's Theory of Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Relationships

As this study focuses on heterosexual marriages, this theory provides a framework to understand women's violence within heterosexual intimate relationships (Swan and Snow, 2006). This model contextualises "women's violence" in terms of "victimization by male partners"; discusses factors influencing violence such as "women's motivations for violent behavior" and "the coping strategies" they use; "the historical context of women's experiences"; and "outcomes" such as "depression … and substance abuse" (Swan and Snow, 2006, p. 1028).

Women's violence, in most cases, is linked to the violence they experience from their male partners, and therefore, a study of women's violence

must take this into account (Das Dasgupta, 1999; Abel, 2001; Hamberger and Guse, 2002; Swan and Snow, 2006). The types of violence women use in such situations also differ greatly (Swan and Snow, 2002). Swan and Snow's 2002 study found that while both men and women engage in a similar level of verbal and/or emotional abuse and women engaged in more moderate levels of physical violence than men (e.g., throwing things, pushing/shoving), women were more often subjected to more serious types of abuse such as "sexual coercion, injury, and coercive control behaviors" (Swan and Snow, 2006, p. 1028). While women can be abusive and controlling, it is much less common for women to exert much control over men's behaviour as this type of abuse is based on and maintained through fear and men are generally not afraid of women (Morse, 1995; Hamberger and Guse, 2002).
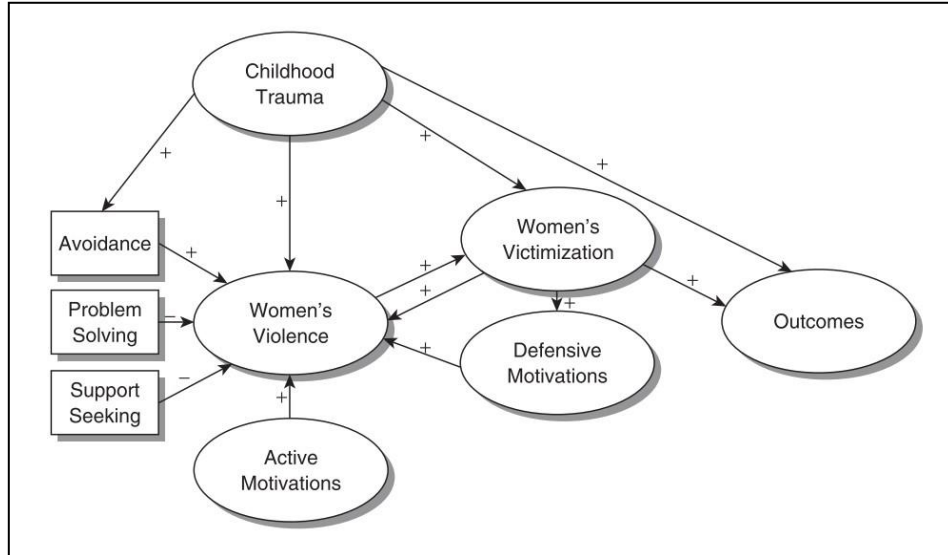
Figure 2: Swan and Snow's Model of Women's Violence and Victimization, Motivations for Violence, Coping, Childhood Trauma, and Outcomes (Swan and Snow, 2006, p. 1029)

Figure 2 demonstrates the relationship between women's violence towards men and women's victimisation by their male partners. As indicated in the model, there is a bidirectional path between a woman's and her male

partner's violence, which suggests that when one partner's level of violence increases, so does the other's (Siegel, 2000; Swan and Snow, 2002; Hendy *et al.*, 2003). Swan and Snow list five reasons for women's motivations to become violent towards their male partners: self-defence, fear, defence of children, control and retribution (Swan and Snow, 2006). These are divided into two categories, defensive and active motivations. Self-defence, the protection of children and fear are defensive motivations while control and retribution are active motivations. Self-defence is one of the most cited reasons for women's violence in intimate relationships, with more women using violence to defend themselves than men (Makepeace, 1986; Barnett, Lee and Thelen, 1997; Snow *et al.*, 2003). If there are children involved, defending them is another motivation (Browne, 1987; Swan and Snow, 2006). Control is another reason for women's violence. While men are more likely to engage in violence to maintain control of their partner, women are less likely to use violence to exercise control but those who do are usually not in control of the dynamics (Makepeace, 1986; Barnett, Lee and Thelen, 1997; Ehrensaft *et al.*, 1999; Hamberger and Guse, 2002; Swan and Snow, 2006). The final reason is retribution, for actual or perceived wrongdoings (Swan and Snow, 2003, 2006). While both men and women use violence in retaliation for their partner's attacks, men cited "their partners' unwanted behaviour, such as infidelity" as reasons while women cited retribution for their partners' "emotionally abusive behaviour" (Hamberger and Guse, 2002; Swan and Snow, 2006, p. 1031; Follingstad *et al.*, 2016).

"Avoidance", "Problem Solving" and "Support Seeking" refer to women's coping mechanisms in abusive intimate relationships (Amirkhan, 1990; Swan and Snow, 2006). Both problem-solving and support-seeking

negatively correlated with women's violence while avoidance coping had the opposite effect (Swan and Snow, 2006). The study indicated that the more problem-solving strategies were used, the less violence the women used. The model depicts the relationship between women's violence and their coping strategies, with avoidance coping "predicting higher levels of women's violence" while both problem-solving and support-seeking coping strategies tend to reduce the "likelihood of women's violence" (Swan and Snow, 2006, p. 1032). Studies have found that avoidant strategies result in poorer outcomes while problem-solving and support-seeking yield more positive outcomes (Ingledew, Hardy and Cooper, 1997; Snow *et al.*, 2003). Avoidant coping strategies have been linked with later development of mental illnesses such as depression (Mitchell and Hodson, 1983; Valentiner *et al.*, 1996; Foa *et al.*, 2000). In comparison, problem-solving has been associated with general well-being (Foa *et al.*, 2000).

Studies show that experiences of childhood physical and sexual abuse are positively correlated with women's violence and their sexual victimisation by male partners (Straus, 1990; White and Humphrey, 1994; Swan and Snow, 2006; Siegel, 2000). Women who had undergone emotional abuse as children are more likely to engage in coercive and controlling behaviour and are more likely to use avoidance as a coping strategy in abusive situations (Swan and Snow, 2006). In this model, "higher levels of childhood trauma" are considered to predict a "greater use of avoidance coping and higher levels of women's violence and victimization" (Swan and Snow, 2006, p. 1032).

"Outcomes" refers to the psychological issues that these women experience, which include mental illness. Childhood trauma is also a factor that

would negatively affect outcomes both "directly and indirectly through its impact on women's violence and victimization" (Swan and Snow, 2006, p. 1033). Thus, the model predicts a negative effect on outcomes as a result of women's victimisation.

This theoretical framework takes sociocultural contexts into consideration, recognising that relationship and power dynamics and violence in intimate relationships depend upon their respective cultures. However, the authors have discussed women's violence in intimate relationships only in two ethnic groups, African Americans and Latinx, and have called for more research on other ethnic groups.

While this theory attempts to be intersectional and includes vital factors contributing to women's violence, some aspects have been excluded. One of these is age and research has shown that younger partners are more likely to be violent towards their partners (West, 1998; Swan and Snow, 2006). It also does not explore how certain mental illnesses may affect women's violence (Swan and Snow, 2006).

Another shortcoming is that it only explores the outcomes for the women in these relationships, not discussing their children or their male partners (Swan and Snow, 2006). Moreover, this theory only examines heterosexual relationships (Swan and Snow, 2006). Although this theory discusses women's violence, that does not necessarily mean that these factors relate to lesbian relationships as the dynamics within those differ from heterosexual relationships (Swan and Snow, 2006). Thus, while this framework takes into account multiple

important factors regarding women's violence, it requires testing and refinement (Swan and Snow, 2006).

2.9.4   *Female Victimhood and Agency*

To explore female victimhood and agency within domestic noir, some of the theories mentioned earlier will be used, namely Schippers' theory of Gender Hegemony and Multiple Masculinities and Femininities as well as Swan and Snow's Theory of Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Relationships. Both theories will aid in analysing female victimhood and how these women regain agency.

Swan and Snow's model enables a greater understanding of the domestic noir female protagonists' victimisation, offering insight into their reasons for engaging in violent behaviour towards their male abusers. Understanding the extent of damage their male partner's abuse does to the women can clarify women's motivations and justifications for exerting violence upon their partner. This can help identify how these women shed their victimhood to regain their agency and how they manipulate patriarchal ideals of femininity to achieve these aims. Schippers' theory provides an understanding of the types of femininities present within domestic noir to identify the roles the women play and allow an exploration of how female victimhood is portrayed. In the selected texts, the female protagonists engage in violence and Schippers' theory can help identify the power dynamics present within the marriages that lead the women to radically change their behaviour. Used in conjunction with Swan and Snow's model, Schippers' theory allows for an analysis of the types of female

victimhood found within domestic noir through a study of femininities within the subgenre, which in turn can help identify whether these female protagonists can be considered heroines, anti-heroines or villainesses.

2.10   Summary

While domestic noir is not exactly a "triumph for the female gaze", it is "an important battlefield during the war for narrative control" and marks a shift in crime fiction from passive female characters to female protagonists who strive to live on their own terms (Miller, 2018, p. 103). These stories of women's lived experiences have also proven to be commercially viable, indicating that there is a growing market for female-centric storylines (Crouch, 2018; Joyce, 2018; Miller, 2018). The subgenre is significant in terms of how it has changed the way in which women's stories are told, by bringing the focus into women's lives, and displaying the power dynamics in marriages that can make the home a dangerous place (Crouch, 2013, 2018; Joyce, 2018; Waters and Worthington, 2018). Domestic noir also challenges gender norms and society's tacit acceptance of them as well as our knowledge of female victimhood and violence, bringing much-needed attention to the complex nature of domestic violence (Crouch, 2013, 2018; Álvarez, 2018; Burke, 2018; Joyce, 2018; Miller, 2018; Peters, 2018; Waters and Worthington, 2018).

This chapter delves deeper into the subgenre to provide a better understanding of domestic noir, by offering a definition of the term and exploring the genres, texts and authors that influenced the subgenre. The chapter also includes a discussion of the theories that will be used to analyse the texts

and will serve as the background for the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter Three – Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This research aims to study the relationships between men and women in heterosexual marriages within domestic noir in terms of the inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, gender performance and masquerade, the relationship between gender and violence, and female victimhood and agency. The main premise of this study is that, in domestic noir novels that focus on heterosexual marriages, victimised women shed their victimhood and regain their agency by engaging in acts of violence directed at their male abusers (current or previous partners). The women are victimised by their male abusers and by the patriarchy, as gender norms and social ideals of femininity limit women's agency.

While domestic noir novels are fictitious, they are based on women's lived experience and focus on women's issues, primarily domestic violence (which includes Intimate Partner Violence/IPV and child abuse). Thus, theories from sociology, philosophy, gender studies and psychoanalysis are used to analyse these novels in terms of the four aspects mentioned above.

3.2   Theoretical Framework

The major concerns of this research are to identify whether the female protagonists of domestic noir actually subvert patriarchal gender norms and the norms of traditional crime fiction, if they successfully shed their victimhood and

whether their victimhood and violence categorise them as heroines, anti-heroines or villainesses. To achieve this, this study engages in an analysis of how the female protagonists of domestic noir escape their victimhood when subjected to intimate partner violence. The diagram below is the theoretical framework which will be used as a basis to achieve the research objectives. The diagram is also a visual representation of how this study will be conducted to examine the texts. It demonstrates the strategies domestic noir female protagonists use to cope with their victimhood and which theories will be used to examine these strategies (some theories may be used to examine more than one strategy).
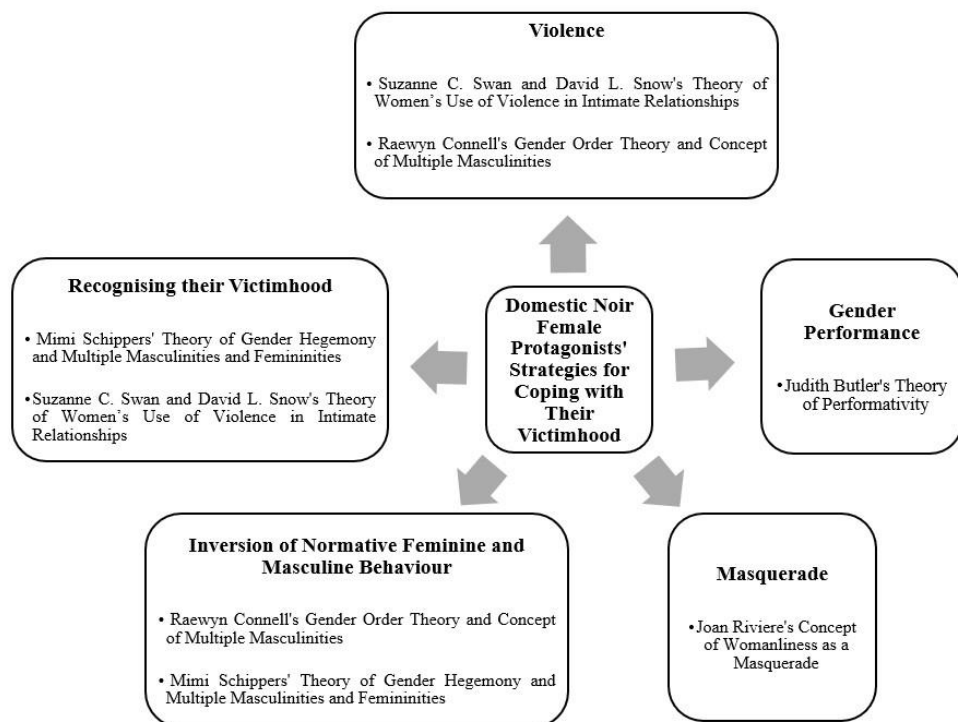
Figure 3: Theoretical Framework

Their escape of victimhood is achieved through five strategies: through engaging in gender performance by enacting hyperfemininity to maintain some semblance of normalcy within the relationships and to conform to gender norms; through engaging in masquerade to maintain a semblance of normalcy within the relationships and to evade negative social sanctions for not conforming to gender norms; through the inversion/subversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour to rebel against restrictive gender norms and their male abusers; through recognising their victimhood, resulting in either the female protagonists' suicide or decision to punish their male abusers; and finally, through the use of violence against their male abusers (ranging from emotional abuse to murder).

Both gender performance and masquerade within the relationships are mainly attempts to salvage their marriages by playing a game of pretence, lying both to themselves and their spouses about the reality of their own victimhood. In their attempts to balance conforming to gender norms and being true to themselves, these women invert normative feminine and masculine behaviour in an act of subversion that is often borne out of a desperate need to regain some measure of control over their lives. At this point, they gradually begin to become aware of their victimhood. Once they recognise that they are indeed victims, they have two escape routes available to them: dying by suicide or eliminating the abuser. While a small minority of these characters take the first option, many of them opt for the second. This leads to the female protagonists committing acts of violence against their male abusers in retaliation for the abuse to which they were subjected.

The strategies that are listed in this theoretical framework have been drawn from a combination of current research on domestic noir and from reading multiple novels from the subgenre as well as drawn from the existing literature. Researchers such as Patrick Osborne (2017), Stephanie Gwin (2017), Emma V. Miller (2018), Elena Avanzas Álvarez (2018) and Eva Burke (2018) have analysed the female protagonists' use of violence, masquerade and gender performance in their attempts to regain agency and how the use of these strategies affect their victimhood. Furthermore, Osborne (2017), Miller (2018) and Meredith Jeffers (2015) have explored the aspect of the inversion/subversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, in terms of violence and the concept of masculinity. In terms of the strategy of 'Recognising their Victimhood', I coined this term as this strategy is not named in existing literature. This term has been drawn from both current research and from my personal study of multiple domestic noir novels, specifically from its sub-type that focusses on marriages and romantic relationships. There is no one term to be found in the existing literature that refers to the point at which the female protagonists recognise that they are victims of intimate partner violence and thus, this term will be used in this thesis.

The five strategies have been listed in this specific order as this is the pattern that I discovered when researching the subgenre and reading domestic noir novels. The order of the strategies has also been influenced by the research found on domestic noir. Through these five strategies, I offer a new methodology with which to examine the female protagonists of domestic noir novels that focus on heterosexual marriages and romantic relationships.

This theoretical framework draws from a range of theories to analyse the strategies listed in it. They have been selected specifically because they help address the research objectives and complement each other. Raewyn Connell's gender order theory and concept of multiple masculinities and Mimi Schippers' theory of gender hegemony and multiple masculinities and femininities have been used to examine the female protagonists' expressions of femininity and masculinity as these two theories are well-equipped to do so. Connell's theory offers a well-developed concept of the multiple types of masculinity and Schippers' theory offers a framework of multiple femininities that address the concerns of this study. Furthermore, these two theories are complementary to each other as Schippers' theory is inspired by Connell's theory and offers a framework to explore aspects that are not addressed in sufficient depth in Connell's theory. Therefore, Schippers' theory acts as an extension of Connell's theory that provides much-needed clarifications in terms of femininities and masculinities.

Similarly, Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Joan Riviere's concept of womanliness as a masquerade complement each other. Butler's theory is a descendant of Riviere's theory and incorporates the latter's concept of masquerade. However, this research uses these two theories together to explore the aspects of masquerade and gender performance to highlight their interconnectedness as well as to examine how domestic noir female protagonists use their femininity as both a conscious masquerade and as a natural performance of gender. As Riviere's theory specifically addresses how stereotypical femininity is often used consciously as a masquerade by women to protect themselves from social censure and men's ire is an important distinction

that is highly relevant to this research. While Butler's theory is useful in understand acts of gender performance by the female protagonists of domestic noir, this theory does not specifically focus on the relationships between women and men as Riviere's theory does. Therefore, both theories have been used in conjunction with each other to provide an in-depth analysis.

Suzanne C. Swan and David L. Snow's theory of women's use of violence in intimate relationships is a sociological one that has few connections in the literature to the other four theories, however it has been chosen as it specifically focusses on heterosexual relationships where domestic violence occurs and addresses the aspect of female-on-male violence, something that is lacking in many literary theories. Swan and Snow's theory is successful in examining domestic noir female protagonists' violence and functions as a natural extension of the other theories in exploring why the violence occurs. This is especially the case with Schippers' and Riviere's theories, which both demonstrate that women have many frustrations concerning patriarchal gender norms. As a result, Swan and Snow's theory is particularly useful in studying how the female protagonists use the strategy of recognising their victimhood combined with Schippers' theory as both enable an examination of different aspects of the characters, and therefore complement each other. Furthermore, because Swan and Snow's theory is designed to investigate female-on-male violence, it functions well in conjunction with Connell's theory in studying male violence and women engaging in violence typically coded male.

As this an interdisciplinary study, it includes non-literary theories to analyse the novels. Despite the use of such theories, all their terminology will not be used in this research as they are not entirely applicable. For example,

although this study focusses on the aspects of female violence, victimhood and agency and uses Swan and Snow's (2006) theory on women's violence to explore some of these aspects, the terminology used in this research will not reflect the terminology found in these research areas. One of the main reasons for this is that, as domestic noir novels are fictional accounts of domestic violence/intimate partner violence, functioning mostly as revenge fantasies, and are therefore not always realistic in terms of real-world violence in such relationships. Therefore, terminology from studies of female violence, victimhood and agency that are based on real women are not entirely applicable to domestic noir's female protagonists and will not be used in this study. Instead, terminology and strategies drawn from current research on domestic noir and my research on the subgenre are used to analyse the novels. In addition, the focus of this research is on the slow devolution of the female protagonists' marriages. These aspects are not thoroughly researched in existing literature on violence and victimisation in a way that is applicable to the analysis of domestic noir novels (which are not factual nor entirely realistic in nature). Therefore, within the framework, I suggest that they use different strategies to cope with the violence they face, some of which are supported by Swan and Snow's theory, and includes strategies suggested in existing literature on domestic noir.

In relation to Swan and Snow's theory on women's violence in heterosexual romantic relationships, this research does not employ all the coping strategies that are included in its Model of Women's Violence as they are less relevant to this study. This is because the coping strategies employed by domestic noir female protagonists differ based on the novel and the character in question and the types of coping strategies used are not uniform across the

subgenre. In addition, the theory is based on studies of real-life cases of domestic violence, which are not always applicable to domestic noir novels as the latter, despite being based on or inspired by real events, are a type of fantasy where oppressed women have an opportunity to punish their male abusers and are therefore not entirely realistic in nature. The model also focusses on the mental health conditions of women who are victims of intimate partner violence and this too is not applicable to the analysis of this research as the domestic noir novels that are being analysed in this thesis do not offer the official mental illness diagnoses of their female protagonists. Furthermore, the focus of this study is primarily on the relationship between the female protagonists and their male partners. Swan and Snow's model includes factors such as childhood trauma as a reason for violence. However, discussions of these factors will derail the discussion from objectives of my research which is to maintain the focus on the conflicts between the wife and the husband, and not on their childhoods or mental states (in terms of medical terminology). However, references to the coping strategies are made in the analysis chapters where applicable.

3.3   Research Plan

The methodology will address four research objectives based on the four main aspects by analysing the five strategies used by the female protagonists to escape their victimhood using the theoretical framework which will be the basis of the methodology and analysis of the texts. The following are the objectives of this research:

1. Identify how the conventional stereotypes of feminine and masculine behaviour are subverted within the subgenre.

2. Explore how female protagonists of domestic noir engage in gender performance and masquerade.

3. Analyse how women's victimhood is portrayed within the subgenre.

4. Examine how female and male violence are portrayed within the subgenre.

This study will begin with the examination of gender performance and masquerade. The female protagonists often engage in gender performance and masquerade to escape their victimhood when they realise that their marriages are in trouble. Thus, they play a game of pretence, wearing a mask of hyperfemininity hide their desires so that they can conform to gender norms. To examine gender performance and masquerade, I will be using Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity and Joan Riviere's Concept of Womanliness as a Masquerade respectively.

Next, I will be studying how the female protagonists invert normative feminine (hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity) and masculine behaviour (hypermasculinity/hegemonic masculinity). This is often a result of the failure of gender performance and masquerade of hyperfemininity to bring about satisfactory results in their marriages. In attempting to mend their relationships and stay true to themselves, the female protagonists use the strategy of inverting gender norms. To examine this strategy, Raewyn Connell's Gender Order Theory and Concept of Multiple Masculinities and Mimi Schippers' Theory of Gender Hegemony and Multiple Masculinities and Femininities will be used.

If the above three strategies result in failure to, then the female protagonists are forced to recognise that they are indeed victims and will gradually begin to realise the role their male abusers have played in their victimisation, thus, this will be explored next. At this point, they have two options available to them: escape through suicide or escape through elimination of their male abusers. The female protagonists engage in an internal battle with their own victimhood and undergo a process of denial and a refusal to admit that they have been manipulated by a loved one. To examine this aspect of female victimhood and agency, Mimi Schippers' Theory of Gender Hegemony and Multiple Masculinities and Femininities will be used with Suzanne Swan and David L. Snow's Theory of Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Relationships.

As a result of the female protagonists' realisation of their role as victim, they turn to violence as a strategy to escape their victimhood. The violence can be directed either at themselves, resulting in suicide, or directed at their male abusers, often resulting in murder. Usually, the female protagonists opt for the second option. Ironically, through violence, they are able to stop the cycle of violence from continuing, effectively ending their own victimisation. To study this strategy, Suzanne Swan and David L. Snow's Theory of Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Relationships and Raewyn Connell's Gender Order Theory and Concept of Multiple Masculinities will be used.

While these female protagonists follow this general flow from strategies one through five, they do not always follow these strategies in a linear manner and may employ one or more of the strategies at any point. For example, while employing violence, they may also employ the first strategy of masquerade. This

pattern of combining strategies as and when required is common within domestic noir and will be discussed within their respective chapters.

3.4   Texts Examined in this Study

Considering the aspects discussed in Section 3.3.1, the following three domestic noir novels will be analysed in this research: *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn; *The Silent Wife* by A. S. A. Harrison and *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins (Flynn, 2013; Harrison, 2013; Hawkins, 2015).

This research analyses the domestic noir sub-type focussing on the relationship between spouses in heterosexual marriages and the texts for this research have been chosen based on the three criteria concerning the female protagonist, her husband and the plot. They are:

1) The novels include a wife victimised by her husband, be it through physical, verbal or emotional/psychological abuse and the wife may initially be ignorant of and/or complicit in this abuse.

2) The texts include a husband who exhibits hegemonic masculinity (according to Connell's theory) and commits acts of violence against his wife, either on purpose or unintentionally.

3) The plot includes a wife committing acts of violence against her husband in an attempt to escape her husband's abuse and regain her independence, and this violence may take the form of murder or other acts of violence (physical violence such as assault, verbal abuse and/or emotional/psychological abuse).

There are many domestic noir novels from other regions (Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia). Some examples are Marcela Serrano's *Nuestra Señora de La Soledad* [Our Lady of Solitude] (1999), Natsuo Kirino's *Riaru Wārudo* [Real World] (2003), Pierre Lemaitre's *Robe de Marié* [Wedding Dress] (2010) and Rumena Buzharovska's Мојот маж [My Husband] (2014). However, novels from non-Western countries were not included for a few reasons. One of the main reasons is that many are published in non-English languages, and although they have been translated to English, this would be a poor substitution as the translations might not capture the intentions of the original works' authors and the essence of the original novels. Another reason is that, with novels from these regions, various sociocultural norms unique to the regions apply and having insufficient knowledge of these norms can lead to a flawed understanding of the texts. In contrast, the selected novels are based in the United States and in England, and a large amount of these countries' sociocultural norms can be gleaned from being exposed to American and British culture through films, television, music and the Internet.

Gone Girl, *The Silent Wife* and *The Girl on the Train* were also selected because of their prominence in contemporary fiction and culture. They are three of the best examples of domestic noir and are largely responsible for popularising the subgenre and this type of female-centric story-telling that features imperfect female protagonists. In addition, these novels are recognisable and identifiable as they have been translated into many languages, with *Gone Girl* and *The Girl on the Train* having been made into high-grossing films and *The Silent Wife* being in production, with the involvements of some of the most popular and highest-paid Hollywood actors and directors (Goodreads, n.d.; Box

Office Mojo, n.d., The Internet Movie Database, n.d.). Despite these types of stories having been in circulation before the arrival and recognition of domestic noir by authors such as Daphne du Maurier and Patricia Highsmith, Gillian Flynn and Paula Hawkins have been instrumental in bringing renewed attention to the dangers that exist within the home and in revolutionising contemporary literature with the inclusion of unconventional female protagonists.

3.5   Structure of the Thesis

The thesis includes one chapter each devoted to each of the three novels, examining all four aspects according to the research objectives. Thus, Chapter Four focusses on Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*, Chapter Five on A. S. A. Harrison's *The Silent Wife* and Chapter Six on Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*. In each chapter, the five strategies are examined in the order listed in the theoretical framework. Chapter Seven is a discussion of all three novels, comparing and contrasting the three texts, followed by the final Chapter Eight (Conclusion).

3.6   Summary

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework drawn from the review of literature that will be used to achieve the research objectives. The theoretical framework serves as the basis for this research and demonstrates how the chosen theories will be used to analyse the selected texts in terms of the four major aspects under study and to address the research objectives of this study. Thus, R. W. Connell's Gender Order Theory and Concept of Multiple Masculinities; Mimi Schippers' theory of Gender Hegemony and Multiple Masculinities and

Femininities; Swan and Snow's Theory of Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Relationships; Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity; and Joan Riviere's Concept of Womanliness as a Masquerade will be used in the analysis of the aspects of the inversion of normative/stereotypical feminine and masculine behaviour; gender performance and masquerade; the relationship between gender and violence; and the concepts of female victimhood and agency in the subgenre of domestic noir. Each aspect has a corresponding research objective that will be addressed using a combination of these theories in the following chapters.

In addition, this chapter also discusses the texts that will be analysed, providing an explanation of the reasons behind the selections and the criteria for the texts. The three texts chosen for analysis in this research are Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*, A. S. A. Harrison's *The Silent Wife* and Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*. They have been selected based on the criteria discussed in this chapter and taking into consideration the novels' and the authors' roles in the development of domestic noir.

Chapter Four – Masquerading as the 'Perfect Victim': Performative

Victimhood in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*

4.1   Introduction

This chapter examines how the female protagonist (Amy Elliott Dunne) of Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* dealt with domestic issues with her husband using the following five strategies: masquerade, gender performance, inversion of feminine and masculine behaviour, recognising their victimhood and violence. Using the theoretical framework in Chapter 3, this chapter explores Amy's coping mechanisms within her marriage and how she employed these five strategies to shed her role as the victim and regain her agency. The analysis within this chapter addresses the research objectives.

Gone Girl, with its increasingly unlikeable protagonists, provides an interesting study of domestic conflict that occurs once the initial marital euphoria begins to deteriorate, illustrating how the home can become a site of conflict due to the dangers inherent within it (Flynn, 2013; Abbott, 2018a; Crouch, 2018; Joyce, 2018). As one of domestic noir's most prominent examples, this novel offers a different type of female character to crime fiction, challenging notions of femininity and girlhood, marriage, gender norms, female victimhood and villainhood. *Gone Girl* is also significant in terms of the types of femininities and masculinities displayed by the protagonists (Amy and Nick Dunne), with both female and male characters exhibiting femininities and masculinities, illustrating how traditional notions of femininity and masculinity are flawed.

Furthermore, the novel exposes the negative impact of the media on gender construction through an exploration of the pervasive true crime narrative.

This novel is about Amy Elliott Dunne and her husband, Nick and is set in the United States (Flynn, 2013). It begins with Amy's disappearance on their fifth wedding anniversary and gradually, all the evidence pointed towards Nick being guilty. While the authorities and the public assumed that Nick had murdered Amy, in reality, Amy had planned an elaborate scheme to disappear and ensure that Nick was imprisoned for her "murder" to punish him for real and perceived transgressions against her. Although Nick later became aware of Amy's plans, he was unable to prove his innocence to the police, and his extramarital relationship with his student (Andie Hardy) made him appear even more suspicious. However, when Amy was forced to seek help from an old friend (Desi Collings), he imprisoned her and she escaped by murdering him. Upon her return to Nick, she pretended that Desi had abducted her, and was treated as a heroine. While Nick, his sister and Detective Boney were aware of Amy's actions, they were unable to prove her guilt. When Nick began to write a book to reveal Amy's personality, Amy forced him to abandon this by impregnating herself with his sperm that she had secretly kept, forcing him to play the role of the caring husband for the sake of their unborn child.

The story is narrated using the alternating perspectives of Nick and Amy. While the reader meets Nick in Part One (Boy Loses Girl), the reader encounters Amy as Diary Amy in a fictitious account of their marriage specifically designed to make Nick seem like abusive to the police. The reader meets real Amy only in Part Two (Boy Meets Girl). The final Part Three (Boy Gets Girl Back (Or Vice Versa)) finds Amy reunited with Nick.

4.2   Gender Performance and Masquerade

Gender performance and masquerade are the first two of the five strategies used by Amy. Cool Amy (Amy's Cool Girl persona) was the first instance of masquerade and gender performance in her relationship with Nick. In their initial meeting, their courtship and the early stages of their marriage, Amy engaged in the masquerade of Cool Amy to mould her personality into one that Nick preferred in his romantic partner. Cool Amy can also be considered a gender performance as this persona adhered to normative feminine behaviour. As masquerade is intertwined with gender performance due to both strategies resulting in the female protagonist adhering to gender norms, the two strategies are discussed together.

Her second main persona was Amazing Amy (while her Amazing Amy persona was an overarching one, it was the personas of Cool Amy and Diary Amy that she utilised as part of her strategies with Nick, thus, they are discussed in detail in this chapter and Amazing Amy is discussed when required). As Amy felt pressured to enact the masquerade of Amazing Amy throughout her entire life, beginning with her childhood and into her adult life, this was a persona that was always in the background of her other personas. Amazing Amy was created as a result of the children's book series titled Amazing Amy, written by Amy's parents, Rand and Marybeth Elliott. They constantly used Amy's literary counterpart, who was based on their daughter, to indirectly criticise Amy's choices despite insisting that Amy need not take literary Amy "too personally": "I can't fail to notice that whenever I screw something up, Amy does it right"

(Flynn, 2013, p. 30). Amy found this passive-aggressive parenting method to be anger-inducing and demotivating. Undoubtedly, her parents' constant undermining negatively impacted her self-worth (Flynn, 2013, pp. 267-268).

In commodifying Amy through the series, Rand and Marybeth set impossible standards for her in accordance with prevailing ideals of American girlhood, continuing to parent her through passive-aggressive means, resulting in Amy having to constantly perform the role of Amazing Amy, thereby engaging in a masquerade to satisfy her parents' (and society's) expectations of her. Therefore, Amazing Amy was a gender performance of the perfect/ideal girlhood as stipulated by her parents and prevailing gender norms and a masquerade where Amy hid her true self from her parents and from herself. Her parents' unrealistic expectations led to the development of Amy's staunch belief in the importance of creating new identities, from Amazing Amy to Cool Amy, and Diary Amy (Diary Amy is discussed in Section 4.4 of this chapter). As the constant implicit message was that Actual/Real Amy's girlhood and femininity were undesirable by her parents' and society's standards, Amy relied on her ability to create new identities for herself to seek validation from her audience. Amazing Amy was the result of this need for validation. Her parents' rejection of Actual/Real Amy at this young age caused Amy significant childhood trauma and defined her relationships, romantic and otherwise.

Her third major persona is Diary Amy. Although another elaborate masquerade, this was specifically created as part of her plan to punish Nick and functioned as part of her strategy of embracing her victimhood, thus, Diary Amy is discussed in Sections 4.4 and 4.5 of this chapter. In addition, as Amy's use of masquerade to evade punishment is directly related to the persona of Diary Amy

and her return to Nick in Part Three of the novel, this aspect is also explored in Sections 4.4 and 4.5 of this chapter.

The following subsections explore how Amy employed gender performance and masquerade. The first four subsections discuss how Amy used the strategies of masquerade and gender performance to seduce Nick into becoming her romantic partner, how she maintained this masked performance (Cool Amy) during their courtship and in the early stages of their marriage. In the fifth and final subsection, I discuss how Amy, unable to sustain her mask as Cool Amy, reacted to the devolution of her marriage to Nick. Here, she engaged in gender performance in the hope that adhering to social norms of femininity might help her maintain some level of normalcy within her marriage with Nick in an attempt to avoid separation or divorce.

4.2.1   Cool Amy

Amy's tirade about the "Cool Girl" is a scathing indictment of social ideals of femininity (pp. 250-252). The Cool Girl ideal illustrates how women must engage in an elaborate gendered performance, enacting hegemonic femininity or a hyperfemininity to be accepted as a woman and successfully achieve the milestones women are expected to reach, such as marriage and motherhood. According to Amy, every woman must adhere to the Cool Girl ideal if they wish to attract a male romantic partner as this ideal of femininity had become the standard, and "[e]very girl was supposed to be this girl, and if you weren't, then there was something wrong with *you*" (p. 252). However, this ideal was extremely unrealistic, demanding and often contradictory. For example, the

Cool Girl was expected to have a large appetite for junk food and yet maintain a slim figure:

> Being the Cool Girl means I am a hot … woman who … jams hot dogs and hamburgers into her mouth like she's hosting the world's biggest culinary gang bang while somehow maintaining a size 2, because Cool Girls are above all hot (pp. 250-251)

The Cool Girl ideal was clearly created by men for men. To be the Cool Girl, a woman must not only be "hot, brilliant" and "funny" (with extra emphasis on physical beauty), but she must also enjoy her male partner's preferred activities and interests, many of which were stereotypically masculine, such as "football", "poker" and "video games" (pp. 250-251). The interests the Cool Girl was supposed to espouse was expected to change according to the interests of the man (p. 251). Essentially, a woman must become the female version of the man in whom she was interested ("he wants Cool Girl, who is basically the girl who likes every fucking thing he likes and doesn't ever complain") (p. 251). This was also reflected in her relationship with Nick where he expected her to do certain things, such as "[wax-strip her] pussy raw and [blow] him on request" to ensure that Nick was sexually satisfied (p. 253). When confronted with the idea that Amy did not enjoy either of these and did them only to please Nick, he was astonished and confused (p. 253). While this was mainly due to Amy's convincing masquerade as the Cool Girl for the entire duration of their courtship and the initial stages of their marriage, the Cool Girl ideal becoming the standard ensured that Nick naturally assumed that all women enjoyed the same things that he did (pp. 252, 253).

4.2.2   Becoming Cool Amy

Amy's stance on the Cool Girl ideal was constantly changing, based on how beneficial it could be to her. Throughout the novel, she oscillated between outright hatred and acceptance of the ideal. Initially, she was frustrated with the ideal as she (correctly) interpreted it as an unrealistic standard that unnecessarily limited women's autonomy and resulted in their denigration (pp. 250-251). She found this version of idealised femininity to be completely in men's favour and accurately recognised that women's feelings were never considered: "Cool Girls never get angry; they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner and let their men do whatever they want. *Go ahead, shit on me, I don't care. I'm the Cool Girl*" (p. 251). Ironically, her intense dislike of the ideal did not make her sympathetic towards the women who were forced to enact this role. Instead, her disgust of Cool Girl made her sympathetic only of the men who were fooled by the women enacting this role (p. 251). She wanted to "sit these men down and calmly" explain to the "poor [guys]" that they were not "*dating a woman*" but that they were "*dating a woman who has watched too many movies written by socially awkward men who'd like to believe that this kind of woman exists and might kiss them*" (p. 251).

Shockingly, instead of sympathising or empathising with the women who were forced into this masquerade, she derided them for engaging in it just to attract men's attention: "And the Cool Girls are even more pathetic [than men]: They're not even pretending to be the woman they want to be, they're pretending to be the woman a man wants them to be" (p. 251). Amy waited for the "*Cool*

Guy" ideal to take hold to provide some equality between the sexes, hoping that the "pendulum" would "swing the other way" (p. 251). However, she angrily noted that "it never happened" and that instead, "women across the nation colluded in our degradation", making the Cool Girl the standard, leading to men having the expectation that every woman was a Cool Girl and that if she did not adhere to this norm, then "something was wrong with [her]" (pp. 251-252). Thus, while Amy recognised that this idealised femininity was the result of unrealistic male expectations of women, she still blamed other women (who were also victims) for perpetuating it. Ironically, despite her hatred of the ideal, she constantly engaged in performing the Cool Girl role and its many variations with men in whom she had a romantic interest (pp. 310-311, 266). Amy's desire to gain acceptance for herself drove her to enact hegemonic femininity to compete with other women for male attention, masking her true self with a masquerade of womanliness in the process (Riviere, 1929).

When she met Nick, she again succumbed to the temptation of being the Cool Girl (Flynn, p. 252). She attributed this to her competitive streak: "For someone like me, who likes to win, it's tempting to want to be the girl every guy wants" (p. 252). She enjoyed identifying the traits Nick preferred in his partner and playing the role to perfection, treating it as if it were a game (pp. 252, 253). Despite her initial disgust of the Cool Girl, she continued this masquerade because, with Nick, she was happy for the first time in her life (pp. 252, 253). She was "probably happier for those few years – pretending to be someone else – than [she] ever [had] been before or after" (p. 253).

To Amy, constantly engaging in masquerade by creating and changing personalities to suit her audience was the norm (pp. 252, 250). Anticipating

criticism of her use of personas, she provided justifications for changing her personality to suit the occasion:

> I was pretending, the way I often did, pretending to have a personality. I can't help it, it's what I've always done: The way some women change fashion regularly, I change personalities. What persona feels good, what's coveted, what's *au courant*?
>
> (p. 250)

Her readiness to engage in masquerade for acceptance indicates her recognition of her unlikability. Due to her insecurities, caused by her parents' passive-aggressive parenting, this masquerade was the only way she believed she could gain acceptance. Thus, despite her claiming that she accepted some of the blame for the devolution of her marriage, this is not true as she believed this masquerade to be essential to her existence and relied on it for praise and validation (to maintain her image of herself as Amazing Amy) (p. 252). Therefore, like her Amazing Amy masquerade, the Cool Amy masquerade hid her true self from romantic partners to mask her unlikability and from herself to maintain her illusions of her superiority.

4.2.3   Cool Amy Exposed

While Amy maintained that she accepted a small part of the blame for their marital issues as she recognised the damage her Cool Amy masquerade had done, she reserved most of her disappointment and fury for Nick for not recognising that this had been a pretence (pp. 252, 253). She silently blamed him for not realising that Actual/Real Amy and Cool Amy were not the same: "It

wasn't *me*, Nick! I thought you knew. I thought it was a bit of a game. I thought we had a wink-wink, *don't ask, don't tell* thing going" (p. 253). When she had to eventually stop the pretence of the Cool Girl as it was "unsustainable", she found that Nick had been pretending too: "It turned out he couldn't sustain his side either: the witty banter, the clever games, the romance, and the wooing. It all started collapsing on itself" (p. 253). After marriage, when both Amy and Nick had dropped their performances, Nick was surprised and confused by Actual/Real Amy and Amy found herself increasingly angered by Nick's reactions to her true self:

> I hated Nick for being surprised when I became me. I hated him for not knowing it had to end. For truly believing he had married this creature, this figment of the imagination of a million masturbatory men, semen-fingered and self-satisfied. He truly seemed astonished when I asked him to *listen* to me. He couldn't believe I didn't love wax-stripping my pussy raw and blowing him on request. That I *did* mind when he didn't show up for drinks with my friends (p. 253)

Once her relationship with Nick was revealed to have been based almost entirely on lies, and now that the Cool Girl ideal no longer served her purposes, Amy had a renewed hatred of the ideal and began to despise the men who believed in it. This also extended to Nick, and all her frustrations and anger at being misunderstood was directed solely at him. She also internally blamed him for decimating her happiness by not recognising the masquerade and for not accepting Actual/Real Amy, all of which served to cement her ever-increasing hatred towards him ("Can you imagine, finally showing your true self to your

spouse, your soul mate, and having him *not like you*? So that's how the hating first began.") (p. 254). Through his rejection of her true self, Amy held Nick responsible for destroying Actual/Real Amy:

> Nick … destroyed and rejected the real me a piece at a time –
> … you overthink things, you analyze too much, you're no fun anymore, you make me feel useless, Amy, you make me feel bad, Amy. He took away chunks of me with blasé swipes: my independence, my pride, my esteem. I gave, and he took and took. He Giving Treed me out of existence. (p. 268)

Her competitive streak intensified her hatred of Nick as she interpreted his rejection of Actual/Real Amy as losing (pp. 253, 254). The realisation that the Cool Girl ideal and masquerade had destroyed their marriage arrived too late as Amy was now trapped in a marriage riddled with misunderstandings, and both Amy and Nick vented their frustrations by emotionally abusing each other. Thus, even before Nick committed the ultimate act of betrayal through infidelity (meaning he 'won' and she 'lost'), their marriage had been destroyed (p. 263).

A part of Amy recognised that the Cool Girl ideal and men's firm belief in hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity to be the standard were also to blame (p. 267). Thus, although the ideal and patriarchy set her in competition with other women for men's attention and this perfectly aligned with her competitive streak, her awareness of social norms allowed her to recognise that women were forced to engage in this masquerade of womanliness (hegemonic femininity), while men were free to manipulate this ideal to their advantage, readily abandoning one woman after another as they tired of performing the charade

(Riviere, 1929). This further angered her as she realised that Nick would never have to reconcile with the consequences of his actions and would continue to hurt more women:

> I'd picture him with [Andie, Nick's mistress], in her stripper thong, letting him degrade her because she was pretending to be Cool Girl … *I'm married to a man who will always choose that, and when he gets bored with this dumb twat, he'll just find another girl …, and he'll never have to do anything hard in his life* (Flynn, 2013, p. 267)

4.2.4   Cool Amy's Hypocrisy

Despite Amy's active role in destroying their marriage, she refused to accept responsibility and felt herself to be the sole victim (pp. 268, 252-254). In her self-victimisation, Amy refused to acknowledge her own sociopathic behaviour, instead choosing to attribute her contribution to the destruction of her marriage as a "logical consequence of her gender" (Burke, 2018, p. 78). She despised the Cool Girl ideal for the restrictions it placed on women by idealising an unrealistic version of femininity which also characterised Amy's version of femininity as a pariah femininity (Burke, 2018, p. 78). Despite this awareness, she was quick to judge other women for their choice to use a "mask of womanliness" (Riviere, 1929, p. 303) to attract male attention and avoid retribution from men just as she did, using gendered slurs such as "slut" (Flynn, 2013, pp. 278, 299, 367, 369), "whore" (p. 268), "bitch" (pp. 263), "twat" (pp. 267, 254) and "cunt" (2013, p. 253). Thus, while she claimed to oppose feminine

ideals for their damaging effects upon women, she subscribed to these ideals when they suited her purposes, illustrating her ability to successfully manipulate them. However, Amy was either "unwilling or unable to truly transcend the whore-virgin complex governing the experiences of these women [that she derided]", resulting in hypocritical behaviour (Burke, 2018, p. 78).

This hypocrisy is likely the result of her frustration at the restrictive nature of gender norms combined with her "disappointment at her own inability to internalise them" (Burke, 2018, p. 78). Amy was ultimately unsuccessful in adhering to these norms and "[offsetting] her sociopathic antagonism [had] only served to make her more cynical" (Burke, 2018, p. 78). This is evident in Amy's reaction to Nick's rejection of Actual/Real Amy. While she was happy for the first time when she was masquerading as Cool Amy, her failure to maintain this façade disappointed her ("I tried so hard to be easy. But it was unsustainable.") (Flynn, 2013, pp. 252–253). However, once she realised that Nick would not accept Actual/Real Amy and preferred Cool Amy, her hatred of Nick began: "Committing to Nick, feeling safe with Nick, being happy with Nick, made me realize that there was a Real Amy in there, and she was so much better, more interesting and complicated and challenging, than Cool Amy" (p. 254). Faced with the rejection of Actual/Real Amy and being unwilling to accept any blame or recognise the flaws of her personality that had contributed to pushing Nick away, she reacted with cynicism and hatred directed at Nick to protect herself.

As Burke notes, "[m]uch of [Amy's] frustration hinges on a kind of paradoxical resentment" where "she possesses enough self-awareness to question other people's conformity to gender and class norms", however, "much of her contempt for these norms seems to stem from the disappointment at her

own inability to internalise them" (Burke, 2018, p. 78). Due to her competitiveness and incessant need to 'win', she interpreted her inability to internalise and conform to gender norms as failure on her part, leading to self-hatred. However, due to her narcissism, instead of placing the blame on the patriarchy that forced women into following these rules, she directed her hatred towards other women who were also victims of the patriarchy. In projecting her self-hatred onto other women, she was attempting to elevate herself above them and destroy her insecurities about herself, but this only resulted in her inability to maintain healthy relationships.

4.2.5   *No Longer Cool Amy*

Despite Amy's mention of her attempts to mend the rift between herself and Nick, she failed to describe these efforts in detail, only mentioning them in passing while discussing Nick's infidelity and his many failings as a husband. Thus, there is limited information to rely on, and considering Amy's unreliability as a narrator and lack of corroboration of these attempts from Nick, it is difficult to gauge whether she made any attempts to mend their rift at all. Nevertheless, her comments are discussed in this subsection as part of her strategy of using masquerade and gender performance in an attempt to maintain normalcy within her marriage, as she hoped that this strategy would help repair her "disheveled" home (Flynn, 2013, p. 279).

While Amy was consumed by rage due to Nick's rejection of Actual/Real Amy, she was nostalgic for the happiness she had felt during their courtship and attempted to recapture these moments:

I wanted him back so badly that I was willing to re-create [a

past romantic] moment. I was willing to pretend to be someone

else again. I remember thinking: *We can still find a way to*

make this work. Faith! … I still believed he'd love me again

somehow, love me that intense, thick way he did, the way that

made everything good. Faith! (Flynn, p. 262)

Claiming to have been willing to mend the rift between them, she was willing to make some compromises, namely engaging in some level of gender performance by enacting the type of hyperfemininity (hegemonic femininity) Nick expected in Amy to save their marriage. This led to her following Nick to surprise him and recreate this moment. Ironically, it is during this attempt to reconnect that she learned of his extra-marital affair with Andie, where Amy witnessed Nick being intimate with Andie in the way that Amy had hoped he would be with her: "I followed them, and suddenly, he pressed her up against a tree – *in the middle of town* – and kissed her" (p. 262). This incident enraged her, and realising that she been rejected by Nick yet again while she had wanted to rekindle their romance, effectively making her the 'loser', she began to devise her plan of revenge (p. 263). Thus, despite Amy's attempts, her strategies of masquerade and gender performance were ultimately unsuccessful in maintaining a successful marriage as she was unable to sustain the façade for an extended period.

While these strategies had been unsuccessful in salvaging their relationship, Amy utilised the strategy of gender performance to maintain a semblance of normalcy within her marriage to deceive Nick into believing that she would remain passive despite their unhappy marriage. This was an important

part of her strategy of recognising her victimhood as, following her discovery of Nick's extra-marital affair, she had set in motion her plan for revenge that made her the adored "Dead Girl" while Nick was to be the despised husband (p. 263). Thus, Amy used masquerade and gender performance to engage in a type of hyperfemininity (hegemonic femininity) that was different from her own expression of femininity (a pariah femininity) to conceal her knowledge of Nick's infidelity and her anger from Nick to ensure the success of her plan for revenge. While she engaged in gender performance with Nick, enacting a type of femininity he preferred but not enacting one that was drastically different from her own authentic one that would make him suspicious of her change of behaviour and motivations, she also engaged in masquerade and gender performance of hyperfemininity during her interactions with others in the town.

These peculiar yet specific performances had a purpose: to convince everyone else that she had been the 'perfect' wife, and this was meant to be used later to vilify Nick. This blend of masquerade and gender performance can be interpreted as Diary Amy come to life, as she enacted her fictitious Diary Amy persona as part of her plan for revenge (discussed in Section 4.4.). Since her gender performance and masquerade during the attempt to enact her plan for revenge are part of her Diary Amy persona (thus, a part of her strategy of recognising her victimhood), these are discussed in Section 4.4 of this chapter.

4.3   Inversion of Normative Feminine and Masculine Behaviour

While this is the third strategy in the theoretical framework, it is important to note that Amy did not follow the five strategies listed within the theoretical

framework in a linear fashion and used one or more strategies at one time throughout her marriage, depending on the context and her motivations. This is evident in her combined use of the strategies of masquerade and gender performance in conjunction with the inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour in their marriage after the revelation of both of their masquerades. Amy engaged in inversions of normative feminine and masculine behaviour to rekindle their romance in their first two years of marriage, alongside gender performance. However, her expression of her true femininity (following the revelation of Actual/Real Amy), made Nick feel emasculated and forced into exhibiting a subordinated masculinity as Amy exhibited traits characteristic of hegemonic masculinity (therefore, a pariah femininity). Amy and Nick's expressions of femininities and masculinities, their inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviours and the impact of these on their marriage are discussed in this section.

This section identifies and examines the types of femininities and masculinities exhibited by the protagonists, Amy and Nick, to understand which types are present in domestic noir. It also analyses how Amy and Nick engage in subverting conventional stereotypes of feminine and masculine behaviour in their relationship with each other and in the process of Amy's attempts to regain her agency. The first two subsections include a discussion of two of the most contentious aspects of their relationship: the annual treasure hunt conducted on their anniversary and Amy's financial support of Nick. These two aspects provide insight into the types of femininities and masculinities both Amy and Nick exhibit, indicating the causes of marital strife based on social pressures faced by the characters to enact a certain type of femininity and masculinity

(hyperfemininity/ hegemonic femininity for Amy and hypermasculinity/ hegemonic masculinity for Nick). Amy also used the inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour as a strategy to maintain some sense of normalcy in her marriage, which is primarily done using the treasure hunts. Throughout these subsections, the effects of this subversion of gender roles on the characters is explored.

Nick's complex expressions of masculinity (with Amy and with Andie Hardy) are explored in this section and in Section 4.4.4. Andie Hardy's expressions of femininity are explored in Section 4.4.4 of this chapter.

4.3.1   Emasculation through Romantic Gestures

The romantic treasure hunt on their wedding anniversary was a point of contention. The tradition was borrowed from Amy's parents, Rand and Marybeth Elliott, with Rand setting up a treasure hunt for Marybeth on their wedding anniversary every year to celebrate their love and each other (Flynn, 2013, p. 20). In their relationship, Amy took the initiative, designing clues that focused on moments that she deemed special in their relationship and places that were of special significance to her (pp. 20-22, 73). Unlike for her parents, Amy's treasure hunts only alienated her and Nick from each other as Nick failed to guess most of the clues, leading to Amy's disappointment and anger (pp. 20-22). Despite Nick's inability to remember intricate details from their relationship and Amy's life, she continued this tradition, hoping that it would become as romantic a gesture as it was in her parents' marriage (pp. 20-22). Thus, in their five years of marriage, Amy organised a treasure hunt every year. However, only the first

four years' treasure hunts were organised in the hopes that it would strengthen their relationship; in the fifth year, where the novel begins, Amy's treasure hunt was exclusively designed to incriminate Nick in her 'murder' (pp. 73, 248, 286).

While Amy insisted that she was invested in organising the annual treasure hunt as her grand romantic gesture to Nick ("The clues are all about us, about the past year together"), due to his fragile masculinity, he was convinced that this was another attempt to emasculate him, pointing to the reversal of the "gender roles" as an indicator of this (pp. 45, 73, 20). His dislike of the treasure hunt and the concept of the grand romantic gesture can be traced to his childhood and his parents' marriage, where his father was a misogynist and verbally and emotionally abused Nick's mother and his sister, Margo, pointing out that his own father was never romantic towards his mother (pp. 20, 66-68, 49). The insinuation was that, having never witnessed his father making romantic gestures towards his mother influenced Nick's own attitudes towards romance, and, consequently, he tended to view such gestures as excessive (pp. 20, 288):

> My wife loved games, mostly mind games, but also actual games of amusement, and for our anniversary she always set up an elaborate treasure hunt …. It was what her dad always did for her mom on their anniversary, and don't think I don't see the gender roles here, that I don't get the hint. But I did not grow up in Amy's household, I grew up in mine, and the last present I remember my dad giving my mom was an iron, set on the kitchen counter, no wrapping paper. (p. 20)

Even when questioned by others about romantic gestures he had made for his wife, Nick's response was that he was "not a romantic-movie kind of guy" (p. 237). He also attributed his lack of romance to Amy's unfair treatment of him (pp. 20, 66-68, 237, 166, 136, 151). When their marital conflicts began, by their own admissions, both had shed the masquerades they had used with each other during their courtship and in the first two years of their marriage (pp. 237, 253). However, upon the end of the façades, neither could reconcile with their spouse's true self, leading to the devolution of their marriage. While Nick insisted that Amy had constantly disapproved of him, he claimed that he had been forced to try to appease her, but was unsuccessful as she was mostly unresponsive to his efforts, leading to both becoming emotionally abusive with each other (pp. 166, 237):

> For two years I tried [to please Amy] as my old wife slipped away, and I tried so hard – no anger, no arguments, the constant kowtowing, the capitulation, the sitcom-husband version of me … [but] each attempt, was met with a rolled eye or a sad little sigh. A *you just don't get it* sigh.
>
> By the time we left for Missouri, I was just pissed. I was ashamed of the memory of me – the scuttling, scraping, hunchbacked toadie of a man I'd turned into. So I wasn't romantic; I wasn't even nice. (p. 237)

Amy's recollection of their relationship following the revelation of their true personalities was slightly different (pp. 253-254), where she blamed Nick for being emotionally abusive towards her as he did not accept her true self

(Actual/Real Amy), claiming that he always complained that she made him feel inadequate, adding unflattering comments about her personality: "*you're too serious, Amy, you're too uptight, Amy, you overthink things, you analyze too much, you're no fun anymore*" (p. 268). However, both heir narrations of what occurred in the early stages of their marriage have only one factor in common: Amy revealing her true personality. While Amy described revealing her true self as being an inevitable part of their marriage ("I hated Nick for being surprised when I became me") (p. 253), Nick described it as his "old wife slip[ping] away" (p. 237), as if she had "literally shed herself, a pile of skin and soul on the floor, and out stepped this new, brittle, bitter Amy", calling it "an awful fairy-tale reverse transformation" (p. 55). It is within this context that their relationship soured, and consequently, his reactions to the reversal of the gender roles and receiving financial support (discussed in Section 4.3.2) from Amy intensified, leading to feelings of emasculation.

On their fifth wedding anniversary, with his intense hatred of Amy, he attributed her insistence on having the treasure hunt to her love of "mind games" for her own "amusement", suggesting that this was another of her attempts to emasculate him (p. 20). While Nick was staunchly against the treasure hunts, his primary concern was that Amy took on the male/masculine role (according to the roles played by her parents), and he took issue with being 'relegated' to the female/feminine role, which he interpreted as an active effort by Amy to further emotionally abuse him (p. 20). The fact that he failed to guess most of the answers to the clues every year was immaterial to him; it only mattered that he was playing the role of the woman in this scenario, which negatively affected him as he subscribed to toxic masculinity (pp. 22, 20). Thus, he was convinced

that Amy attempted to emasculate him: "No matter how many clues I solved, I'd be faced with some Amy trivia to unman me" (p. 151). To Nick, Amy emasculated him by enacting hegemonic masculinity herself while forcing him to enact a subordinated masculinity that was similar to femininity or a male femininity (According to Schippers' theory, men who engage in behaviours that are typically coded as feminine are exhibiting a male femininity so that the behaviour does not threaten hegemonic masculinity.).

In addition, he believed that these treasure hunts were Amy's way of attracting more attention to herself as the clues often focused on Amy's preferences and references to her childhood: "These treasure hunts had always amounted to a single question: Who is Amy? (What is my wife thinking? What was important to her this past year? What moments made her happiest? Amy, Amy, Amy, let's think about Amy.)" (p. 82). This is a valid claim, as Amy had a tendency to want to be the centre of attention, showing displeasure when someone else was shown preference over her (pp. 324-325). One of her clues in the fifth anniversary treasure hunt suggested that Amy had previously consciously included clues that Nick may have found hard to recall:

> It may help that I decided to not make this year's treasure hunt an excruciating forced march through my arcane personal memories. … I finally get it, what you've said year after year, that this treasure hunt should be a time to celebrate us, not a test about whether you remember everything I think or say throughout the year (p. 123)

This indicates that the complicated clues had been a conscious choice in the second, third and fourth years of their marriage, designed specifically to humiliate Nick for not paying enough attention to her and to emasculate him as punishment as she knew the importance he placed upon upholding traditional ideals of masculinity.

While he claimed that he had been "raised to listen" (p. 155), he consistently failed to pay attention to things Amy said (p. 22). Unfortunately for Nick, Amy appeared to have been aware of how he failed to listen to her when she talked about herself, designing complex clues about herself knowing that Nick would fail to guess the answer correctly, strongly suggesting that these continued treasure hunts were her way of subtly punishing him, knowing that his upbringing (due to his father) would lead to feelings of emasculation. While this may be true of Amy in their past two to three years as a married couple, it is unlikely that she had these same intentions in the first year of their marriage when she was still engaged in the Cool Amy masquerade. Then, she used the treasure hunt as a way to celebrate their love, and herself (with clues only about herself), hoping to establish a romantic tradition. In their first treasure hunt, her despair at Nick not recognising a romantic moment in their relationship indicates that she was genuinely attempting to recapture their past special moments: "'The statue wasn't the point. The place was the point. The moment. I just thought it was special.'" (p. 21).

As Amy had begun to shed her Cool Amy persona in the second year of their marriage and had completely shed it by the third year, with Nick having noticed this transformation and growing unhappy with each year, Amy's use of the treasure hunt in the second, third and fourth years was almost exclusively to

punish him for rejecting her true self following her shedding of the Cool Amy persona (pp. 54-55). Thus, Nick's suspicion that her sole intention with the treasure hunts was to emasculate him was correct regarding the treasure hunts in most of their years of marriage. Due to his upbringing with a father who subscribed to toxic masculinity and Nick's resultant fragile masculinity, Nick always perceived the treasure hunt, with its inverted feminine and masculine roles, as emasculating. While it is widely accepted in social norms that grand romantic gestures be conducted by the man in heterosexual relationships, Nick's lack of interest in such gestures and his frequent reiteration of being "unman[ned]" by Amy means that he despised this inversion (p. 151). Thus, despite Amy's desire to establish a romantic tradition to strengthen their relationship, her attempt was unsuccessful as Nick secretly struggled with fragile masculinity and believed in the clear division of gender roles within heterosexual relationships.

4.3.2   *Emasculation through Financial Support*

Amy's parents bought them their first house, "[a] Brookyln brownstone" "right on the Promenade, with the big wide-screen view of Manhattan" (p. 44). This was yet another situation in which Amy or her family had financially supported Nick (p. 44). Although this seemed not to have bothered him while living in New York, upon returning home to Missouri to care for his ailing mother following the loss of his position as a writer for a magazine, Nick's father made him feel emasculated for seeking financial support from Amy (pp. 4-5, 8). It is within this context that Nick had to borrow from the last of Amy's trust fund

to begin his joint business with his sister Margo, a bar named The Bar (pp. 8, 9). He despised having to borrow money from Amy and was adamant that he would repay the loan, later believing that this been a mistake, undoubtedly influenced by his father's sexist ideas of male superiority and female inferiority:

> We borrowed money from Amy to [open a bar]. I swore I would pay her back, with interest. I would not be a man who borrowed from his wife – I could feel my dad twisting his very lips at the idea. *Well, there are all kinds of men*, his most damning phrase, the second half left unsaid, *and you are the wrong kind*. (p. 8)

His fears of inviting his father's disapproving comments and the harmful ideas about masculinity that his father had ingrained in him negatively affected Nick, resulting in his fragile masculinity. Thus, he was ashamed of having been forced to borrow money from his wife as providing financial support (the role of the provider) is typically coded as being masculine (hegemonic masculinity) while receiving financial support is coded as a feminine act (Osborne, 2017). According to these gender norms, Nick was again 'relegated' to the feminine role while Amy was in the masculine (and therefore dominant) position. Here too, Amy was enacting hegemonic masculinity, thereby challenging Nick's masculinity and the patriarchy, making her expression of femininity a pariah femininity. Meanwhile, Nick's expression of masculinity was that of subordinated masculinity, and at times enacting a male femininity due to his financial dependence on his wife. The subversion of the gender roles bruised Nick's ego by emasculating him, making him more resentful towards Amy.

It is likely that this situation affected how Nick perceived any of Amy's acts that subsequently put him in the feminine/woman's position while Amy was in the masculine/man's position, as is evident with the treasure hunt. In addition, it pained him to admit that Amy was, technically, the rightful owner of his bar, noting that he had to be careful when asking for a divorce from her as she might claim ownership of it out of spite (Flynn, 2013, pp. 170, 384). This was a fate he could not tolerate as the bar had special meaning for him. To Nick, this bar was the clubhouse that he and Margo had never had as children and it gave him a new sense of purpose after his termination from his writer position as if he was of no value: "[the bar is] a reminder that I am, after all, an adult, a grown man, a useful human being, even though I lost the career that made me all these things" (pp. 18, 8).

While these are valid justifications for purchasing the bar and attempting to keep it in his possession, the bar may have had another purpose: to establish his masculinity and prove to himself and others of his hegemonic masculinity, thereby allowing him to stem the anxiety from his fragile masculinity. Nick's admission that Amy made him constantly feel emasculated meant that he would have sought measures to remedy this, and the bar provided this. A bar is considered a stereotypically masculine establishment, and spending time at bars and pubs and imbibing alcohol are generally perceived as being a masculine/alpha male activity, thus an expression of hegemonic masculinity (Kimmel, 2008; Osborne, 2017). This is also insinuated by Nick's defence team when discussing how Nick should present his occupation as the owner and proprietor of a local bar: "'Mention … that you own the bar with your sister –

always mention your sister when you mention the bar. If you own a bar on your own, you're a player'" (Flynn, 2013, p. 354).

Amy's knowledge of Nick's need to be recognised as being traditionally masculine allowed her to plan the fifth year's treasure hunt to maximise his humiliation. Many of the clues in the treasure hunt were references to their many inside jokes. In one of them, Amy was found to be mocking Nick's expression of masculinity. Nick noted that Amy was constantly amused by Nick's non-conformance to traditional ideals of masculinity, and, in recounting one of their inside jokes, he mentioned that Amy was entertained by his lack of knowledge about traditionally masculine domains:

> The furnace – another inside joke from Amy! She'd always proclaimed amazement at how little I understood the things men are supposed to understand. During our search, I'd even glanced at my dad's old furnace, with its pipes and wires and spigots, and backed away, intimidated. (p. 384)

While at the beginning of their relationship, Amy found Nick's expression of masculinity with its non-conformance to hegemonic masculinity amusing but not in any way emasculating, following his rejection of Actual/Real Amy, she weaponised this knowledge to make him feel even more insecure in his manhood. Nick's insecurity in his own masculinity made Amy's emotional abuse easier (as punishment for rejecting Actual/Real Amy) and his continued attempts to assert his masculinity by enacting hegemonic masculinity while being submissive to Amy's expression of female masculinity in the form of hegemonic masculinity (a pariah femininity) caused numerous conflicts within

their marriage. To battle these feelings of emasculation and stem the anxieties arising out of his fragile masculinity, Nick engaged in an extra-marital affair with Andie Hardy, with whom he felt more masculine and dominant. Andie was Nick's twenty-three-year-old student at the community college at which he taught a course, and his age, his role as an authority figure and him being far more sexually experienced than Andie put him at a marked advantage, creating an unequal power dynamic. Essentially, the affair was an expression of hegemonic masculinity to combat his emasculation by Amy (Jeffers, 2015; Osborne, 2017). In addition, considering the significant gaps between their ages and life experience, Nick's initiation of a sexual relationship with Andie can be considered a predatory act as well.

4.4   Recognising Victimhood

This is the fourth strategy used by Amy. Upon learning of Nick's infidelity, Amy realised that she had become the kind of woman that she had never thought she would be: "I had a new persona, not of my choosing. I was Average Dumb Woman Married to Average Shitty Man. He had single-handedly de-amazed Amazing Amy" (pp. 262-263). Combined with Nick's emotional abuse, she felt that she had two options available, neither of which she preferred: "I won't divorce him because that's exactly what he'd like. And I won't forgive him because I don't feel like *turning the other cheek*. … The bad guy wins? Fuck him." (pp. 263-264). Thus, she decided to frame Nick for her murder, as she felt he deserved serious punishment because he had to be "taught a lesson" (p. 264). It is then that she crafted her "*Fuck Nick Dunne*" plan, creating the Diary Amy

persona in the process (pp. 266-267). Thus, while refusing to accept the role of victim and actively denying it, Amy created a persona for herself of a seemingly helpless woman to exact her revenge upon Nick for his transgressions against her.

This section discusses how Amy recognised her own victimhood and what this entailed. Thus, this section includes an analysis of how Amy's use of this strategy was a manipulation of patriarchal ideals of femininity, an exploration of how she began the process of shedding her role of victim to regain agency, a discussion of how women's victimhood is portrayed in the novel and an examination of the types of femininities and masculinities exhibited by Amy and Andie Hardy (Nick's mistress). As the elaborate masquerade of Diary Amy is the direct result of Amy's recognition of her victimhood (in her plan to punish Nick), the first three sub-sections analyse this persona and examines how Amy manipulated both social and media narratives of victimhood (which in turn are informed by patriarchal gender norms) to craft this persona. The fourth subsection delves into how the dichotomy of 'the whore' and 'the virgin' present in the true crime narratives (and in society) affects both Amy and Andie. In all four subsections, I attempt to identify and examine the types of femininities and masculinities exhibited by Amy and whether she violates gender norms, especially within the context of the true crime narrative within which the novel operates. The fourth subsection also includes an examination of Andie's expression of femininities and masculinities as she is a significant character in the context of the true crime narrative.

4.4.1   Diary Amy

Diary Amy is perhaps Amy's most convincing and successful masquerade in *Gone Girl* and is an example of her performative victimhood. The protagonist of a series of untruthful diary entries made by Amy where she portrayed herself as an innocent woman who gradually began to fear her increasingly violent husband (Nick), the persona of Diary Amy was a significant part of Amy's plan to seek revenge.(p. 266) Diary Amy was a cleverly crafted character that was created by co-opting both social and media narratives of female victimhood (Jeffers, 2015; Burke, 2018; Miller, 2018). Devised as a strategy to implicate Nick in her subsequent suspicious disappearance and possible death, she manipulated the tragic 'abused wife narrative' to achieve this end (Jeffers, 2015; Burke, 2018). In doing so, Amy forcibly occupied space inhabited by legitimate female victims of men, such as Nick's sister Margo and his mother, who had both been victims of Nick's father's abuse for much of their lives (Burke, 2018, pp. 75–76). By manipulating female victimhood narratives in her plan for revenge, Amy also demonstrated her in-depth awareness of gender relations and stereotypes, allowing her to utilise 'loopholes' to convincingly portray herself as the 'perfect victim' while simultaneously portraying Nick as the villain.

To ensure that Amy was perceived as "the hero, flawless and adored" in this new story that she had created for herself, she had to shed Actual/Real Amy and create the gullible and innocent persona of Diary Amy (Flynn, 2013, p. 263). However, with her self-awareness and knowledge of gender norms, Amy knew that her true personality would not attract the sympathy and attention that she required for her plan to succeed. Thus, despite her derision for women like Diary

Amy, she had to engage in this masquerade and her media-savviness and social awareness made her adept at recognising the power of the meek, accommodating and devoted wife, the type of femininity espoused by patriarchal gender norms. While she correctly recognised that gender norms force women to play this role to achieve the milestones of marriage and motherhood, leading to her constant derision of the norms and the women who embodied these, she noted that society would perceive the persona of Diary Amy more favourably than Actual/Real Amy, despite her belief of Actual/Real Amy's clear superiority over other women (society favoured hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity over Amy's pariah femininity). Thus, her Diary Amy persona was designed to be found endearing and tragic by its readers, specifically targeting law enforcement officers who, upon reading her entries, would be even more convinced of Nick's involvement in her disappearance and 'death' (pp. 266, 267).

Diary Amy was the most powerful tool at Amy's disposal and she employed it to seek retribution from Nick, and upon her return in Part Three, she used Diary Amy as a measure to threaten Nick and control his behaviour, therefore, both retribution and control were the drivers of her violence. As discussed in Section 4.2 of this chapter, Amy's childhood trauma played a significant role in the development of her vengeful personality, having taught her that her true self was undesirable and had to be masked for her to receive acceptance. When this situation re-emerged in her relationship with Nick, she yet again relied on avoidant coping strategies that only resulted in miscommunication between her and Nick. It is within this context that Amy created Diary Amy.

4.4.2   Manipulation of Social and Media Narratives of Victimhood

Amy's manipulation of gender norms and social and media narratives of female victimhood is apparent in Diary Amy. Amy carefully crafted the Diary Amy persona to make her as endearing and sympathetic as possible to the intended audiences (the police and the public) (pp. 266, 267). She achieved this by manipulating gender norms where it is assumed that women who conform by engaging in the required hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity (i.e. seeking marriage and motherhood) are ideal women (pp. 266-267, 290-291). As women who conform to these norms are perceived more favourably than those who do not, injustices that happen to the former are perceived as being more tragic (pp. 263, 266-267, 290-291). This is particularly evident in the media, especially in true crime programmes (e.g., *Dateline, Nancy Grace*, *20/20* and *48 Hours*), where disappearances and murders of conventionally attractive White, middle-class, suburban women are consistently given more attention than similar crimes with victims who are women of colour (Stillman, 2007; Moody-Ramirez, Dorries and Blackwell, 2008; Liebler, 2010; Stein, 2012). This is especially significant, as Ellen Abbott, the media personality who propelled Amy's case to the national spotlight in the novel, was based on the television journalist Nancy Grace (host of *Nancy Grace*) (CNN, n.d.; Yahr, 2014).

News coverage of true crime stories and true crime programmes operate using gender and racial stereotypes, resulting in almost all of their episodes following the same pattern (Booth and Edds, 2004; Stillman, 2007; Moody-Ramirez, Dorries and Blackwell, 2008; Mastro *et al.*, 2009; Liebler, 2010; Stein, 2012). Informed by restrictive gender ideologies, true crime narratives are structured in such a way that it presents only one possible conclusion in terms of

cases of gendered violence: the irrefutable guilt of the husband (Booth and Edds, 2004; Jeffers, 2015). Thus, in terms of cases similar to the one depicted in *Gone Girl*, true crime narratives provide the conclusion at the start: the missing wife may have been murdered by her husband (Bolin, 2014; Jeffers, 2015). The formulaic nature of true crime narratives, with its familiar plots and predictable endings, makes these stories more palatable to the media as these stories have the power to attract and retain public attention: "The morning network shows and cable television have a need for a certain kind of tabloid story where the facts of the story are very simple and don't change very much" (Booth and Edds, 2004).

In Flynn's examination and deconstruction of "the fetishisation of female victimhood as a cultural phenomenon" within her novels, she brings the reader's attention to the 'missing wife, guilty husband' narrative (Jeffers, 2015; Burke, 2018, p. 71). These true crime narratives are also present within *Gone Girl*, and Nick was acutely aware of the role he had been given and how he had to act from that point onwards to prove his innocence (Flynn, 2013; Jeffers, 2015; Burke, 2018). During his first interview with the police after Amy's disappearance, Nick became very aware of the automatic assumption of his guilt, thinking, "It's always the husband. Everyone knows it's always the husband, so why can't they just say it: *We suspect you because you are the husband, and it's always the husband. Just watch* Dateline." (Flynn, 2013, p. 48). With the knowledge that he was the first suspect, he made a conscious effort to appear as innocent as possible, attempting to behave in a manner he believed an innocent man would (pp. 26, 48, 49, 65, 82, 228). He was even aware of how certain aspects of his life and behaviour will be considered as proof of his guilt, both in the eyes of the

law enforcement officers and in the court of public opinion, such as his affair with his student, Andie: "Now is the part where I have to tell you [the reader] I have a mistress and you stop liking me. If you liked me to begin with" (pp. 161, 207). In fact, Nick was so hyper-aware of the crime narratives that he was operating within, from the missing wife narrative to his automatic role as the perpetrator, that he called it "the "*Missing Wife game*!"" (pp. 47, 207). Therefore, the media plays a prominent role in packaging tragedies in simplistic forms that are based on cultural stereotypes of men and women (Mastro *et al.*, 2009; Lee, 2012; Jeffers, 2015).

Research indicates that these media portrayals affect the people directly involved in such investigations, such as spouses/partners, family, friends and law enforcement officers, as well as larger audiences in other communities (Mastro *et al.*, 2009; Conlin and Davie, 2015; Jeffers, 2015). True crime shows' tendency to provide these narratives in bite-sized and simplified forms, especially with similar repetitive themes of gendered violence, makes it easier for viewers to use their knowledge of these violent narratives to jump to conclusions (Booth and Edds, 2004; Mastro *et al.*, 2009; Jeffers, 2015). Amy took advantage of this assumption of the husband's guilt and the wife's innocence when crafting her diary entries, creating the fictitious persona of Diary Amy, a sweet and patient wife to an angry and dangerous Nick (Jeffers, 2015; Burke, 2018). She also exploited "gendered cultural signifiers", feminine tropes and stereotypes of femininity in her creation of Diary Amy, thus drawing a parallel between investigations of missing or dead women and her false 'abused wife and possible murder victim' narrative (Burke, 2018, p. 73). This connection is meant to resonate with the readers of her diary, reminding them of familiar stories of

abused wives and abusive husbands, thereby ensuring lesser scrutiny of Diary Amy and severe punishment for Nick (Burke, 2018, p. 75). Through her careful exploitation of these aspects, Amy ensured that Diary Amy was a character that her audience would sympathise, effectively vilifying Nick, thereby using the missing wife narrative to lend authenticity to Diary Amy, painting herself as the victim to punish others (Flynn, 2013, pp. 266, 267; Jeffers, 2015).

By exploiting this narrative of abused women, Amy appropriated "a discursive space reserved for victims of male violence" (Burke, 2018, p. 75). Amy's manipulation of victim narratives was an attempt to profit from the 'benefits' of victimhood while "maintaining narrative dominance" (Burke, 2018, p. 76). Accordingly, Amy created what she viewed as the 'perfect victim', bringing together aspects of victim narratives that she knew would have the most impact, making her case irresistible to the mass media (Jeffers, 2015; Burke, 2018). Motherhood was also a part of Amy's "performative victimhood" (Burke, 2018, p. 77), inspired by her neighbour Noelle, a mother of triplets, who represented the type of docile mindset that Amy despised (Flynn, 2013, pp. 290–291). Amy added in the pretence of a pregnancy for Diary Amy, knowing that this would provide additional motive for Nick, further suffering for her parents, allow her to be the "sweet missing pregnant lady", and guarantee her being featured on *Ellen Abbott*, a crucial goal if her case was to gain more momentum: "I knew the key to big-time coverage, round-the-clock, frantic, bloodlust never-ending *Ellen Abbott* coverage, would be the pregnancy" (Flynn, 2013, pp. 291, 290; Jeffers, 2015). Thus, Amy meticulously planned her false victim narrative based on what would appeal to the public, which signals the constructedness and pervasiveness of true crime narratives (Flynn, 2013, p. 47; Jeffers, 2015). Just as

Amy relied on the police and the public to assume Nick's guilt, Flynn relied on readers' prior knowledge of the conventions of the missing wife and their "true-crime media hyper-literacy" to drive suspense (Lee, 2012; Jeffers, 2015, p. 32).

4.4.3   Crafting Diary Amy

With her keen awareness of these social and media narratives, Amy crafted Diary Amy to be "likable" (Flynn, 2013, p. 266), knowing that this would lead to sympathetic treatment ("hero, flawless and adored") (p. 263), effectively vilifying Nick. Amy's manipulation of these narratives was intentional, as she made a conscious effort to make the right word and tone choices to endear her character to the police and the public:

> I hope you liked Diary Amy. She was meant to be likable. Meant for someone like you [the reader] to like her. She's *easy* to like. … I had to maintain an affable if somewhat naive persona, a woman who loved her husband and could see some of his flaws (otherwise she'd be too much of a sap) but was sincerely devoted to him – all the while leading the reader (in this case, the cops, I am so eager for them to find it) toward the conclusion that Nick was indeed planning to kill me (p. 266)

> I wrote her very carefully, Diary Amy. She is designed to appeal to the cops, to appeal to the public … They have to read this diary like it's some sort of Gothic tragedy. A wonderful, good-hearted woman – *whole life ahead of her, everything*

going for her, whatever else they say about women who die –

chooses the wrong mate and *pays the ultimate price*. They

have to like me. Her. (p. 267)

The media-savvy Amy knew that media personalities such as Ellen Abbott would find her fictional life story sensational, as Diary Amy represented the 'perfect victim', being a beautiful White suburban woman, a loving wife and an expectant mother, essentially enacting hegemonic femininity (Flynn, 2013; Jeffers, 2015). In fact, she needed Ellen Abbott's coverage of her disappearance for her plan to succeed, having carefully crafted every aspect to be palatable to the mass media:

Ellen Abbott is part of my plan too. The biggest cable crime-

news show in the country. … I love how protective and

maternal she gets about all the missing women on her show,

and how rabid-dog vicious she is once she seizes on a suspect,

usually the husband. (Flynn, 2013, p. 275)

With her in-depth knowledge of the conventions of the true crime narrative and female victimhood, Amy knew that if she were to behave like her Diary Amy persona in real life, that that would lend legitimacy to her performance, thus, Actual/Real Amy masqueraded as Diary Amy with her neighbour Noelle and others in their town (pp. 298, 290-291, 300). One of her primary targets was Noelle as she found the woman easy to manipulate (p. 290). Amy knew that Noelle was the type of woman that the public would be sympathetic to and would trust more than her potentially murderous husband, owing to the fact that Noelle conformed to gender norms (p. 290). Upon realising

that being pregnant would make her case irresistible to Ellen Abbott and would likely guarantee coverage of her story, Amy "[faked] a pregnancy" (pp. 290-291). Being shrewd and calculating, Amy recognised Noelle's weaknesses and exploited these to ensure that Noelle would be convinced by her Diary Amy masquerade. She recognised that Noelle, in her naïveté, would believe her lies about Nick and would prove to be a credible witness (pp. 290-291). Derisive of Noelle and what she represented (mainly her unquestioning conformity to gender norms and complacency in the roles of wife and mother), Amy exploited Noelle's trusting nature and desperate need for a friend to further her own narrative:

> I knew I needed a pliant friend for my plan, someone I could load up with awful stories about Nick, someone who would become overly attached to me, someone who'd be easy to manipulate, who wouldn't think too hard about anything I said because she felt privileged to hear it. Noelle was the obvious choice (pp. 290-291)

Her public persona was well-crafted, a real-life version of Diary Amy. Therefore, when Actual/Real Amy's photo appears on Ellen Abbott's show and is criticised by Greta, as a "spoiled rich girl. High maintenance. Bitchy", Amy was offended: "That is simply unfair. I'd left no evidence for anyone to conclude that" (p. 298). She had played the role of Diary Amy to perfection:

> I'd been careful to be low-maintenance, easygoing, cheerful, all those things people want women to be. I waved to neighbors, I ran errands for Mo's friends, I once brought cola

to the ever-soiled Stucks Buckley. I visited Nick's dad so that

all the nurses could testify to how nice I was. (p. 298)

All the characteristics that Amy lists as being "things people want women to be" require women to prioritise others before themselves (p. 298). As women are expected to put others' needs before their own, they must engage in this gender performance to satisfy men and society. However, Amy was unwilling to engage in this gender performance and masquerade to satisfy others, choosing instead to stay true to Actual/Real Amy. In addition, her choice to put her needs above others is a behaviour that is typically coded as masculine as being nurturing and caring is coded as a feminine trait. Therefore, her selfish nature is an expression of hegemonic masculinity, therefore, she was exhibiting a pariah femininity by enacting hegemonic masculinity as a woman. However, she correctly recognised that her true personality would render her unlikeable as she was naturally a confident and somewhat unfriendly woman who had little interest in others. An example is her refusal to thank others for helping her: "My thank-yous always come out rather labored. I often don't give them at all. People do what they're supposed to do and then wait for you to pile on the appreciation" (p. 379).

Thus, the elaborate gender performance and masquerade of Diary Amy was necessary for Amy's plan to be successful as society did not celebrate nor accept Amy's femininity, which was a pariah femininity. Despite her unlikability, Amy desired to be liked, which is evident in her line about Diary Amy: "They have to like me. Her." (p. 267). This Freudian slip indicates that she attempted to create a likable Amy, implying that she recognised that Actual/Real Amy was not likable, requiring engaging in an elaborate masquerade to be liked.

However, her correction ("Her.") indicates her refusal to accept this reality, instead choosing to deny her unlikability, framing it as the fault of others for not recognising her superiority (p. 267).

4.4.4   The 'Whore-Virgin Complex'

While Amy appeared to pride herself for being a feminist and as someone who was very aware of social issues, she reverted very quickly to the 'whore-virgin complex', immediately vilifying Andie Hardy, Nick's 'mistress', as a "slut" (pp. 267, 278, 367, 369) (The 'whore-virgin complex' is discussed in Section 2.8 of Chapter Two.). Just as Amy interpreted Nick's infidelity as Nick winning and her losing, Amy perceived Andie as having won while Amy had lost. Amy also felt that she was in competition with Andie for Nick's affection and so she comforted herself "by means of feeling herself superior in some way to" Andie (Riviere, 1929, p. 309). As Riviere noted, this is the result of another aspect of womanliness as a masquerade, where women were "conscious of rivalry" and "flashes of hatred" regarding "almost any woman who had either good looks or intellectual pretensions" as women are expected to be in competition with each other for male affection (Riviere, 1929, p. 309). Therefore, Amy hated Andie for 'winning' and for threatening her sense of superiority, choosing to reduce Andie to the role of the stereotypical "homewrecker" (Flynn, 2013, p. 279), borrowing true crime narrative's depiction of the 'mistress' as the seductive woman who steals the loving wife's husband, from her appearance to her relationship, to make Andie the villainess of Amy's story (Sands, 1978; Richardson, 1985; Utley, 2016):

> the ever-texting, gum-chewing, vapid mistress with her acrylic nails and the sweatpants with logos across the butt (she isn't like this, exactly, but she might as well be) (Flynn, 2013, p. 267)

> Homewrecker. My home was disheveled but not yet wrecked when she first started kissing my husband, reaching inside his trousers, slipping into bed with him. (p. 279)

Despite her desire to place part of the blame for her 'plight' on Andie, making her the villainess of Amy's story, she found it difficult to match Andie to the main stereotype that the true crime narrative provides for the mistress, as Andie's social media profile did not corroborate this image (Sands, 1978; Richardson, 1985; Flynn, 2013, pp. 278–279; Utley, 2016). However, she required Andie to conform to this stereotype as, with the added national coverage of her case by Ellen Abbott, Nick would be perceived as guiltier of her 'murder' in the court of public opinion due to society's subscription to the pervasive true crime narrative:

> Andie is a good girl, meaning she doesn't post photos of herself 'partying', and she never posts lascivious messages. Which is unfortunate. When she's exposed as Nick's girlfriend, I'd prefer the media find photos of her doing shots or kissing girls or flashing her thong; this would more easily cement her as the homewrecker she is. (Flynn, 2013, pp. 278–279)

The true crime narrative that treats the mistress as a villainess with no moral compass borrows from the 'whore/virgin complex' that moulds the perception and depiction of women as either "the disobedient woman [the whore]" or her complete opposite, "the maternal, the chaste and the virginal [the virgin]" (Simkin, 2014, p. 6). The true crime narrative resorts to this binary depiction of womanhood and Amy heavily relied on the public to interpret the women in this story (herself and Andie) through this lens. While in this dichotomy, Actual/Real Amy would be categorised as 'the whore' and 'the monster' (due to her propensity to punish those who she believed had wronged her), making her the villainess, she had to create an alternative reality to match her requirements, thus styling Diary Amy in accordance with the characteristics set apart for 'the virgin'. In doing so, Diary Amy (both in the diary entries and in real life) perfectly aligned with the role of 'the virgin', automatically making Andie 'the whore'. Andie too was acutely aware of this dichotomy and created an alternative storyline for herself, where she was the inexperienced victim of an older man instead of a woman who knowingly engaged in a sexual relationship with a married man:

> 'I did engage in an affair with Nick Dunne … Nick was my professor at North Carthage Junior College, and we became friendly, and then the relationship became more.'
>
> …
>
> 'I am deeply ashamed of having been involved with a married man. It goes against all my values. I truly believed I was in love' – she begins crying; her voice shivers – 'with Nick

Dunne and that he was in love with me. He told me that his relationship with his wife was over and that they would be divorcing soon. I did not know that Amy Dunne was pregnant.'

…

'I am a twenty-three-year-old student,' she continues. 'I ask only for some privacy to heal during this very painful time.'
(Flynn, 2013, pp. 368–369)

It must be noted that, due to Andie's relative life and sexual inexperience in comparison with Nick, his choice to engage in a relationship with Andie is a predatory act, making Andie a victim. However, in the face of negative media attention and her image as the villainous mistress ('homewrecker'), she emphasised the gaps between their ages, thereby attempting to paint Nick as an abuser preying on young women. To challenge the image of the mistress in the true crime narrative, Andie made the conscious decision to change the way she dressed and behaved for the press conference, adopting a shy and frightened demeanour that was more likely to elicit sympathy and prevent her vilification in the press:

Andie looks tiny and harmless. She looks like a babysitter, and not a sexy porn babysitter but the girl from down the road, the one who actually plays with the kids. I know this is not the real Andie … In real life she wears snug tops that show off her breasts, and clingy jeans, and her hair is long and wavy. In real life she looks fuckable.

Now she is wearing a ruffled shirtdress with her hair tucked

behind her ears (p. 367)

Her voice is tiny, childish. She looks up at the wall of cameras

in front of her and seems shocked, looks back down. Two

apples turn red on her round cheeks. (p. 368)

This approach did appear to work, as Andie's performance of 'the virgin' was convincing enough for both the press and viewers (pp. 368-369). As Andie had now successfully shed the image of the mistress, and thereby of 'the whore', she was cast in the role of 'the virgin', personifying innocence, which made Nick the sole villain in this narrative, prompting one viewer to say: "'I guess he [Nick] did do it [kill Amy] after all'" (pp. 369, 334, 336-339).

However, while Andie exhibits a somewhat deviant femininity in terms of her flouting of social norms to engage in a romantic relationship with a married man, her gender conformance, hyperfemininity and heterosexuality does not categorise her as a pariah femininity as she does not challenge Nick's masculinity, hegemonic masculinity and the patriarchy. While Andie dressing provocatively points towards a more deviant femininity, as she dressed for the male gaze, thus actively participating in her own sexual objectification, she does not challenge masculinity. Her relative inexperience, her young age and Nick's role as her professor translated to her willingly being the submissive/subordinate figure to Nick's dominant male figure. Thus, while he exhibited subordinated masculinity and even male femininity in his marriage with Amy, he exhibited hegemonic masculinity with Andie as he was able to be the dominant figure in their relationship due to Andie's subordination to him.

4.5   Violence

This is the fifth and final strategy in the theoretical framework. With the failure of the strategies of masquerade, gender performance, inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, Amy was forced to reconcile with her role as victim. However, with her sense of superiority and desire for vengeance, she chose to vehemently deny her victimhood, instead choosing a retaliatory role. While she devised her plan to punish Nick while negotiating her position as a victim, she engaged in violence as a strategy once all others had been exhausted. During the execution of her plan, she exerted violence upon both herself and others, including Nick and Desi Collings. The violence took the form of physical, verbal and emotional/psychological abuse.

As Amy's reasons for engaging in violence directed at Nick have been discussed in this chapter, this section explores the kinds of violence both Amy and Nick employed, attempting to understand their different approaches to abuse and to identify whether violence is gendered in the novel as it is in crime fiction. Through this analysis, I aim to explore how female and male violence are portrayed in this novel. The first subsection includes an analysis of the types of violence both protagonists engaged in, including a comparison of the violent strategies they used against each other. This subsection will also include an analysis of how female and male violence have been portrayed in *Gone Girl*. Self-victimisation is a crucial aspect of Amy's fifth strategy of violence and the second subsection explores this. In the third subsection, I attempt to determine whether Amy could be categorised as a heroine, an anti-heroine or a villainess.

4.5.1   The Gendering of Violence

Physical violence is considered a trait of hegemonic masculinity (and toxic masculinity) due to its associations with strength, dominance and superiority over women and other men (Connell, 2005; Schippers, 2007). Therefore, coded masculine (and thus unfeminine), women who engage in physical violence are considered to be exhibiting a pariah femininity as women's utilisation of physical violence challenges men's hegemony over women. Thus, Amy's continued use of physical violence as part of her strategy to punish her male abusers is a direct challenge to the patriarchy as she challenged Nick's (and Desi Collings') superiority over her. Furthermore, while Amy did not physically assault Nick, she murdered Desi by stabbing him repeatedly, which Miller (2018) notes is a mimicry of rape, an act of violence that is more commonly perpetrated by men against women (p. 103).

While physical violence is coded masculine, verbal and emotional violence are coded feminine. Research on types of abusive behaviour teenagers use consistently found that, as physical violence is stereotypically masculine and therefore unavailable to girls, they must rely on more subtle methods of abuse that do not challenge ideals of femininity, which leaves verbal and emotional abuse as the girls' only strategies for retribution (Roland and Idsøe, 2001; Connell, 2005; Pepler *et al.*, 2006; V. Besag, 2006; V. E. Besag, 2006; Silva *et al.*, 2013). This also translates to adult women's and men's abusive behaviour in intimate relationships (Makepeace, 1986; Cantos, Neidig and O'Leary, 1994; Gilbert, 2002; Hamberger and Guse, 2002). Amy, too, utilised verbal and

emotional abuse against Nick following his rejection of Actual/Real Amy and used both strategies to effectively silence him by the end of the novel, cementing her victory over him. The same applied to her relationship with Desi, where she used emotional and sexual abuse to lull him into a false sense of security, only to brutally murder him (physical violence) as revenge for capitalising on her vulnerability (Flynn, 2013, p. 417). While she used a combination of physical, verbal, sexual and emotional abuse to subdue and silence her male abusers, her acts of violence were all premeditated and the result of meticulous planning (e.g., emotional manipulation and fashioning of weapons and false evidence).

Following the revelations of their true personalities shortly after marriage, both Amy and Nick engaged in emotional/psychological abuse; Amy as a response to rejection and Nick due to his dislike of Actual/Real Amy. As Nick described it, his surprise gave way to obedience as he attempted to accommodate the expectations of this 'irrational' version of Amy ("For two years I tried ["so hard"] as my old wife slipped away"), becoming "ashamed" at "the scuttling, scraping, hunchbacked toadie of a man" (a subordinated masculinity) he had become (p. 237). However, Amy bitterly noted that Nick expected her to continuously take into account only his pleasure, expecting the same behaviour they engaged in during their courtship (p. 253). Therefore, both parties had to reconcile with the new reality of their spouses being completely different people, leading to a toxic relationship and emotional trauma. However, Amy perceived Nick's rejection of Actual/Real Amy as abuse, thereby justifying (for her) her choice to seek justice for herself. While his rejection was the primary source of their conflict, his infidelity proved to be even more unforgivable. His infidelity itself was emotional abuse, as it was yet another

rejection of Amy. Despite this, Amy decided to forgive Nick and return to him (murdering Desi in the process), intending to repair their relationship (pp. 394, 413, 408, 417, 439-442, 445-447, 453). She firmly believed that the things he had said about her while she was missing meant that he still loved her and that their relationship could be salvaged (pp. 393-394, 439). While she and Nick recognised that everything he had said had been a lie to lure her out of hiding, they realised that they both found excitement and pleasure in their mutual toxicity (pp. 393-394, 439, 443-444, 451-452). Amy was the first to accept this while Nick was reluctant to accept his attraction to a murderer (pp. 439, 443-444, 451-452).

Upon her return to Nick, Amy used threats of violence to control and silence him ("I can ruin you, Nick.") (pp. 439, 436). Her first tactic to control him and ensure that he remained in their marriage was to poison herself and then threaten to frame Nick for attempted murder (p. 436). She used this as a threat to control and silence him temporarily, believing that during this time, she would be able to restore their relationship to its former glory, telling him that he was "'going to have to try again to love [her]'" (pp. 445, 436, 439):

> The man he was pretending to be [when he lied to manipulate her into coming out of hiding] … I love that guy. That's the man I want for my husband. That's the man I signed up for. That's the man I deserve.
>
> So he can choose to truly love me the way he once did, or I will bring him to heel and make him be the man I married. (p. 439)

Amy pointed out that their marriage had failed only because Nick had "stopped *trying*", insisting that they "were so perfect when [they] started" and that Nick's lack of "trying" led to the devolution of their marriage (pp. 439-440). However, yet again, Amy refused to take responsibility for her actions, and placed all blame on Nick.

His subsequent pleas for divorce only resulted in more threats from Amy ("I won't divorce you, Nick. … If you try to leave, I will devote *my* life to making *your* life as awful as I can") (p. 440). His further insistence of the advantages of divorce and their mutual toxicity led to more threats of ruining his life by framing him for attempted murder, followed by attacks on his masculinity, which were effective (pp. 440-442). Knowing his hatred of becoming as misogynistic as his father and Nick's misogynistic beliefs, Amy used this knowledge to emotionally abuse him by taunting him to make him feel emasculated (pp. 441-442):

> 'You are an average, lazy, boring, cowardly, *woman-fearing* man. Without me, that's what you would have kept on being … But I made you into something. You were the best man you've *ever* been with me. And you know it. The only time in your life you've ever *liked* yourself was *pretending to be* someone *I* might like. Without me? You're just your dad.' (p. 441)

By attacking his deepest insecurities, Amy succeeded in making him feel vulnerable and emasculated. However, contrary to her expectations, he reacted with anger, briefly attempting to strangle her (p. 442). Despite this momentary slip, recognising that if he were to murder Amy, that he would be "*as bad as*

Amy" and the murderer that everyone was convinced he was, he secretly resolved to expose Actual/Real Amy, insisting to himself that he was the only person who could do so (pp. 443-444). While this was the justification he gave himself, he finally accepted that he also found excitement in their toxic relationship, and that he would never find another woman who could make him feel the way Amy did (pp. 443-444). He readily recognised that they both fed off of their mutual toxicity:

> Amy was toxic, but I couldn't imagine a world without her entirely. Who would I be with Amy just gone? … Just as Amy took the credit for making me my best self, I had to take the blame for bringing the madness to bloom in Amy. … Amy's story could have gone a million other ways, but she met me, and bad things happened. So it was up to me to stop her. (p. 444)

However, with this resolve came a very real fear for his life as he was convinced that she would murder him if he displeased her ("My wife, the very fun, beautiful murderess, will do me harm if I displease her.") (p. 452). Therefore, he became the husband Amy wanted him to be from the beginning:

> Me, Nick Dunne, the man who used to forget to many details, is now the guy who replays conversations to make sure I didn't offend, to make sure I never hurt her feelings. I write down everything about her day, her likes and dislikes, in case she quizzes me. I am a great husband because I am very afraid she may kill me. (p. 452)

Meanwhile, Amy made additional preparations to silence Nick to ensure that they could rebuild their marriage, starting "with the façade", determined to "have a happy marriage if it kills him" (pp. 457, 445). In her attempts to silence Nick and completely take away his agency while financially benefitting from her performative victimhood, Amy wanted to begin the process of recounting her false version: "My story: mine, mine, mine. … I just need Nick on the same page so that we both agree how this story will end. Happily." (pp. 447, 453). She fashioned her victim narrative for maximum sympathy for herself while vilifying Nick, when, at the same time, her forgiveness became an endorsement of Nick, single-handedly re-humanising him, undoing the damage her previous lies had done to his image (p. 450). Her aim was to be celebrated as a heroine who overcame her victimhood while simultaneously silencing Nick:

> I have a book deal: I am officially in control of our story. It feels wonderfully symbolic. Isn't that what every marriage is, anyway? Just a lengthy game of he-said, she-said? Well, *she* is saying, and the world will listen, and Nick will have to smile and agree. I will write him the way I want him to be: romantic and thoughtful and very very repentant … If I can't get him to say it out loud, he'll say it in my book. Then he'll come on tour with me and smile and smile (p. 453)

With her memoir celebrating herself, Amy is again benefitting from her performative victimhood by usurping the space of unagentic female victims (Burke, 2018).

Having been reduced again to his former emasculated self and a subordinated masculinity where he is submissive/subordinate to Amy while she enacted hegemonic masculinity/pariah femininity with her dominance in their relationship, Nick searched for ways he could regain his agency. To retaliate, Nick began the process of writing a memoir, detailing Amy's true nature as "*a sociopath and a murderer*" (Flynn, 2013, pp. 455–456). Aware of Nick's potential plans to upend her own plans for their marriage, she resorted to her precautionary measure: impregnating herself with his sperm that she had saved previously to use against him (pp. 457, 458-459). This pregnancy cemented her plans to maintain the farce of their marriage: Nick, overjoyed at finally becoming a father, vowed to protect his son from Amy, remaining as Amy's devoted husband (pp. 458-461):

> I was a prisoner after all. Amy had me forever, or as long as she wanted, because I needed to save my son, to try to unhook, unlatch, debarb, undo everything that Amy did. … I deleted my story (pp. 459-460)

Towards the end, Nick accepted that he had "finally" become "a match for Amy', that he was "rising to the level of [Amy's] madness" (p. 461), noting that Amy was changing who he was yet again:

> I was a callow boy, and then a man, good and bad. Now at last I'm the hero. I am the one to root for in the never-ending war story of our marriage. It's a story I can live with. Hell, at this point, I can't imagine my story without Amy. She is my forever antagonist (p. 461)

However, while Nick was forced to engage in a masquerade as the husband that Amy had always wanted, forcing him again into a subordinated masculinity while Amy enacted hegemonic masculinity (a pariah femininity), he recognised that Amy was engaging in a masquerade too (as Cool Amy): "she's pretending to be someone better too" (p. 461).

Amy interpreted forcibly making Nick play the role of the doting husband as "reassembling him", the logical next step to her previous plans from a year ago when she was "undoing him", suggesting that she enjoyed the power she held over him and the direction his life could take (p. 462). It is through victimising Nick and taking away his agency through premeditated acts of extreme emotional abuse that Amy was able to successfully shed her own victimhood and regain her agency. Ironically, while she appeared to be getting the devoted husband she had always wanted in Nick, this required both Nick and Amy to consciously engage in masquerade, Nick as Amy's idea of the perfect husband and Amy as Cool Amy. Thus, while Amy had successfully shed her victimhood and regained her agency, she was also forced to continue the masquerade of Cool Amy that she despised. Although this could be interpreted as Amy never experiencing true freedom from restrictive gender norms, she interpreted silencing Nick and taking away his power as her triumph (p. 440).

Amy was responsible for much of the violence within the novel, engaging in physical, verbal, emotional, sexual and economic abuse and reproductive coercion against Nick (and other characters) to seek control and retribution while Nick (and many of the other characters) engaged in emotional abuse. Amy's use of a diverse range of tactics designed to punish Nick is recognised by Amy, Nick and other characters as being immoral, unfair and

disproportionate to the abuse perpetrated against Amy. While the characters recognised the emotional abuse Nick and others had subjected Amy to, her use of more overt types of violence (e.g., physical, sexual) give her the appearance of being more abusive than the other characters. With the author's desire to write female protagonists who are "pragmatically evil", this was likely the intended effect (Burkeman, 2013). Therefore, in *Gone Girl*, violence is very much gendered and female, with the female protagonist engaging in types of violence that are traditionally coded masculine (Osborne, 2017). The female violence in the novel is also presented as being far more brutal and destructive than the effects of male violence (the latter usually taking the forms of verbal and emotional abuse, both of which do not leave visible marks), although Amy's portrayal indicates that her violent actions were, to some extent, affected by the abuse she had faced. Thus, the violence she meted out to Nick was both due to her need to exert control over him and for retribution, suggesting that her violence was a response to his continued emotional abuse (exacerbated by his final rejection of Amy through infidelity).

Furthermore, Amy's tendency to exert violence upon herself to punish others by insinuating that she was physically, sexually, verbally and emotionally abused, was a recurrent pattern. While she exerted serious but impermanent physical injuries upon herself, she did not do the same to those she wanted to punish (with the exception of Desi whom she murdered because she knew he would never free her) (Flynn, 2013, pp. 393–394, 417). Instead, she used verbal and emotional/psychological abuse against those she wished to punish, knowing that these types of abuse would not leave visible marks and her own physical injuries would lend credibility to her account while invalidating her victims'. By

doing so, Amy was "'exploiting the sociopath's most reliable maxim'": "'[t]he bigger the lie, the more they believe it'" (p. 437). Her use of self-victimisation as part of her strategy of violence is discussed in the next section.

4.5.2   Self-Victimisation

Whenever Amy sought to punish someone who had 'wronged' her, she framed them for violent crimes (physical assault, rape, kidnapping, attempted murder) and committed violence upon her own body to provide false evidence. Apart from with Nick, Amy's self-victimisation was a consistent pattern throughout her life, inflicting physical and even sexual injuries upon herself to punish others for real and perceived transgressions, as seen with Hilary Handy, Tommy O'Hara and Desi Collings (pp. 324-327, 309-312, 406-408, 417).

However, her most elaborate revenge plans were reserved for Nick. In addition to cutting her wrist to make a pool of her blood, she had also gradually poisoned herself with antifreeze-laced cocktails, intending to have Nick charged with attempted murder (pp. 247-248, 436). Diary Amy's entries also incorporated the poisoning into the narrative, and the reader finds that Amy was showing symptoms of being poisoned very slowly (pp. 383, 423). She even saved some of her vomit in case she needed it as evidence, and in a thinly veiled threat, suggested that she may present it to the police, to ensure that Nick remained under her control upon her return (pp. 436-438, 450). Therefore, not only did she consistently resort to exerting violence upon her own self to punish others, she also used these self-inflicted wounds as part of her strategy of violence to establish control and dominance over her victims.

It is significant that Amy, with her hateful and vindictive nature, placed more importance on masquerading as the victim, co-opting and forcibly occupying a space that is preserved for real victims of violence, such as Nick's mother and his sister, Margo (Gwin, 2017; Burke, 2018). As part of her retribution, Amy tended to attack the reputations of her victims (Gwin, 2017). In fact, Nick, who, at this point, was aware of Amy's complex plan to frame him for her 'murder', noted upon her return that Amy revelled in the attention she received by playing the victim:

> My wife took it all as her due, fluttering a dismissive hand toward the rabble outside. She turned to me with a worn but triumphant smile – the smile on the rape victim, the abuse survivor, the bed burner in the old TV movies, the smile where the bastard has finally received due justice and we know our heroine will be able to move on with *life*! (Flynn, 2013, p. 414)

Masquerading as the victim who was triumphant against all odds made her the heroine of her own story and in the public eye. In her quest to be perfect and adored, and realising that Actual/Real Amy would not be celebrated in the same way due to her non-conforming femininity, she had to engage in gender performance and masquerade to receive the attention she desired. Her masquerade as the victim is also evident in the numerous false tales she constantly told. Apart from the elaborate concoction of lies that was her diary, Amy tended to use false stories of violence to endear herself to others and to attract more attention to herself. One of her main targets of these lies was her high-school boyfriend, Desi Collings. In one instance, she pretended that she was sexually abused by her father for years as a child to ensure that she would

have Desi's undivided attention and devotion as she knew that he enjoyed playing the role of the white knight, and a sexually abused woman satisfied his "craving for ruined women" (p. 363). She also attracted more attention for herself when she pretended that Desi, upset at her ending their romantic relationship, had attempted to commit suicide:

> I'd always liked that lie about Desi trying to kill himself over
>
> me. He had truly been devastated by our breakup, and he'd
>
> been really annoying, …
>
> So he might as well have attempted suicide. (p. 365)

This fictitious story served to illustrate to others how someone idolised Amy and was willing to sacrifice their life for her, and further confirmed her superiority over others in her mind, elevating her far above other women. This lie was meant to demonstrate to her audience how special and unforgettable she was, while cementing her grandiose delusions of her own perfection.

These lies were vital for her to maintain the identity she wanted for herself. Apart from providing the type of attention and adoration that she craved, these lies also provided her countless opportunities to play the victim who succeeded in overcoming trauma while ensuring that she could manipulate her audience. Amy took great care to craft her lies to suit her audience to ensure maximum effect, with the sole aim of priming her targets for manipulation to achieve her objectives. Therefore, she engaged in elaborate masquerade and gender performance to craft an identity for herself that would be more widely accepted by those around her and by society as her deep-seated insecurities made her believe that Actual/Real Amy was not socially acceptable. Thus, she

constantly engaged in performative victimhood to be adored, to receive the attention she felt she deserved and pretend to conform to gender norms, allowing her to engage in manipulative behaviour to punish those she felt deserved it.

4.5.3   Amy: Heroine, Anti-Heroine or Villainess?

Clearly not a heroine due to her conscious abuse of Nick and others, the question is whether Amy is an anti-heroine or as a villainess.

It is possible for Amy to be considered an anti-heroine as the criteria is heavily subjective. Her use of violent methods to seek justice for herself in retaliation for Nick's abuse could be interpreted as actions that are morally right in terms of punishing her abuser. However, considering that her punishments for Nick outweigh his abuse and that her actions are deemed immoral by social standards (with Amy and other characters recognising this), Amy does not match the criteria of an anti-heroine, suggesting that Amy is a villainess.

In response to criticism for her portrayal of 'bad women' and being called a misogynist, Gillian Flynn maintained that writing truly villainous women was not anti-feminist but indeed feminist (Burkeman, 2013). She noted that defining women as being only "innately good, innately nurturing" is restrictive and limits "what feminism is" (Burkeman, 2013). She recognised that there is reluctance to accept that women have the ability to be "pragmatically evil, bad and selfish", leading to the depiction of villainesses as being easily "dismissible" (Burkeman, 2013). While Flynn's comments make it clear that Amy was written as a villainess, Amy's close parallels with the femme fatale also lead her to be categorised this way: her selfish intentions, her desire to punish others, her use

of her sexuality to seduce and punish men, the emotional abuse she was subjected to by Nick and Desi, and her inability and refusal to conform to gender norms by enacting hyperfemininity and subordination to men (Lota, 2016; Osborne, 2017; Vahlne, 2017; Valdrè, 2017; Gwin, 2017; Kennedy, 2017; Lane, 2018; Alsina, 2019; Paszkiewicz, 2019; Martin, 2019). According to Gwin (2017), Amy is best categorised as a neo-noir femme fatale.

Despite suffering emotional abuse, Amy's rejection of traditional notions of femininity, including her refusal to cater to Nick's needs by modelling herself as the 'perfect wife', her reluctance to become a mother and her constant challenging of Nick's masculinity (and thereby the patriarchy), label her as a pariah femininity. Although this would make her an anti-heroine in a feminist context, according to social norms, the rejection of patriarchal notions automatically makes her a villainess as a woman who does not conform challenges the patriarchy by her very existence. Furthermore, Amy's calculated manipulation of gender norms, her malevolent nature and propensity for premeditated violence further reaffirm her role as a villainess.

Despite her villainy, Amy is a victim too. Her parents' constant rejection of her, the restrictive gender norms that dictated her life choices and Nick's emotional abuse complicate her classification of 'villainess'. While Amy's intentions of seeking justice for herself falls within the confines of the domestic noir female protagonist who can be forgiven for her crimes due to the abuse she faced, the way Amy sought justice was sociopathic. Her vindictive nature and premeditated violence were disproportionate to the abuse she faced, therefore, despite her victimisation, her label as a villainess is justified. Thus, even within a feminist framework, Amy Elliott Dunne is classified as a villainess.

4.6   Conclusion

The following chart provides a chronology of events in the novel and demonstrates how Amy employed the five strategies in the theoretical framework to cope with her status as a victim and to regain her agency:

First Meeting, During Courtship, Before Marriage	• Masquerade as Cool Amy • Gender Performance of hyperfemininity (Cool Girl ideal)
Early Stages of Their Marriage	• Masquerade as Cool Amy • Gender Performance of hyperfemininity (Cool Amy) • Inversion of Normative Feminine and Masculine Behaviour (treasure hunt and financial support)

• Amy and Nick's realisation that both had been engaging in masquerade
• Both Amy and Nick subjected each other to Violence (verbal and emotional abuse)

Amy's Attempts to Rekindle Romance with Nick	• Gender Performance • Inversion of Normative Feminine and Masculine Behaviour (treasure hunt)

• Amy's discovery of Nick's extra-marital affair with Andie
• Enacting her elaborate plan for revenge ("*Fuck Nick Dunne*")

Maintain Normalcy in Marriage to Avoid Nick's Suspicion to Help Enact Her Plan	• Gender Performance • Inversion of Normative Feminine and Masculine Behaviour (treasure hunt)
Enacting Plan for Revenge	• *With Nick*: Gender Performance • *With Others*: Masquerade as Diary Amy

• While in hiding, Amy's money is stolen, necessitating a change of plans
• Amy requests for help from Desi Collings
• Desi's subsequent entrapment of her

Escaping from Desi Collings	• *With Desi*: Inversion of Normative Feminine and Masculine Behaviour and Violence (physical and sexual abuse)

• Amy's return to Nick after murdering Desi

After Amy's Return to Nick and Attempts to Salvage Their Marriage	• *With Nick*: Masquerade as Cool Amy, Gender Performance and Violence (verbal and emotional abuse, reproductive coercion) • *With Others*: Masquerade as Diary Amy

Figure 4: Amy's Use of the Five Strategies

Despite Amy's combined use of the strategies of gender performance and masquerade to attract and seduce male romantic partners (specifically Nick), her inability to sustain the façade of Cool Amy led to the destruction of their marriage. Upon the realisation that Nick had also been engaged in a masquerade, and his subsequent rejection of Actual/Real Amy, Amy began to despise him, choosing not to take any responsibility for her role in the state of their marriage. Amy's gender performance and masquerade led to the enaction of a hyperfemininity that was expected of her and was forced to engage in, as without it, she would not be socially accepted. Unfortunately, as this hyperfemininity was not her true expression of femininity, and therefore a pariah femininity, she was unable to sustain it, leading to her victimisation by both Nick and society. However, despite recognising that the issue was the restrictive and contradictory Cool Girl ideal (therefore, men and the patriarchy), she held herself responsible for her inability to conform. Due to her Amazing Amy persona, the frustration and disappointment she felt at her non-conformity manifested as internalised misogyny. Although Amy was able to conform to gender norms initially using gender performance and masquerade, she was unable to maintain this façade, making both strategies unsuccessful in helping her conform.

While Amy initially attempted to use both the treasure hunt and financial support as ways to support her husband and secure happiness within their marriage, Amy's and Nick's need to assert dominance led to their conflicts. His frustration with Amy was exacerbated by Amy always assuming the masculine role, as he interpreted that this automatically assigned him the feminine role. As this occurred constantly throughout their relationship, Nick engaged in a

subordinated masculinity (male femininity) when forced into behaviours that are typically coded feminine, as opposed to exhibiting hegemonic masculinity as he preferred due to his own submissiveness opposite Amy's dominance. His subsequent emasculation and resentment at being 'relegated' to the feminine role encouraged him to commit infidelity with young Andie Hardy as, in this relationship, he was dominant while Andie was submissive due to her relative sexual inexperience, Nick's age and position as her professor. With Andie, Nick exhibited traits of hegemonic masculinity as Andie's expressions of femininity (gender-conforming and hyperfeminine) did not challenge Nick's expressions of masculinity as Amy's did.

The Diary Amy masquerade enabled Amy to engage in a masquerade and gender performance that masked the pariah femininity of Actual/Real Amy and also masked her role as the perpetrator. By engaging in a performative victimhood that did not reflect her own experiences as a victim (as Amy was both victim and perpetrator), she appropriated a space that was meant for female victims of male abusers like Nick's sister Margo. Amy's performative victimhood was clearly meant to mimic and enact the victimhood of a more socially accepted type of female victim who would easily garner sympathy (Burke, 2018). Therefore, her use of masquerade to become the 'perfect victim' was a clear manipulation of gender norms and the patriarchy and also allowed her to evade suspicion and punishment. Through her manipulation of patriarchal ideals of femininity, she was able to recognise her victimhood, and by doing so, she regained her lost agency. Her manipulation of gender norms led to her shedding her role of the victim, adopting the role of perpetrator, forcing her male abuser (Nick) into the role of victim, thus renegotiating the terms of her agency.

Despite Amy and Nick engaging in violence against each other as a strategy to satisfy their own desires, Amy used a range of violent behaviours to punish, control and silence Nick, thereby taking away his agency and making him a victim just as he did to her (which was Amy's interpretation of events). While the severity of her violence appears to be far worse than Nick's, Amy's acts of violence were in retaliation to Nick's emotional abuse. In addition to subjecting others to violence, Amy engaged in performative victimhood by exerting violence upon herself as an additional way to inflict emotional abuse upon those she wished to punish. Thus, violence is gendered within the novel and female violence is portrayed as being more malevolent than male violence, with the female protagonist engaging in the types of violence typically coded masculine. Amy's use of extremely violent tactics for retribution and control also signal that she is a villainess, despite the abuse she had experienced. Meant to be interpreted as a villainess by the author, Amy embodies the rare type of villainess who is pragmatically evil, a new and deviant type of femininity that challenges the patriarchy by refusing to conform to gender norms while directly challenging men and masculinity.

Amy did not utilise the five strategies in a linear fashion, rather employing one or more of them simultaneously within her marriage to mend their relationship or to punish Nick for his abuse. While she used all five strategies in these attempts, much of the time, she utilised masquerade, gender performance and violence to achieve her objectives. By the end of the novel, she had successfully used a combination of these strategies to punish Nick for his transgressions against her, while shedding her victimhood and regaining her agency, forcing Nick into the role of victim and taking away his agency in the

process. Thus, she succeeded in seeking justice for herself while also silencing her male abuser. Perpetrated mostly by Amy, violence in *Gone Girl* is predominantly female, and with Amy's inversions and subversions of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, she directly challenged patriarchal values by asserting dominance over Nick and refusing to conform to gender norms. While she is classified as a villainess, this does not invalidate her experiences as a victim, and, together, these two aspects of her personality demonstrate that Amy's character is a new type of femininity that freely enacted hegemonic masculinity. However, despite her overt challenges to the patriarchy and her success in asserting dominance over Nick, she was ultimately unable to seek acceptance for her true self (Actual/Real Amy), thus, she was forced to engage in masquerade and gender performance to be Cool Amy with Nick, and Diary Amy and Amazing Amy with others to be accepted. Ultimately, Amy was able to assert dominance over Nick through her continued and strategic use of violence, successfully silencing him within their marriage, while she continued to remain powerless in the face of restrictive gender norms, having to resort to conforming to gender norms to receive any kind of social acceptance.

Chapter Five – Masquerading as the 'Perfect Wife': Performative

Hyperfemininity in A. S. A. Harrison's *The Silent Wife*

5.1   Introduction

This chapter explores how the female protagonist (Jodi Brett) of A. S. A. Harrison's novel *The Silent Wife* coped with the issues within her marriage to her husband by employing five strategies: masquerade, gender performance, inversion of feminine and masculine behaviour, recognising their victimhood and violence. With the use of the theoretical framework in Chapter 3, this chapter examines how Jodi utilised various coping mechanisms to deal with the abuse to which she was subjected, leading her to shed her victimhood and regain her agency through the use of these five strategies. This chapter's analysis addresses the research objectives.

Yet another novel with unreliable narrators who are attempting to convince the reader of their partners' guilt, *The Silent Wife* opens with the female protagonist, Jodi Brett, confessing that she would soon become a murderer, probably of her husband, Todd Gilbert (Harrison, 2013). Thus, the novel can be classified as a whydunit, and the rest of the novel explores Jodi and Todd's marriage in detail, from their courtship to the devolution of their marriage, leading to the climax of his murder. *The Silent Wife* offers a different type of heterosexual marital union, with the concept of the common-law marriage/CLM (see Section 5.2.1 of this chapter), which has its own unique set of challenges that increased the pressure on their already-fraught relationship. The novel is notable for its depictions of femininities and masculinities, the restrictive nature

of gender norms (especially for women) and the negative impact these can have for both women, men and the family unit. A prominent example of domestic noir, the novel also offers a unique type of female protagonist who is also a pragmatic villainess and challenges stereotypes of femininity and a male protagonist who subscribes to stereotypes of masculinity, illustrating the depth and complexity of femininities and masculinities at play with both characters. While moving at a slower pace than most novels of the subgenre, *The Silent Wife* is an in-depth exploration of how destructive and unsafe domestic spaces can be, with a heavier focus on character study than most other novels, which often focus more on the 'murder mystery' aspect (Crouch, 2018).

Set in the United States, this is the story of Jodi Brett and her husband Todd Gilbert (Harrison, 2013). While they never officially wed because Jodi preferred not to, theirs was a common law marriage which is eventually revealed to not be recognised in their state (Illinois). Despite not wishing to follow in her mother's footsteps and marry and have a family, Jodi was charmed by Todd, and the novel begins at a point slightly before Jodi has her husband murdered. Todd was a serial cheater, and while she had initially confronted him about his affairs, Todd did not change his behaviour. At one point, when he pined for children (and Jodi was not ready for motherhood), he went into a deep depression and began a relationship with Natasha Kovacs (his best friend's young daughter). After accidentally impregnating her, and under intense pressure by Natasha to marry and begin their own family, he left Jodi and began the process of evicting Jodi from their shared home, even restricting her access to his credit cards. Realising that Todd meant to marry Natasha, leaving Jodi destitute, she took her friend Alison's advice and paid her to employ someone to

execute Todd. As Todd had not rewritten his will to include Natasha and his unborn child, Jodi inherited his wealth.

The Silent Wife is told in the alternating points of view of both Jodi and Todd in Part One with Part Two being narrated by Jodi following Todd's death. This novel is a whydunit, as in the second page, it is revealed that Jodi will murder her husband (Harrison, 2013, p. 4), and much of the slow suspense is created by each character's revelations about their marriage and the double lives they led, leading to the climax with Todd's murder.

5.2   Gender Performance and Masquerade

Jodi's initial coping mechanisms are gender performance and masquerade, the first two of the five strategies in the theoretical framework. During their courtship period, both Jodi and Todd remained constantly honest, revealing private aspects of their personalities and deeply personal stories from childhood, with the knowledge that both of them would be accepting of each other's flaws (Harrison, 2013, pp. 54–58). Thus, in this initial part of their romantic relationship, neither character engaged in a masquerade as neither felt that there was a need to do so. The same applied for elaborate gender performance, as neither Jodi nor Todd was required to engage in elaborate expressions of femininity and masculinity to seek acceptance. Instead, the masquerade and gender performance manifested in their relationship once they began engaging in a serious romantic relationship, with Jodi moving into his home so that they could live together. Jodi was forced to employ these strategies in earnest following her realisation that Todd preferred to engage in sexual

encounters with other women while being her partner (pp. 22-25). To Jodi, this seemed to be a clear betrayal as she had assumed they were supposed to be monogamous, although she later learned to simply ignore his affairs in order to save their relationship as he was not prepared to alter his behaviour (pp. 22-25). Their relationship itself functioned as a marriage, despite not being officially wedded. While their relationship could be considered a common-law marriage/CLM, this type of union was not recognised in the state they lived in (Illinois), which later became a serious concern for Jodi following Todd's decision to marry his mistress (pp. 157-158, 189-192).

This section examines Jodi's use of masquerade and gender performance in her relationship with Todd. It explores Jodi's use of gender performance to achieve her objectives of attempting to conform to gender norms, to maintain some sense of normalcy in her marriage to Todd amidst his infidelities so that they could conform to gender norms and how she engaged in masquerade to seduce Todd and to keep him tethered to her and their marriage. The first subsection discusses how Jodi rebelled against gender stereotypes to establish a sense of autonomy and to avoid her mother's fate. In the second subsection, Jodi's elaborate gender performance of hyperfemininity is explored. This hyperfemininity was meant to provide Todd with a compelling reason to remain invested in their relationship, and thus, was one of Jodi's strategies to avoid separation from Todd. The third subsection examines how feigning ignorance of Todd's infidelities was part of Jodi's masquerade, designed to maintain a semblance of normalcy in their marriage and to avoid separation or divorce.

5.2.1   Challenging Gender Norms

While Jodi's lifestyle gave the impression that she conformed to traditional gender roles due to her enacting the role of the housewife, she rebelled against restrictive gender norms in subtle but definitive ways. The two main ways in which she refused to conform were by rejecting all of Todd's marriage proposals and her decision to not have children (and thereby rejecting the concept of the traditional family unit), and by continuing her higher education and working part-time. Although some of her beliefs about marriage and traditional gender roles appeared to have been informed by feminist ideas, most of these decisions were driven by her desperate attempts to avoid her mother's fate.

To understand Jodi's determination to avoid subscribing to gender norms, it is important to focus on her parents' failed marriage which caused her significant childhood trauma and negatively affected her views of romantic partnerships. Jodi described her mother as a timid woman who had big dreams but failed to achieve any of them and was constantly haunted by her failures: "Maybe it had to do with her disappointments in life. My mother trained as a singer, but never got beyond the church choir. Her dream was to be in a Broadway musical" (p. 58). Her father was a traditional patriarch who instilled in his children the "solid core values of hard work, earning power, community spirit, and education" (p. 122). However, Jodi's father also engaged in a lengthy extra-marital affair, with his infidelity having been public knowledge in their town (p. 120). Jodi noted that everyone in her town being aware of her father's affair brought more shame upon her mother, who was forced to mask her despair and shame and continue as if nothing was amiss although she was strongly

affected: "I think it was the humiliation that got to her more than anything. The idea that people pitied her. She felt demoralized" (p. 120). Their family life too was greatly affected by her father's infidelity and disrespect towards Jodi's mother, with her parents not speaking to each other, instead using Jodi and her two brothers (Darrell and Ryan) as intermediaries in order to avoid conversing with each other (p. 119).

From Jodi's descriptions of her mother, it is evident that she relied on excessive gender performance, performing the roles of the perfect housewife and mother, to both avoid challenging gender norms by leaving her husband and children and also to maintain a semblance of normalcy within the marriage (the sense of normalcy may have been for the benefit of their children and to avoid public speculation) (pp. 119-122). Jodi even admitted that she would make the same choices as her mother in a similar position: "If I had three kids? I guess I would have done the same. Stuck it out" (p. 121).

While Jodi sympathised with her mother, she also felt that her mother had been responsible for her fate, and had she made different choices, would have been able to avoid or reduce the harmful effects of the marriage. Therefore, unconsciously, Jodi was blaming her mother for not leaving her father in response to the emotional abuse (his infidelity and silent treatment). Despite Jodi's acceptance that her mother had the added responsibility of three young children that she had prioritised over herself, Jodi continued to blame her mother for remaining in an abusive marriage. Essentially, Jodi believed that leaving her father had been an option readily available to her mother, and that she had simply not made this obviously correct choice. This indicates that Jodi had failed to consider other factors that could have hindered her mother from leaving her

father, apart from having to "[break] up the family", such as financial issues and the fear of rebuilding her life (p. 121). This led Jodi to believe that, if she made the correct choices, she could avoid the same fate:

> **Jodi:** But you learn from their mistakes, right? I won't put myself in that position. … I won't get married. I won't have a family.
>
> …
>
> **Jodi:** If I ended up like my mother I would only have myself to blame. (pp. 121-122)

In attempting to avoid her mother's fate, Jodi made every effort to make decisions that were very different from her mother's. Believing that marriage and motherhood would only complicate her life and make her unnecessarily vulnerable to a plight like her mother's, Jodi refused to marry or have children. By consciously making these choices, she hoped to avoid the situation her mother had been in, convinced that these choices would save her from such a fate. Thus, many of Jodi's life choices had been dictated by her parents' unhealthy (and toxic) marriage, leading to her distaste of the institution of marriage and the mantle of motherhood. Therefore, instead of marriage, Jodi and Todd had been in a common-law marriage (CLM) for twenty years, a fact she revealed at the beginning of the novel (Harrison, 2013, p. 4). According to American law, CLM is:

> established when couples cohabit and hold themselves out as spouses by calling each other husband and wife in public, …

or declaring their marriage on … [legal] documents.

(Grossbard and Vernon, 2015, p. 144)

Legally, CLM is not recognised as a marriage in the state of Illinois, the setting of the novel. This is a crucial detail as it is this lack of recognition of their union that eventually led to Jodi not receiving spousal support upon their separation and contributed to her decision to murder Todd (Harrison, 2013; Grossbard and Vernon, 2014; Kennedy, 2017). However, despite this lack of legal recognition for their union, Jodi's relationship with Todd functioned as a marriage and others acknowledged her as being Todd's wife, therefore, Jodi felt secure in their relationship, having no regrets regarding her choices:

> By forgoing marriage and children she has kept a clean slate, allowed for a sense of spaciousness. There are no regrets. Her nurturing instincts find an outlet with her clients, and in every practical sense she is as married as anyone else. Her friends of course know her as Jodi Brett, but to most people she is Mrs. Gilbert. She likes the name and title; they give her a pedigree of sorts and acts as an all-round shorthand, eliminating the need to correct people or make explanations, dispensing with awkward terminology like *life partner* and *significant other*.
>
> (p. 17)

In addition to her rejection of gender norms by refusing to adopt the roles of wife and mother, she focused on having some level of financial independence and her own life separate from Todd. With her family having prioritised education, Jodi continued her higher education and had "a doctorate and a couple

of master's degrees" (p. 40). As she dedicated much of her day to taking care of their household, "[h]er schedule allows for just two clients a day"', yet "[h]er practice generates enough to cover household costs" (pp. 20, 300). Her part-time work allowed her to be somewhat independent and remain in touch with her professional world, providing her with her own space, just as Todd had his construction business, TJG Holdings. Despite Todd viewing Jodi's practice as just a hobby, Jodi derived great pleasure from her work and took pride in how much she earned from working so little:

> In spite of what Todd likes to say about her practice being a
> hobby, she [earns] [e]nough, anyway, for basic household
> needs and a few extras. (pp. 80-81)

However, her refusal to marry and have children was at odds with Todd's convictions, and marriage and progeny became topics that they avoided. Jodi attempted to compensate in other ways, hoping that this was a passing phase for Todd (pp. 4, 11, 126, 132-133). Her attempts at compensating for her rejection of the traditional roles of wife and mother are discussed in the following section.

5.2.2   Playing the Role of the "Perfect Wife"

Despite Jodi's best efforts to avoid her mother's fate and preserve her independence, she was still forced to conform to gender norms so that she would not have to sacrifice her relationship with Todd. Essentially, she sacrificed her autonomy and her ideals to preserve her marriage. Jodi's elaborate gender performance of hyperfemininity (hegemonic femininity) and employment of this hyperfemininity as a mask (masquerade) began with her serious relationship

with Todd, where she played the role of the devoted wife who took care of all the household duties while he was the breadwinner for their family (Schippers, 2007; Butler, 2011). Her refusal to conform by marrying Todd and giving birth to his children meant that she had to compensate for this 'lack' in other ways, and the most suitable option was providing Todd with some semblance of the kind of home that he wanted. This required Jodi to engage in hyperfemininity to complement Todd's hypermasculinity (hegemonic masculinity that is also a toxic masculinity). Essentially, Jodi was using her hyperfemininity to appease Todd's hypermasculinity, using this as a compromise, although Todd had made few adjustments to his life while Jodi had to sacrifice her some of her independence and most of her ideals for this strategy to succeed.

As a result of her masquerade of hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity, Jodi relied on a daily routine that put much of her focus on maintaining the household, with many of her activities of the day aimed at pleasing Todd (Schippers, 2007; Butler, 2011). Much of her day was devoted towards managing their household, with multiple hours spent on making Todd meals, from shopping for the ingredients to preparing and cooking them (Harrison, 2013, pp. 147, 5). The highlight of her day was when Todd would come home: "She's aware of … everything rushing to the point in time when she'll hear his key in the lock, an event that she anticipates with pleasure. She can still feel that making dinner for Todd is an occasion" (p. 5). Her extreme reliance on this daily routine was evident once Todd left her, forcing her to realise just how much of her day had been focused on activities that were supposed to appease Todd and to make him comfortable and happy. This realisation that her daily life was

centred around Todd only served to push her deeper into her depression after Todd left her:

> What bothers her most is the blow to her routine. She misses the hours spent poring over cookbooks, composing a menu, shopping for ingredients, putting a twist on his favorite foods. …
>
> Her shattered routine leaves her at loose ends, but worse still, much of what she used to enjoy no longer brings any pleasure at all. (p. 147)

She maintained that her daily routine provided her constant comfort, it being one of the values she had been taught as being part of a middle-class family (pp. 25-26). Instead of full-time employment to keep her active mind busy, Jodi incorporated her attempts to be the perfect housewife through the masquerade and gender performance of hyperfemininity into a routine where she focused solely on tending to Todd's needs and expectations:

> Daily routine is the great balm that keeps her spirits up and holds her life together, … Keeping busy is the middle-class way … She enjoys the busywork of scheduling clients, running her household, and keeping herself fit and groomed. … Evenings, when she isn't cooking for Todd [when he is at work or engaging in affairs], she has dinner with friends. (pp. 25-26)

By focusing on creating a home life designed to please Todd, Jodi managed to compensate for her unwillingness to offer him the traditional concept

of home that he desired, with her as his legal wife and with children of their own. Todd, as a man who subscribed and conformed to hegemonic masculinity, envisioned himself as one day becoming a proud patriarch, with many sons that he could impart his wisdom to, and thus, wanted to conform to gender norms (p. 126). Todd's image of his future was at odds with Jodi's, as she did not desire marriage nor children to avoid suffering like her mother (pp. 17, 121-122). The difference in opinion regarding their lifestyle choices and expectations for themselves would likely have resulted in separation, and, in her attempts to avoid this, Jodi made the compromise of being the 'perfect wife' to Todd, maintaining their household, even scaling back her practice to accommodate her household chores. By becoming this 'perfect wife', Jodi was engaging in gender performance, conforming to gender norms by enacting hyperfemininity to complement Todd's expectations, thereby using her own hyperfemininity to appease Todd's hypermasculinity and compensate for her refusal to marry him.

Although Jodi constantly told herself that she enjoyed this daily routine and willingly engaged in activities that were catered towards Todd, she had very consciously been making a home for Todd. Her awareness of the importance of the home in the traditional sense to Todd seemed to have driven her to establish this daily routine. Thus, when it appeared that his mistress, Natasha Kovacs, was going to threaten Jodi and Todd's marriage and the home that Jodi had built for them, Jodi reassured herself by reminding herself that home was the most important thing to Todd, even noting that it was the home that she had established that gave special flavour to Todd's affairs, thereby assuming that he would never abandon their home and their relationship, the very things that grounded him:

> She, Jodi, is the one who knows Todd best, and one thing she
> knows for sure is that home is important to him. Not just for
> Todd but for most men, home is the counterpoint that gives an
> affair its glamour. An affair by definition is secret, temporary,
> uncommitted, not leading to the complications of a longer-
> term arrangement—and thus its appeal. Todd has no intention
> of marrying this girl. (p. 112)

She completely relied on the importance of home to Todd to keep him tethered to her, incorrectly believing that their twenty years of marriage would keep him loyal to their marriage despite Todd's constant infidelity throughout their marriage. Her belief that Todd's relationship with Natasha was similar to all of his other extra-marital relationships led her to believe that Todd was "in it for the short term" because what he was searching for was "reassurance" because Todd was only drawn to Natasha's youth and the fact that "a girl half his age [took] an interest in him" (p. 112). Dismissing Todd's relationship with Natasha as no more than an effort on Todd's part to enhance his self-esteem because "[m]en are like that; they crave the reassurance" was a logical conclusion, considering that most of Todd's extra-marital relationships were extremely short and never threatened to challenge Jodi's position as his wife: "That's his pattern, and everyone knows that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior" (p. 112). In this way, Jodi continued to excuse Todd's behaviour, choosing to pretend that she was not aware of his many infidelities, tacitly accepting that this was who he was.

5.2.3   Feigning Ignorance as Part of the Masquerade

Initially, Jodi had felt betrayal when she had learned of Todd's infidelities, confronting him, wanting apologies and promises to not repeat his behaviour (p. 149). However, as time went by and Todd's infidelities did not cease despite Jodi's confrontations with Todd and his apologies, Jodi made the sacrifice to tolerate and then ignore his indiscretions to continue their relationship ("after all he was Todd, and he was precious to her. Even his sedition could be precious, his way of remaining true to himself.") (p. 149).

Leaving Todd never occurred to her as an option, saying that: "There are lots of reasons why a woman stays with a man, even when she's given up on changing him and can predict with certainty the shape that the rest of her life with him is going to take. Her mother had a reason. Every woman has a reason" (p. 149). As is typical of an unreliable narrator, Jodi does not offer the reader her reason for choosing to stay with Todd. However, having developed an emotional dependency may have been one of her reasons, as well as a certain level of emotional insecurity and fear about leaving Todd and starting life and dating anew as an older woman. However, when questioned by others or when she questioned her choice to stay with him, she often said: ""He's a weakness of mine. I have a weakness for him." She said this to herself and to her friends in the way of a justification" (p. 149). This can be interpreted as a masquerade for the benefit of others and herself.

By constantly choosing to forgive Todd for his indiscretions, Jodi found herself facing a fate like her mother's, a situation she had hoped to avoid:

But Todd was bound and determined to live his life, and all

she could do in the end was accept this, even knowing that

what she had become was a version of her mother. In spite of

making different choices, in spite of living in different times,

in spite of being forewarned by her education in psychology,

which taught her that the buck passes from one generation to

the next, the predicament she landed in was the very one she

had set out to avoid. (pp. 149-150)

While she made an effort to ignore Todd's transgressions, she was grateful that he did attempt to be discreet (p. 23). This was important to Jodi because this pretence was vital to maintaining some semblance of normalcy within their marriage, thus making her feel somewhat secure in her relationship. Thus, on both their parts, masquerade was extremely important: both Todd's mask of being the perfect and loyal husband and Jodi's mask of being the perfect and forgiving wife were vital to their charade, to maintain "the illusion that everything [was] fine":

It simply doesn't matter that time and time again he gives the

game away, because he knows and she knows that he's a

cheater, and he knows that she knows, but the point is that the

pretense, the all-important pretense must be maintained, the

illusion that everything is fine and nothing is the matter. As

long as the facts are not openly declared, as long as he talks to

her in euphemisms and circumlocutions, as long as things are

functioning smoothly and a surface calm prevails, they can go

on living their lives. (pp. 23-24)

By feigning ignorance of Todd's infidelities, Jodi continued the masquerade of the 'perfect wife' who was forgiving of her partner's faults. However, this did not mean that she ceased to engage in damaging behaviour to punish Todd in subtle ways. Jodi consistently resorted to petty behaviour whenever it was evident to her that Todd had been disloyal. Aware that she was guilty of keeping track of the transgressions Todd made in the relationship (which Jodi calls "ledger keeping") (p. 96), Jodi enjoyed punishing Todd in petty ways without letting him know that she was responsible for these 'accidents' such as throwing his phone away or making sure he misplaced his things, while justifying these by perceiving "her own transgressions as slight compared with the liberties that he freely takes" (p. 25).

She engaged in these petty activities to attempt to lessen her frustration at Todd's infidelities as the masquerade did not provide a satisfactory solution to her problems, instead exacerbating them. Nevertheless, she believed that she was equally to blame for his behaviour by tolerating it, and she felt powerless to continue to confront him and demand better treatment. In her attempts to displace some of the blame from Todd, she placed some upon herself, maintaining that she too was responsible in some way for his treatment of her because she was aware of his true personality and made the conscious choice to tolerate his behaviour. However, her penchant for ledger-keeping resulted in Jodi drugging him with Natasha's sleeping pills after Jodi learned of his affair, putting Todd into a deep sleep that lasted for many hours, potentially poisoning him, and had Jodi contemplating whether he would die, leaving her the only possible murder suspect (pp. 95-101). While she recognised that this was an extreme act, she felt

it was only fair that she attempt to redress the power imbalance between them that was always in Todd's favour.

This power imbalance was also caused due to the mismatch between their ideas of loyalty. While Jodi expected their relationship to be a monogamous one, Todd wished to engage in multiple sexual affairs while considering himself to be Jodi's husband. He disclosed his opinions on monogamy and polygamy, providing justifications for his infidelities:

> He's never felt kindly toward … anyone who carries on a long-term extramarital affair, in effect, a form of polygamy. A passing fling is one thing, sex with a prostitute is one thing, but dividing your loyalties as a way of life is a faithless path to take and one that can only end badly. (pp. 173-174)

While providing justifications for how his methods of infidelity (having flings and employing sex workers) were perfectly acceptable, he also firmly believed that Jodi would accept and tolerate his behaviour as she "could see the bigger picture", that "[a]s long as he and Jodi were together he belonged to her, and she knew that" (p. 174). In this way, he was able to excuse his own behaviour, despite knowing that Jodi did not accept his infidelities. He provided further justifications for his behaviour by suggesting that men weren't capable of being monogamous:

> 'Monogamy wasn't designed for men. Or men weren't designed for monogamy. However you want to put it. Both things are true. … All men cheat sooner or later, one way or another' (pp. 56-57)

His infidelities were part of his performance of toxic hegemonic masculinity, meant to stem the anxieties felt from his fragile masculinity. As having multiple sexual partners is a sign of virility, his behaviour is somewhat excused as it is committed by a man, whereas this behaviour would not be tolerated in women and would be considered to be embodying a pariah femininity (Connell, 2003; Schippers, 2007; Brubaker and Johnson, 2008). His decision to engage in a romantic and sexual relationship with the much-younger Natasha is also evidence of this. Having such a young woman find him attractive reinforced his hegemonic masculinity to himself and others, despite the relationship itself being a predatory act by Todd due to his age and his sexual experience translating to a significant power imbalance between them, victimising the young Natasha. However, despite his tendency to have affairs, Todd himself indicated that he would not have tolerated his same behaviour from Jodi when he expressed feelings of jealousy about her new partners following their separation, indicating that he felt possessive of her, even becoming jealous of her friendship with their neighbour's 14-year-old son:

> It crosses his mind that men are going to notice her [Jodi], that maybe they already have. … These are not pleasant thoughts and he struggles to quell his spiralling imagination, the part of him that wants to get up from the table and rage around the room, assert his dominance, his ownership. (p. 175)

While he was engaged to Natasha and was in the process of planning their wedding, he still entertained ideas of wanting to have a relationship with Jodi, and this idea excited him as sexual intercourse with Jodi was now a forbidden act ("Natasha is now standard fare, whereas sex with Jodi … had the

agreeable tang of adultery.") (p. 186). In addition, he demonstrated his toxic masculinity in his feelings of possessiveness over Jodi and his need to assert his dominance over her to show other men that she was his territory/property, despite him being engaged to another woman. Jodi noted that his tendency to engage in "lying and equivocation" and "his never-ending affairs" indicated his "deep-seated feelings of inferiority that drove him to continually prove himself" (pp. 162-163). Thus, Todd's low self-esteem led to his fragile masculinity and he felt the need to constantly prove his worth to others and to himself.

Despite her acts of defiance through the passive aggressive tactics designed to punish him, Jodi continued to engage in a gender performance of hyperfemininity to complement and appease Todd's hypermasculinity that allowed her to remain in her relationship with Todd, while she sacrificed her feminist ideals. However, enacting hyperfemininity was not sufficient: Jodi also had to engage in a lengthy masquerade that required her to feign ignorance of Todd's infidelities. This illusion was intended to maintain a semblance of normalcy within their marriage, allowing both to pretend they were content.

5.3   Inversion of Normative Feminine and Masculine Behaviour

Jodi combined the strategies of masquerade and gender performance with the third strategy of inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour depending on her circumstances instead of employing these strategies in a linear fashion. Her use of silence as a tool and a weapon is an example of this, as she was subverting stereotypically feminine and masculine behaviour while employing masquerade and gender performance to maintain normalcy in

her marriage while attempting to regain her agency. However, Todd's hypermasculinity/hegemonic masculinity placed limitations on Jodi's ability to regain her lost agency and to enact her true femininity, instead forcing her to enact a hyperfemininity that would pose little to no threat to his masculinity.

This section explores the types of femininities and masculinities that were exhibited by Jodi and Todd to identify which types are found within domestic noir. It also examines how Jodi engaged in subverting normative feminine stereotypes while Todd conformed to masculine stereotypes by enacting a hypermasculinity that forced Jodi to perform a hyperfemininity. The following subsection includes a discussion of Jodi and Todd's femininities and masculinities, focusing on how Todd's expression of hypermasculinity was masking a fragile masculinity and negatively affected not only their marriage but also Jodi's gender expression while exploring how Jodi weaponised silence within their marriage in an attempt to maintain some semblance of normalcy and to regain some level of agency.

5.3.1   Weaponising Silence

Todd's expression of toxic hegemonic masculinity meant that Jodi was not able to openly exhibit any normative masculine traits for fear of being labelled as a woman exhibiting a pariah femininity and thus challenging Todd's hegemonic masculinity and the patriarchy, resulting in her exhibiting hyperfemininity/womanliness instead (Riviere, 1929; Connell, 2005; Schippers, 2007). For someone as deeply insecure as Todd, his macho version of masculinity was a point of pride and he sought to elevate his self-esteem by

believing himself to be superior to all others, even women, including Jodi. This sense of superiority is a classic sign of toxic masculinity and is easily threatened by real or perceived challenges to their dominance. This is why Todd was easily affected by his friends' remarks of Jodi's intellectual superiority as his ego would not allow anyone else, not even his wife, to be considered superior to him in any way (pp. 40-41). Therefore, to appease Todd's fragile masculinity, Jodi engaged in gender performance and masquerade (Riviere, 1929; Butler, 2004, 2011; Schippers, 2007). Considering the dynamics of their relationship, these strategies were her best options as she did not want their marriage to end. However, despite having to conform to stereotypical gender roles, Jodi still found ways to challenge them. While she did not invert normative feminine and masculine behaviour in an obvious manner by adopting a 'masculine' role, she found subtle ways to manipulate gender norms to her benefit in her attempts to maintain some sense of normalcy in her marriage while Todd continued his extra-marital affairs.

The result of Jodi's gender performance and masquerade was that Todd retained the freedom to remain true to himself while Jodi had to sacrifice her ideals and reshape her beliefs to fit this new reality. It is within this context that Jodi employed the strategy of inverting normative feminine and masculine behaviour. She achieved this by using silence as a tool and a weapon in her marriage with Todd.

Silence can be interpreted as being either feminine or masculine. As a trait, silence can be considered as being a trait of idealised femininity, such as "sexual passivity" "and nurturing maternal love" (Holt, 2005, p. 3; Wrye, 2009).

In this sense, silence can be perceived as a sign of passivity and subordination. Both traits are part of Connell's concept of emphasized femininity, which suggests that women can be easily forced into a subordinate role to men if women are both passive and silent (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Thus, passivity and silence are often perceived as being traits of idealised femininity to which women must conform and this serves to further strengthen hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity, ensuring male domination (Irigaray, 1996, p. 84). However, this definition of silence is not entirely applicable to Jodi's use of silence with Todd. Silence as passivity suggests that Jodi was completely powerless and lacking agency, when in fact, her use of silence was a conscious decision on her part to counter Todd's behaviour with a masquerade where she feigned ignorance. As Valdrè (2017) notes, there is indeed a "reversal", where "the feminine silence that from a residual of submission becomes an instrument of authority and power" as "[s]ilence was her signature during her twenty years with Todd" (p. 54).

However, silence in hegemonic masculinity differs from how it is interpreted as a trait in femininity. Where silence is associated with passivity in women, in men, silence is associated with inexpressiveness and masking true emotions in order to wield power in their relationships (Sattel, 1976). Thus, silence for men is not about remaining passive but rather a weapon that can be used to dominate. According to Jack Sattel (1976), silence in men signals inexpressiveness and it "empirically emerges as an intentional manipulation of a situation when threats to the male position occur" and silence is used to "guard his own position" (p. 474). Essentially, remaining silent can also be a defiant act that is meant to protect oneself and maintain one's power within a relationship

(Sattel, 1976). In terms of Jodi's use of silence, this definition is more accurate. Therefore, Jodi's use of silence can be interpreted as an adoption of normative masculine behaviour, making her expression of femininity a pariah femininity as it includes a trait of hegemonic masculinity. In addition, Jodi's use of silence is not an effort to remain subordinate nor passive, but to actively avoid a discussion where Todd would have the opportunity to manipulate her, therefore it is an attempt to retain some power while trying to control Todd's behaviour:

> Jodi's great gift is her silence, and [Todd] has always loved this about her … but silence is also her weapon. The woman who refuses to object, who doesn't yell and scream — there's strength in that, and power. The way she overrides sentiment, won't enter into blaming or bickering, never gives him an opening, doesn't allow him to turn it back on her. She knows that her refusal leaves him alone with his choices. (Harrison, 2013, p. 106)

Todd recognised that Jodi's silence was an attempt at retaining her power within their marriage, by not allowing him "an opening" (pp. 106, 23-25). He noted that Jodi had always used silence as a weapon against him and that their marriage had been filled with "the stubborn pretence, the chasms of silence, the blind forging ahead", to the point that silence had become a normal feature of their relationship (p. 106). Apart from being weaponised, silence also played a key role in maintaining their masquerades. Todd actively participated in their masquerade of the 'perfect marriage', noting the importance of "dissimulation" to them, resulting in them simply "go[ing] through the motions" and actively ignoring their marital issues: "Act as if all is well and all *will* be well" (p. 106).

Despite allowing their marriage to continue under false pretences, Jodi's use of silence served to alienate them from each other and forced her to suffer alone. While Todd was aware of how his actions and Jodi's subsequent silence made her suffer, he readily took advantage of the silence to continue to engage in extra-marital affairs.

While within this situation she still possessed less power than Todd and was forced to sacrifice her beliefs to accommodate his behaviour, Jodi was able to present a stoic façade (a normative masculine behaviour), allowing both of them to engage in a masquerade where they were the 'perfect wife' and the 'perfect husband' in the 'perfect marriage'. The performance of this masquerade was both for their benefit and for those outside their marriage as maintaining this pretence was vital for both of them (p. 23). This does not mean that Jodi did not engage in other tactics to punish Todd. She routinely used passive-aggressive methods to subtly punish him, circumventing any direct confrontations or accountability for his actions. These tactics included throwing his phone into a lake, ruining his laundry and ensuring that he routinely misplaced his belongings. While she was deeply ashamed of "these misdemeanors" as she believed herself to be a wife who was accepting of Todd "for who he [was]" and would not blame him for his behaviour "after going into it with open eyes", she felt that she could "[count] her transgressions as slight compared with the liberties that he freely takes" (p. 25). Her other, more serious punishments for him included poisoning Todd with Natasha's sleeping pills upon learning of their affair (pp. 95-101). Despite knowing that such passive-aggressive tactics were largely ineffective in solving her problems, she nevertheless engaged in them as she placed much of the blame for his behaviour and the state of their marriage

upon herself (pp. 25, 78). Thus, while she resolutely remained silent and seemingly unaware of Todd's transgressions, Jodi's need to seek revenge pushed her to engage in passive-aggressive tactics in a somewhat successful attempt to cope with her feelings of anger and betrayal.

Jodi's inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour led to her weaponisation of silence as a means to protect herself and her marriage from the damage caused by Todd's transgressions and to regain some measure of agency for herself that she had lost by sacrificing her ideals to remain in her marriage with Todd. While this strategy only alienated Jodi and Todd from each other, giving Todd free reign to continue his damaging behaviour without censure, the continued silence allowed both of them to engage in a masquerade of the 'perfect wife' and the 'perfect husband' in the 'perfect marriage'. This pretence was beneficial to both, but especially to Jodi, as it allowed her to maintain a semblance of normalcy within their relationship and give the appearance of conforming to gender norms to avoid censure. Therefore, while Jodi weaponised silence as a strategy to invert normative feminine and masculine behaviour to regain some of her agency, it was also a feature of her masquerade. However, although used in conjunction with masquerade, weaponising silence did not help Jodi regain her agency and only provided her with the illusion that she had any power within their relationship, as Todd was still freely engaging in his emotional abuse while Jodi continued to make many sacrifices. Unfortunately, employing silence in a stereotypically masculine way against Todd failed to help Jodi regain her agency and only led to further victimisation of herself.

5.4   Recognising Victimhood

This is the fourth strategy employed by Jodi. Upon her realisation that her attempts at mending their relationship were unsuccessful, made clearer by Todd's decision to leave her and marry Natasha, Jodi had to finally come to terms with her position as Todd's victim and recognise that she was powerless within her marriage. This led to her attempts to further engage in gender performance to salvage her marriage, enacting hyperfemininity to do so. However, this strategy failed to achieve her goals and she was forced to search for an alternative solution to her financial troubles arising from Todd's abandonment.

This section discusses how Jodi recognised her victimhood. The first subsection explores her attempts at salvaging their marriage by engaging in gender performance to remind Todd of her worth and attempt to make him feel nostalgic of their time together, in the hopes that this would convince Todd to abandon his idea of marrying Natasha. The second subsection analyses how Jodi subscribed to the 'whore-virgin complex' and how this affected her attitude towards Natasha. It also discusses how Natasha is portrayed within the novel and how Todd's relationship with Natasha and her conformity to gender norms affected his marriage with Jodi. I also examine how the dichotomy of 'the whore' and 'the virgin' of true crime narratives affects Jodi and Natasha's portrayals to understand the types of femininities and masculinities they exhibit.

5.4.1   Attempts at Reconciliation

While Jodi employed the strategies of gender performance, masquerade and inversion of normative feminine and masculine, all three were unsuccessful in helping her solve the issues within their marriage. Jodi's powerlessness in the face of Todd's enactment of hypermasculinity resigned her to the position of reluctant victim and this realisation led Jodi to feelings of despair. Her recognition of her own victimhood was not the result of self-reflection, but rather an observation made by her friend, Alison. It is Alison who also provided Jodi with a plan that would not only succeed in exacting Jodi's revenge upon Todd and Natasha, but also providing a solution to her financial troubles caused by Todd's abandonment (pp. 231-232, 234-237). She realised that this plan would allow her to finally punish Todd for all the emotional abuse to which he had subjected her. This included his countless infidelities throughout the years, all of which can be considered emotional abuse as these were direct rejections of Jodi as a partner. She also lamented that she had had to make many compromises and sacrifices to save their marriage and suffered as a result:

> She feels that in killing him off she killed off parts of herself
> as well. But at heart she knows that those parts perished long
> ago—the parts that were guileless and trusting, whole-hearted
> and devout. (p. 300)

Jodi's realisation of her powerlessness in their marriage became more apparent to her following Todd's weekend trip with Natasha. His announcement that he would be leaving Jodi to marry Natasha was a devastating blow to Jodi, leaving her angry, disappointed and betrayed, but also with major financial ruin as she was expected to vacate their shared home to accommodate Todd's new family. Following his announcement that he would be leaving Jodi for Natasha,

Jodi's first attempt at reconciliation was to remind him of their shared life together, hoping that the nostalgia and the comfort of their years together would make him reconsider his choice to marry Natasha (pp. 172-179). As mentioned in Section 5.2.2 of this chapter, Jodi was aware of the importance of home to Todd and used this knowledge to manipulate him and save their marriage. Thus, she invited him to their shared apartment for dinner, and, instead of treating him as a guest to her home now that he was living with Natasha instead of her, she resorted to their usual dinnertime routine (pp. 172-179):

> She's intentionally giving the occasion a commonplace twist. This is not something that can happen only once, not a special event but a staple, something to be repeated. She wants them to go on as usual, behave as if nothing has changed, making him dinner is part of ordinary life, and routine pleasures have always been her mainstay, the crux of her happiness, the themes of her existence. A bottle of wine, a home-made meal, the delights of the domicile, predictable diversions, dependable comforts. (pp. 174-175)

However, Jodi's tactic was unsuccessful and did not result in Todd ending his relationship with Natasha. Instead, she received an eviction notice from Todd's lawyer, which led to Jodi's realisation that her marriage had truly ended with no chance of reconciliation, pushing her into a depression (pp. 190-193, 200-203). It is at this point that Jodi realised that she was a victim and had been powerless against Todd's abuse during much of their marriage, despite her use of the strategies of gender performance, masquerade and weaponisation of silence. Her realisation only made her feel more despondent, knowing that she

still remained powerless against Todd (pp. 202-203, 217-222). Jodi's initial reaction to her recognition of her role as the victim was to numb herself to pain with the use of alcohol (pp. 202-203, 217-222). It was her friend Alison's involvement that stopped Jodi's downward spiral and allowed Jodi to realise that she could remain the victim or assert herself by punishing Todd for the injustices to which he had subjected her (pp. 231-232, 234-237). Therefore, the plan to murder Todd gave Jodi hope to overcome her victimhood by punishing Todd for his emotional abuse while simultaneously solving her financial issues.

5.4.2   The 'Whore-Virgin Complex'

Despite Jodi's feminist beliefs, she resorted to the 'whore-virgin complex' to disparage Natasha Kovacs, Todd's new wife-to-be, perceiving the latter as the 'whore' (The 'whore-virgin complex' is discussed in Section 2.8 of Chapter Two.). With having met Natasha when she was a child in her rebellious stage, Jodi constructed her view of Natasha based wholly on this, picturing her as a "wild" child (p. 112). Upon meeting the adult Natasha, Jodi's perception did not change and she described Natasha as being "sensual" (p. 297). The manner in which Jodi chose to describe both child and adult Natasha closely aligns with the stereotype of the 'whore' due to its sexual connotations:

> Jodi remembers [Natasha as a child] with black lipstick and spiky hair, a potbelly and chewed fingernails. It's hard to imagine that she's grown up to be in any way attractive. (p. 112)

> [Upon seeing adult Natasha] Aside from being taller and out of pigtails she looks much the same; her features had that swollen, sensual cast even in childhood. (p. 297)

By sexualising both the adult and child Natasha, Jodi perceived Natasha as the 'whore', and therefore exhibiting a pariah femininity that threatened traditional family values. In using words with subtle sexual connotations to describe Natasha, Jodi placed herself on the opposite end from the 'whore', and as someone exhibiting a more traditional and accepted form of femininity, such as hegemonic femininity (Schippers, 2007).

Natasha as the 'whore' is further exemplified by her portrayal as a sexually promiscuous woman, with Todd describing her as being "desirable and insatiable" (Harrison, p. 35), again making references to her sexuality and promiscuity:

> the way she let it all hang out—breasts rising from their moorings, navel ring winking, hair tumbling—and the way she liked to posture by deepening her lumbar curve till it bowed out her torso. (p. 62)

Thus, through her behaviour and her sexual appetite, Natasha is perceived by Todd and Jodi as being a wholly sexual being. Natasha's expression of femininity as a sexually promiscuous young woman, while being a deviant and undesired feminine trait (therefore, not a trait of hegemonic femininity), is ultimately not considered a pariah femininity because she does not threaten Todd's hegemonic masculinity through her expression of hyperfemininity.

While Jodi recognised that Todd was responsible for destroying their relationship, she found it difficult to place much blame on him initially, and thus resorted to placing blame on Natasha for ruining her marriage. This led Jodi to view Natasha as competition, despite telling herself that Natasha was "not a *force*. Not to be *reckoned* with" (p. 112). Comparing herself to Natasha in this way provided Jodi a source of comfort as it allowed her to convince herself that her marriage was not at risk: "Todd has no intention of marrying this girl. … Todd is in it for the short term" (p. 112).

Despite making Natasha out to be an antagonist and a 'whore', Jodi also believed that Todd was acting like a predator, as Natasha was more than twenty years younger than him and she knew that, more than anything else, Todd enjoyed the attention he received from a young and attractive woman, which boosted his ego (pp. 111-112, 136): "What Todd is drawn to is her youth, a girl half his age taking an interest in him" (p. 112). Thus, she also pitied Natasha and believed that she was a victim of Todd's predatory nature:

> Todd is the one at fault here. … Shame on him for picking on
> this child, so naive and spiteful, so desperately insecure. Todd
> can be insensitive, but how can he string the girl along so
> heartlessly, his best friend's daughter, too. (p. 136)

Jodi's firm belief that Todd was taking advantage of Natasha and her relative inexperience lessened her feelings of hatred towards the younger woman, which in turn allowed her to recognise that Todd was the true villain in her story. However, these realisations did not make Jodi act hospitably towards

Natasha, instead directing her anger at the difficult situation Todd had put her in and her own regret at rejecting Todd's past marriage proposals at Natasha:

> [to Natasha] "Your father … says you're bright, too, but I have to tell you that I'm not getting that impression, based on the choices you're making. Based on where you seem to be headed in your life.
>
> "Anyway the point is that none of this is really my problem, and I don't like you or care about you enough to try to help you" (p. 136)

Although she realised that Natasha may have been a victim of the much older Todd's predatory nature, Jodi remained unwilling to help her, perceiving her solely as a threat to her marriage and her own emotional and financial stability.

Unlike Jodi, Natasha subscribed to traditional gender norms and conformed to traditional ideals of femininity (hegemonic femininity) with her desire to become a wife and mother. In fact, Natasha's enthusiasm for conforming to patriarchal gender norms was one of the reasons Todd decided to marry her as she was finally offering him the 'traditional' family life that he desired but that Jodi had rejected:

> [Natasha] hasn't thought about a career; what she would like to do is get married and start a family. Apropos of this she has told him that he'd make an excellent father. (p. 39)

> [Natasha]'s also a born mother, a nurturing type who wants a big family, and [Todd] likes that, can just about imagine himself as a patriarch, the benevolent head of a brood of boys and girls in staggered sizes. … When his boys are old enough he'll teach them the trades, … his accumulated knowledge passed on and not gone to waste. It's a different one from the life he's been leading [with Jodi], and in many ways it appeals to him. (p. 126)

Natasha's willingness to conform to gender norms and her enactment of hegemonic femininity put her in stark contrast with Jodi, who was unwilling to conform to gender norms and as a result, enacted a pariah femininity. While Natasha is often portrayed as the 'whore' due to her romantic relationship with a married man and her sexual promiscuity, thus exhibiting a somewhat deviant femininity, her femininity ultimately is not categorised as a pariah femininity as she is gender-conforming and her femininity did not threaten Todd's masculinity nor the patriarchy. Her young age, her relative sexual inexperience in comparison with Todd and Todd's relationship with Natasha's father (as his best friend) make Natasha the subordinate figure to Todd's dominance, while also making Todd seeking out a relationship with the young woman a predatory act, thereby making Natasha a victim. While Natasha had some advantages over Todd in their relationship due to his insecurities of being significantly older than her, she never directly nor indirectly threatened Todd's masculinity by enacting masculinity herself, instead she enacted a hyperfemininity she knew he preferred, thereby contributing to her own sexual objectification. Thus, Todd was able to exhibit his hegemonic and toxic masculinity with Natasha without

being challenged while, with Jodi, his insecurities made him feel as if his masculinity was threatened.

5.5   Violence

This is the fifth and final strategy within the theoretical framework. With the failure of the other four strategies, Jodi was forced into shedding her victimhood and regaining her agency through the use of violence, by arranging to have Todd murdered. While her acts of violence were retaliations against Todd's acts of violence, his economic abuse left her with little recourse but to eliminate him, thereby relieving her of her financial issues. Although she devised her plan to murder Todd while struggling with her position as the victim, her choice to engage in violence was a last resort, as the other strategies had failed to help her shed her victimhood and regain her agency.

This section explores how Jodi employed violence as a strategy in her attempts to shed her victimhood and regain her lost agency within her marriage. The first subsection includes an analysis of the types of violence Jodi and Todd engaged in, attempting to understand whether violence is gendered within the novel and how female and male violence are portrayed. The second subsection discusses Jodi's process of arranging Todd's murder, exploring the premeditated nature of the murder and how she grappled with her guilt. In the third subsection, I attempt to identify whether Jodi can be categorised as a heroine, an anti-heroine or a villainess.

5.5.1   *The Gendering of Violence*

The violence that Jodi and Todd engaged in were almost always emotional violence, with the exception of Todd's murder. It is important to note that all of Jodi's emotional violence directed at Todd was the direct result of Todd's extra-marital affairs. Thus, it was Todd's actions that precipitated their marital conflicts and Jodi's acts of violence were in response to Todd's abuse. In terms of their violence, it is bidirectional, with both engaging in varying types and levels of violence against each other, with Jodi's acts of violence being in response to Todd's. Therefore, her passive aggressive tactics (emotional violence) were in response to Todd's infidelities (emotional violence) and her decision to poison and murder Todd (physical violence) was in response to him planning to marry his mistress (emotional violence) and his efforts to evict her and cut off financial support (economic abuse).

Todd's extra-marital affairs can be interpreted as emotional abuse as infidelity is a rejection of the partner. Todd's affairs were an expression of his toxic hegemonic masculinity and while it reinforced his masculinity to himself and to society, it only served to victimise Jodi as she was rejected as a partner. After Jodi's arguments with Todd about his affairs did nothing to change his behaviour, Jodi began to excuse his infidelities by claiming that this was who Todd was (pp. 149-150), justifying his behaviour:

> Cheaters prosper; many of them do. And even if they don't
> they are not going to change, because, as a rule, people don't
> change (p. 24) … To a cheater it makes sense to be living a

double life and talking out of both sides of your mouth at the

same time. (p. 25)

Despite her justifications for Todd's transgressions, she could not excuse his ultimate betrayal of deciding to marry Natasha, abandoning Jodi and leaving her in financial trouble. The fact that Jodi's censuring of his behaviour failed to stop his infidelities and that he gleaned pleasure from the thrill of engaging in affairs proved that he consistently put his own desires above Jodi's, despite being aware of the harm he was causing. This also suggests that, while his emotional violence was not intentional at the beginning, his lack of respect for Jodi's feelings were signs of further emotional violence.

In addition, he also subjected her to economic abuse when he ordered for her credit cards to be cancelled without notifying her and for arranging her eviction from their shared home (pp. 247, 189-192). While these actions were legal in their state as common law marriages were not recognised, his choice to not notify her and allow her to make prior arrangements could be considered unethical. His awareness of Jodi's financial situation meant that he also knew that she would not be able to adequately support herself without his financial support, which makes his actions further unjust, and can be categorised as economic abuse (pp. 197-198). His attitude towards her and her financial situation was also callous, ignoring her support for his business in the early stages of their marriage, when she helped him reduce household costs:

The law says that he owes Jodi nothing, that she is nothing

more than an ex-girlfriend whose free ride is now over (p. 186)

It'll do her good to take her profession more seriously, take

herself more seriously. Maybe she'll even get a real job (pp.

197-198)

While both Jodi and Todd engaged in acts of violence against each other, they did not engage in types of violence/abuse that would leave visible scars as it was important to both of them to maintain the pretence of the perfect marriage: "the point is that the pretense, the all-important pretense must be maintained, the illusion that everything is fine and nothing is the matter" (pp. 23-24, 106). For this masquerade to succeed, Jodi and Todd constantly employed various tactics that helped them avoid discussing their marital problems. Jodi engaged in passive aggressive tactics to inconvenience Todd to punish him for his extra-marital affairs without drawing attention to the fact that she was indeed punishing him, and considered "her own transgressions as slight compared with the liberties that he freely takes" (p. 25). While she was "not proud of these misdemeanors", she justified her actions by claiming that Todd's behaviour was far worse than hers (p. 25). In addition, she weaponised silence against Todd, actively avoiding further confrontations, simultaneously closing any avenues for discussion while not allowing Todd to provide her with excuses for his actions. Despite Jodi's use of silence also being a coping mechanism to protect herself from Todd's abuse, she inadvertently provided him with the opportunity to continue his affairs ("She knows that her refusal [to discuss their marital issues] leaves him alone with his choices") (p. 106).

Todd interpreted this as an opportunity for him to continue his affairs despite being aware of Jodi's views, claiming that "her silence leaves him alone with his choices", leaving him free to do as he wished (p. 106). Using her silence

on the topic of his affairs, he engaged in circumlocution, lying by omission and outright lying to continue his infidelities, knowing that Jodi would not question him further. For example, when he had planned a weekend getaway with Natasha, he told Jodi that he was going on a fishing trip: "Todd doesn't go on fishing trips, and as far as she knows neither do any of the guys. She understands immediately—there's no doubt in her mind—that he's using the term "fishing trip" euphemistically" (pp. 13-14). Being aware that Jodi knew that he was using the fishing trip as code for his affairs, he bought her a gift: "He often gives her presents and she loves this about him, but she loves it less when the presents are meant to placate her" (pp. 14-15).

It is evident Todd's extra-marital affairs precipitated their conflicts. Jodi's dislike of confrontations, her choice to stay with Todd despite knowing that he would never change and her use of silence as a coping mechanism all led to her choice to engage in passive aggressive tactics, and even to poisoning him, to punish Todd as she had no other means to punish him for his abuse. Therefore, Jodi's violence was in response to Todd's acts of emotional and economic violence. While this suggests that Todd is responsible for much of the violence that is within the novel, Jodi's attempts to poison him and her final act of violence against Todd (his murder) means that Jodi is also responsible for an egregious amount of violence. However, the severity of her crime does not absolve Todd of his emotional violence as he emotionally abused Jodi for almost the entire duration of his twenty-year relationship with her and engaged in economic abuse following their separation. Thus, within this novel, much of the violence is committed by Todd while the more serious crime (according to the law) is committed by Jodi. This complicates discussions of whether violence is

gendered within the novel. However, considering that Todd engaged in emotional violence towards Jodi for almost twenty years with Jodi engaging in passive aggressive tactics against him for almost the same duration as him, and with Todd subjecting Jodi to economic abuse after their separation, the violence in the novel up until before Todd's murder is mostly male. Considering Jodi's murder of Todd and the premeditated nature of the murder, the violence within *The Silent Wife* is not inherently gendered, with both the female and male protagonists engaging in acts of violence of varying types and levels of severity. Although, it is important to note that it is the female protagonist (Jodi) who committed the more serious act of violence (murder) that permanently silenced her male abuser (Todd).

5.5.2   *Murder by Proxy*

While Jodi was directly responsible for Todd's murder (by giving Alison the permission to arrange it, then collecting the required finances for the payment by quietly selling her valuable items online and then planning an alibi for herself), she was able to maintain some distance from the criminal act as she had not been the one to fatally shoot Todd (pp. 245-248, 262-263). Due to this distance, she was able to justify her violence and rationalise that the murder had not been brutal and had been necessary. In her initial reluctance to accept responsibility, she had attempted to blame Alison for her suggestion that Todd's death would solve Jodi's problems and that it could be easily arranged (pp. 230, 234-236). While she later accepted that she was equally, or even more, responsible than Alison for Todd's murder, she initially displaced much of the

blame onto Alison due to her guilt, claiming that she had been "under duress" (p. 230) and thus had not been able to think rationally:

> In retrospect she'd like to say that it was all Alison's doing, … Still, she has to allow that she was under duress. … Alison's way of talking about it was so offhand that Jodi's alarm bells never sounded. (p. 230)

It is also evident that Jodi was capitalising on Alison's dominant personality and her taking charge of the situation to avoid taking responsibility for her role in Todd's murder (pp. 234-236):

> The beauty of it is that there is no point at which she has to make a decision. She is not required to decide, for example, if she can overcome her reservations, work herself into enough of a rage, do the deed in cold blood, cope with consequences.
>
> …
>
> Jodi is captivated by this alternate world in which her problems simply disappear, not just the immediate problem of keeping her home intact, but the prospective problems as well—the problem of putting Natasha in her place, the problem of the endless days ahead and living through them as Todd continues to eat, sleep, and fornicate in another part of town. (p. 236)

Despite Jodi's reluctance to take responsibility for her actions, she sought guidance from Alison to arrange Todd's murder and make the necessary

preparations (finances required to pay for the crime and Jodi's alibi), thus playing an active role in Todd's murder (pp. 234, 235, 236). Having the end goal of solving her impending financial crisis and punishing Todd and Natasha provided her a sense of purpose, motivating her to methodically make the necessary arrangements (pp. 235-237). However, despite her delight at finding a solution to her problems, she made a conscious effort to not focus on the end result of the plan while she made these arrangements:

> All she has to do is collect her money; she doesn't have to think about what the money is for. (p. 246)

> she hasn't thought about why she's here or what could be going on back home. Forgetting is easy (p. 263)

Her guilt at preparing to commit what she knew was an illegal and immoral act led her to attempting to block out what she wanted to achieve at the end from her mind. In her attempts to ignore the severity of her actions, she kept up the pretence of being powerless as if she had set in motion a plan that could not be stopped. This was a tactic she used to justify her willingness to allow the plan to continue while avoiding responsibility for it (247-248).

She was also forced to re-evaluate herself and her perception of herself as a good person, and as she could not reconcile this new violent Jodi with her image of herself, she opted to engage in a masquerade to hide her violent opportunistic behaviour from herself. Part of this included her ignoring and actively blocking out her actions from her mind, even choosing to manipulate facts and incidents to make her masquerade more realistic to herself (p. 321). This masquerade allowed Jodi to avoid accepting responsibility for her active

role in Todd's murder, and displacing blame onto Alison gave Jodi the space to continue to believe that she was a good person: "But Alison saw and exploited this Jodi" (pp. 311-312).

Later on, upon being forced to admit to herself that she was fully responsible for Todd's murder, Jodi was filled with self-disgust and attempted to rationalise her actions by telling herself that it had to be done under the circumstances and that Todd had deserved punishment for his abuse (p. 280). However, her recognition that she was immoral changed her, and that, in committing the necessary act of eliminating and punishing Todd, she had lost herself too:

> over the passing days she comes to feel appalled by what she's gone and done, unable to grasp how it could have happened. (p. 299)

> She feels that in killing him off she killed off parts of herself as well. (p. 300)

Despite her belief that Todd deserved punishment, Jodi was not prepared to take responsibility for her active role in his murder. Having considered herself a 'good' person throughout their relationship, her role in Todd's murder forced her to re-examine herself and reconcile with her immorality. Unprepared to tackle with this reality, Jodi resorted to engaging in a masquerade that hid her proclivity for evil from herself and displacing the blame onto Alison and the men who killed Todd, hoping that this would absolve her of guilt. This masquerade also allowed her to avoid attracting suspicion from the police and others around her, even consciously engaging in a gender performance as the grieving wife

(pp. 274-326). However, while this masquerade was successful in fooling others and initially successful in assuaging her guilt, later, she was forced to accept that her actions had been "narcissistic" (p. 310).

5.5.3   Jodi: Heroine, Anti-Heroine or Villainess?

Jodi's acts of violence and her non-conformity to gender norms means that she cannot be labelled as a heroine and can only be categorised as either an anti-heroine or a villainess.

While Jodi actively rebelled against gender norms by eschewing traditional norms for women by not getting married, not having children, pursuing her education and working part-time, thereby making her femininity a pariah femininity, she also engaged in hyperfemininity as a mask to satisfy Todd by complementing his hypermasculinity/hegemonic masculinity. By doing so, she did not fully conform to gender norms but only gave the impression that she conformed to some of the societal expectations of women, which was a clear manipulation of gender norms. Her manipulation of these norms is excused somewhat due to her efforts to placate Todd and to ensure that she engaged in gender performance and masquerade to satisfy him. Therefore, while her upholding patriarchal values by catering to Todd's needs by engaging in hyperfemininity for him would classify her as a heroine, her manipulation of patriarchal values and flouting of gender norms in other parts of her life would place her in the category of the anti-heroine.

It is important to note that all of Jodi's violence, from her emotional violence (passive aggressive tactics and tendency for ledger-keeping) and her

physical violence (poisoning and later murdering Todd) were in response to his acts of emotional and economic violence. In terms of the abuse she faced from Todd, her anger and actions were somewhat justified and her subsequent violence against him could have her categorised as an anti-heroine who was seeking justice for crimes committed against her. As the law provided no recourse for her, her actions could be considered as attempting to get retribution for the injustices she faced and for punishing Todd for treating her as no more than a drain on his finances now that he was set to marry Natasha. Therefore, Jodi's success in getting retribution indicates that she is "a modern anti-heroine instead of a character who has been relegated to defeat" (Valdrè, 2017, p. 54).

However, despite Jodi's abhorrence of her crime, the abuse she was subjected to by him made her feel vindictive, a trait that would have her labelled as a villainess. Following the announcements that he had begun the process to evict her from their shared home and the cancellation of her credit cards, she felt that she had no other option but to eliminate the source of her troubles, both financial and emotional, by killing Todd: "The pros and cons no longer count. The options have run out. Survival is what's now on the table." (p. 236).

It is significant that Jodi's willingness to commit murder was primarily because she was financially inconvenienced, and this would place her in the category of the female villain as she was willing to commit murder to prevent her from having to move out of her home and have to fend for herself. Instead, seeking retribution for the humiliation she faced due to Todd's actions and "putting Natasha in her place" were secondary concerns and positive side effects of murdering Todd (p. 236).

In addition, she found that she wished Todd had suffered more, to make up for the all the abuse he had committed against her. While her vindictive thoughts here would place her in the category of the villainess, her anger and frustration at Todd "[getting] off scot-free" were justifiable, considering his abuse during their twenty-year relationship (p. 281):

> She finds now that she wants very much for him to have seen it coming. … That he registered the truth, understood it as her doing, saw that he'd brought it on himself. (p. 280)

> She would like to believe that in death he'll be forced to face up to things, that even now he's reflecting on his wrongdoings, … But she can't dismiss the feeling that he has somehow managed to escape, has finagled things so he gets off scot-free, as always. (p. 281)

Jodi was victimised by Todd for almost the entire duration of their marriage due to his countless infidelities, his refusal to change his behaviour despite being aware of Jodi's feelings about his infidelities, abandoning her for Natasha and subjecting Jodi to economic abuse. Considering her position as a victim, this complicates the question of whether she is an anti-heroine or a villainess. Her constant battles against gender norms and manipulations of gender norms and the patriarchy through her attempts to satisfy Todd by engaging in hyperfemininity, would all categorise her as an anti-heroine. Furthermore, her position as the victim and her search for vengeance for Todd's abuse would categorise her as an anti-heroine. Despite these factors, Jodi can be considered a villainess due to her primary reason for murdering Todd: to

safeguard her home and financial situation, thus a pragmatic motivation. Punishing Todd and Natasha for the humiliation she had had to endure were merely additional benefits. Therefore, even within a feminist framework, despite being a victim who was justified in seeking retribution, Jodi is classified as a villainess.

5.6   Conclusion

The following chart provides a chronology of events in the novel and demonstrates the ways in which Jodi utilised the five strategies provided in the theoretical framework to cope with her victimhood and to regain agency:

During Courtship and After Moving in Together	• Gender Performance of hyperfemininity • Hyperfemininity as a mask (Masquerade)

• Jodi's realisation that Todd would not stop his affairs despite their many confrontations about his infidelities

Maintain Normalcy in Marriage to Avoid Separation	• Gender Performance • Hyperfemininity as a mask (Masquerade) • Inversion of Normative Feminine and Masculine Behaviour (silence as a weapon)

• Unable to confront Todd about his infidelities, Jodi resorted to passive aggressive tactics to inconvenience Todd to satisfy her anger and frustration
• Todd leaving Jodi for Natasha

Attempts at Reconciliation	• Gender Performance of hyperfemininity

• When she is served with an eviction notice, she realised that her attempts at reconciliation would not be successful

Plan to Murder Todd	• Gender Performance • Hyperfemininity as a mask (Masquerade)

• Using the conference as an alibi while the hired assassins murder Todd

Violence	• Gender Performance • Hyperfemininty as a mask (Masquerade) • Physical violence (murder)

Figure 5: Jodi's Use of the Five Strategies

Despite Jodi's efforts to avoid suffering from her mother's fate, her relationship with Todd reflected her parents' marriage. While Jodi did not conform to gender norms in terms of becoming a housewife and mother, and pursued higher education while working part-time, thereby marking her as exhibiting a pariah femininity, she did conform to some gender norms, especially within her marriage to Todd. In her attempts to satisfy him and to compensate

for the fact that she did not want to marry and have children as Todd wanted to, their compromise was for her to play the role of the 'perfect wife'. By enacting this role, Jodi was engaging in a gender performance of hyperfemininity and this hyperfemininity also served as a mask to hide her true self from Todd, society and herself, to satisfy Todd and ensure that they would not separate. Her masquerade and gender performance became even more vital in maintaining a semblance of normalcy within their marriage while Todd engaged in extra-marital affairs. Thus, it is evident that Todd's hypermasculinity limited his and Jodi's gender expressions. Her being forced to engage in a hyperfemininity to complement Todd's hypermasculinity resulted in Jodi having to constantly engage in gender performance and masquerade. However, these two strategies failed to address the cause of Jodi's victimisation.

Therefore, Jodi employed silence as a weapon against Todd in an attempt to redress the power imbalance within their marriage and to regain her agency. While silence and passive aggressive behaviour is often associated with femininity, the ways in which Jodi employed silence were masculine in nature. Her weaponisation of silence was not an attempt to be passive nor subordinate. Instead, she remained inexpressive, using silence as a protective mechanism, which allowed her to have some measure of power within the relationship. However, her use of silence as a weapon made her femininity a pariah femininity as she was adopting a normative masculine behaviour and employed it against Todd. While this strategy had the intended result of not allowing Todd more opportunities to make excuses and allowed Jodi to control the conversation about his infidelities, Todd interpreted her silence as an opportunity for him to continue

his affairs without censure. Thus, this strategy ultimately failed in terms of Jodi regaining her agency.

Upon realising that the strategy of weaponising silence was not effective and learning of Todd's desire to end their marriage, Jodi finally recognised that she was a victim of his emotional violence. When her renewed attempts at engaging in gender performance (hyperfemininity) with Todd failed to convince him that their marriage was worth saving, and she was subjected to economic abuse instead, Jodi was forced to recognise her victimhood. It is at this point that she, with Alison's help, crafted the plan to murder Todd, thereby solving her financial issues, with the added benefit of punishing Todd and Natasha for the humiliation that she had faced. This plan allowed her to shed her victimhood and regain her agency when the previous strategies had failed.

While both Jodi and Todd engaged in violence against each other, Todd's violence precipitated Jodi's violence. Therefore, Jodi's acts of emotional violence were in retaliation to Todd's emotional violence while his murder was in response to his emotional and economic abuse. Although being subjected to Todd's violence does not absolve Jodi of her crimes, the fact that the state and patriarchy did not offer her any recourse from Todd's violence suggests that Jodi's anger was justified as she was forced into the role of the victim with no means of regaining agency other than by eliminating her abuser. It is Todd's death that allowed her to shed her victimhood and regain her agency as she had permanently silenced her male abuser. Despite her liberation from her abuser, she is classified as a villainess as her primary motivation for murdering Todd was to end her financial troubles. Thus, while Jodi conformed to certain gender norms, she exhibited a pariah femininity by challenging men and masculinity.

Jodi did not use the five strategies in a linear fashion to achieve her goals, instead employed them as and when she deemed necessary to mend her relationship with Todd. However, despite her efforts, only the strategy of violence proved to be effective in shedding her victimhood and regaining her agency as Todd's continued violence of twenty years and the law offering her no protection or recourse left her powerless. In shedding her victimhood and regaining her agency, Jodi not only punished Todd for his transgressions and eliminated his agency, thereby making him her victim (making her the perpetrator), she also succeeded in permanently silencing her abuser. Therefore, she not only found a practical solution to her financial issues but was also successful in finding justice for herself. However, despite her position as the victim, she is still classified as a villainess, as her primary motivation for punishing Todd was pragmatic. All these factors categorised Jodi as exhibiting a pariah femininity, and thus a threat to men, masculinity and the patriarchy. Although she did regain her agency, her choice to murder Todd, despite being borne out of powerlessness, changed her forever, and failed to bring her femininity closer to being accepted within the patriarchal framework as she continued to flout gender norms. Therefore, while she was successful in silencing her abuser to regain her agency, she was still not free to exhibit her true femininity.

Chapter Six – Masquerading as the 'Perfect Woman': Performative

Femininities in Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*

6.1   Introduction

This chapter includes the analysis of the three female protagonists (Rachel Watson, Anna Watson and Megan Hipwell) of Paula Hawkins' 2015 domestic noir novel *The Girl on the Train* and focusses on how they dealt with conflicts with their male counterparts by employing the five strategies of masquerade, gender performance, inversion of feminine and masculine behaviour, recognising their victimhood and violence. Employing the theoretical framework in Chapter 3, this chapter investigates how Rachel, Anna and Megan employed varying coping mechanisms to counteract the abuse to which they were subjected to shed their victimhood and eventually regain their agency. This chapter addresses the research objectives.

Unlike the two previous texts, this novel features three female protagonists, and the events in the novel are revealed through their perspectives from different timelines, with Megan's chapters set in the past, before her death (Hawkins, 2015). However, similar to the previous novels, Hawkins offers an unreliable narrator in Rachel Watson, an alcoholic who regularly spied on Megan Hipwell and allegedly stalked Anna Watson and her husband Tom (Rachel's ex-husband). The novel is a whodunit, with Rachel attempting to discover Megan's murderer, becoming increasingly involved in the murder investigation, which drives much of the plot. One of domestic noir's best known and most prominent examples, *The Girl on the Train* offers different types of

femininities and masculinities in its three female protagonists and their male counterparts, demonstrating the flawed nature of traditional notions of femininity and masculinity. The novel also focusses on the importance of marriage and motherhood to women and challenges notions of femininity, gender norms, marriage, female victimhood and female violence. Like *Gone Girl*, *The Girl on the Train* explores how the media and the pervasive true crime narrative negatively influence gender construction and how these mould society's perceptions of female worth and female victimhood.

Hawkins' novel follows the lives of three women: Rachel Watson, Anna Watson and Megan Hipwell and is set in England (Hawkins, 2015). Rachel's marriage to Tom Watson had ended due to her alcoholism. Her drinking had also led to her unemployment and had allegedly caused her to harass Tom after their divorce, although she could never recall these incidents. Later, Tom married Anna Watson, with whom he had an affair while still married to Rachel, and together they have a young daughter (Evie). Anna is a stay-at-home mother and enjoyed the fact that Tom chose her over Rachel. The third woman, Megan Hipwell, is a woman Rachel saw during her commutes and Rachel began to get attached to Megan and her husband Scott (naming them Jason and Jess), idolising them and projecting her hopes of a romantic relationship onto them.

During her commutes, Rachel witnessed Megan kissing another man and soon after, Megan was reported missing. Learning that this other man was Megan's therapist, Dr. Kamal Abdic, Rachel made appointments for therapy sessions with him. Then, Megan's corpse was discovered, revealing that she had been pregnant and the father was neither Scott nor Kamal. Meanwhile, through

her therapy, Rachel realised that Tom had been gaslighting her for years. After learning that Tom had murdered Megan, Rachel notified Anna. When confronted by Anna, Tom confessed to murdering Megan when she had threatened to reveal their affair and her subsequent pregnancy. Tom then physically assaulted Rachel and held her hostage to keep her under his control. Knowing that he planned to kill her, Rachel stabbed Tom and Anna helped her kill him, both maintaining that Rachel had killed Tom out of self-defence.

The story is told through the alternating perspectives of Rachel, Anna and Megan. While Rachel and Anna's chapters are from the same time period, Megan's chapters are from a month to a few months earlier up to her murder.

6.2   Gender Performance and Masquerade

Gender performance and masquerade are the first two of the five strategies Rachel Watson, Anna Watson and Megan Hipwell used to shed their victimhood and regain agency. They engaged in gender performance throughout their courtships and in their marriages. Engaging in gender performances was vital for them, considering the pressures they faced to be perfect wives and mothers from society, their peers, their male partners and from themselves. These external and internal expectations of femininity drove them to engage in gender performance, and sometimes masquerade, to ensure that they conformed to gender norms, and when they failed to successfully conform, these strategies were employed to provide the appearance that they conformed to avoid censure from society and their male partners, and to avoid their own feelings of shame for their failures. Of the many expectations of women dictated by these

restrictive gender norms, motherhood is one of the most prominent ones that becomes a major theme within the novel. Both the 'perfect wife' and the 'perfect mother' are roles women are required to succeed at, causing significant distress for all three female protagonists. Although all three women had varying experiences and challenges with womanhood, wifehood and motherhood, it is the role of the mother that served to define them and they made many uncharacteristic decisions in their attempts to fulfil this social requirement, often to their own detriment.

The following subsections examine how Rachel, Anna and Megan employed the strategies of gender performance and masquerade. Each subsection will analyse each character separately, exploring how they used masquerade and gender performance to cope with the challenges they faced with their male partners. The first subsection focusses on Rachel Watson and Megan Hipwell. This subsection examines Rachel's use of gender performance and masquerade, exploring how her desire to become a mother, her inability to conceive and her subsequent alcoholism led to the devolution of her marriage with Tom Watson. Thus, the importance of motherhood to Rachel and how her infertility affected her womanhood is explored in this subsection. This subsection also includes an analysis of Megan Hipwell and her employment of masquerade and gender performance with her husband Scott Hipwell and her sexual partners Tom Watson and Dr. Kamal Abdic. Megan too had challenges with motherhood and her difficulty in being the 'perfect wife' and 'perfect mother' are also analysed in this subsection. The second subsection focusses on Anna Watson and her use of gender performance and masquerade with Tom. In contrast to Rachel, both Tom and Anna herself perceived Anna as a more

suitable and capable wife and mother, an important aspect in how Anna defined her womanhood. However, despite her success at becoming a mother, she faced challenges in these roles, and these aspects are discussed in this subsection.

6.2.1 Failing at Wifehood and Motherhood

In the early years of Rachel and Tom's marriage, she noted that they had been deeply in love, but that this soon changed due to her infertility (Hawkins, 2015, pp. 50–51, 6, 10, 305) Her subsequent obsession with motherhood led to her disappointment in her inability to conceive, which she perceived as a failure on her part (pp. 77-80). Her infertility even made it challenging for her to be around those who became pregnant (pp. 193, 77-80). As Rachel noted, she and Tom had different viewpoints on parenthood and Tom "didn't *need* a child like I did", which contributed towards their growing alienation from each other (p. 77). This rift only grew because, as a coping mechanism to distract herself from her perceived failure at motherhood, wifehood and femininity itself, Rachel began to rely more on alcohol to numb her pain, alienating her from her husband and damaging their relationship (pp. 77-80):

> I felt isolated in my misery. I became lonely, so I drank a bit,
> and then a bit more, and then I became lonelier, because no
> one likes being around a drunk. I lost and I drank and I drank
> and I lost. (p. 79)

However, her increasing despair at "being barren" was justified as society prioritises a woman's fertility, and not becoming a mother would diminish her social worth as a woman: "women are still only really valued for

two things – their looks and their role as mothers. I'm not beautiful, and I can't have kids, so what does that make me? Worthless" (p. 77). These external and internal pressures to become a mother negatively affected her mental and physical health and her relationships with Tom and others (p. 79).

Despite her efforts, Rachel was unable to mend her relationship with Tom. She made countless attempts to bridge the distance, hoping to appease his disappointment in her. One such attempt was her plan to surprise Tom with a vacation for them: "I was trying to make amends for being a bit miserable and difficult, I was planning a special fourth-anniversary getaway, a trip to remind us how we used to be" (p. 29). However, this was unsuccessful, with Rachel learning of Tom's affair with Anna, eventually resulting in Rachel's and Tom's divorce and Tom's marriage to Anna.

Even after her divorce from Tom and her 'failure as a wife', Rachel still desired motherhood, and still unhappy with her infertility, despite coming to terms with it (pp. 79-80). These feelings were so strong that when she learned that Megan had been involved in her baby's death in an accidental drowning years ago, Rachel began to despise Megan, believing that Megan may have deserved murder. This new-found hatred allowed Rachel to ignore the inappropriate nature of her close relationship with Scott (Megan's husband), even having sexual intercourse with him at one point, rationalising that someone as terrible as Megan did not deserve to be loved by someone as devoted as Scott (pp. 209, 216-218). Made vulnerable due to a lack of human contact and affection, Rachel was even more susceptible to Scott's attentions (pp. 5-6). Seduced by what she had projected onto Scott, combined with her belief that Megan had maliciously committed infanticide, Rachel was able to justify her

inappropriate behaviour (p. 209). However, Rachel was later riddled with guilt and admitted that she had wanted to experience what Megan did with Scott, and had convinced herself that she did not need to feel guilty as Megan had committed infanticide: "I wanted to feel what [Megan] felt when she sat out there with [Scott], … Did I, … think she got what was coming to her, too?" (p. 217).

Despite the appearance that Rachel had abandoned her sympathy for Megan simply because she enjoyed Scott's attention, this began after learning of Megan's role in her infant, Libby's, 'murder'. While the media had misrepresented Megan's role in her baby's death, Rachel could not forgive Megan for having and destroying something she had desperately wanted for so long (much as she had despised Anna, her best friend Lara, and her colleague who had had two abortions) (pp. 77-80). This is also evident when Rachel found out that Megan had been pregnant when she had been murdered and Rachel mourned the life of the baby: "I am choking, too, crying for an infant who never existed, the child of a woman I never knew" (p. 201). Thus, Rachel's infertility affected every aspect of her life.

However, despite her failure at gender performance in the role of the mother and her disinterest towards engaging in gender performance after her issues with fertility began, following her divorce, she still felt that she had mistreated Tom, believing his lies about the abuse to which she had subjected him (Tom's abuse is discussed in Sections 6.4.1 and 6.5.1). Thus, Rachel continued to try to appease him and sought opportunities to spend time with him, hoping that he would divorce Anna and remarry her. This was her attempt to make amends to him for the hurt she felt she had caused him and a hope that she could have a second chance at living her life anew as she believed that she had

failed at both motherhood and wifehood (pp. 222-225). Therefore, in her interactions with Tom, she enacted a form of hyperfemininity that she hoped would remind Tom of their married life (pp. 222-225).

Rachel's infertility led to failed attempts at gender performance as the 'perfect mother', which in turn categorised her a pariah femininity as fertility and motherhood are patriarchal expectations of women. In addition, her alcoholism and her resulting failure at being a 'perfect wife' further labelled her as a pariah femininity as these too are considered deviant traits for women. The sadness and self-disgust from her 'failure' to become a mother led to her disinterest in engaging in further gender performance and masquerade, marking her as a failure yet again as Rachel continued to embody traits that were not associated with hegemonic femininity. While many female characters are labelled as embodying a pariah femininity because they embody traditionally/stereotypically masculine characteristics, Rachel received this label for not embodying stereotypically feminine traits, instead openly flouting the rules of femininity that were expected of her. Furthermore, Rachel did not attempt to engage in a masquerade of womanliness to avoid censure. As her obsession with motherhood and her despair at her infertility increased, Rachel ceased to feel the need to engage in gender performance and masquerade as the ideal woman, as she believed her infertility and lack of beauty invalidated her value as a woman to society (p. 79). Her inability to support herself financially (inability to maintain employment), physically (her appearance) and emotionally (her alcoholism) were examples of how she flouted ideals of femininity. Her alcoholism only exacerbated her undesirability as a woman and her status as a pariah femininity (pp. 10-11). While Rachel did not employ the strategies of

gender performance and masquerade in earnest following her divorce from Tom, her choice to continue to flout gender norms also arose from censure of her authentic gender performance and society's refusal to accept her expression of her gender and, therefore, of herself. Thus, Rachel's rejection of gender norms, masquerade and gender performance was a result of social rejection.

It is due to her dissatisfaction with her life that she became so obsessed with Megan and Scott Hipwell, projecting onto them visions of the life that she had hoped to experience with Tom, with the couple representing the life she had lost due to her infertility and alcoholism (pp. 29, 30-31): "They're what I lost, they're everything I want to be" (p. 10) Although Rachel envisioned that Megan and Scott had the perfect marriage that she was unable to have, their marriage was far from perfect (pp. 10, 29, 30-31, 94-95, 162). Much like Rachel, Megan too suffered from the social norms that dictated her roles as the devoted wife and mother. Megan was continuously haunted by the accidental drowning of her first child, Libby, and was driven by her desire to make amends to Libby when she found herself pregnant for the second time (pp. 211-212, 284). Thus, Megan too had a difficult relationship with motherhood, being unprepared for the demands of motherhood. However, unlike Rachel, Megan was adept at masquerade and gender performance and consistently employed these strategies to provide the appearance of conforming by playing the role of the 'perfect wife' and enacting hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity. However, much of her masquerades and gender performances were attempts to mask her deviant/pariah femininity by providing the appearance of embodying hyperfemininity. Her restlessness and desire to escape from her childhood trauma (the deaths of her brother, Ben, and her first child, Libby, when Megan was a teenager) led to elaborate masquerades

designed to mask her childhood traumas and her true nature from others and herself.

Megan, a self-described "mistress of self-reinvention" (Hawkins, 2015, p. 20), used "masks of femininity" (Miller, 2018, p. 101) or hyperfemininity in her masquerades (employing womanliness as a masquerade) (Riviere, 1929; Hawkins, 2015). As Miller (2018) notes, Megan's masquerades were not successful in regaining her agency but provided her with distractions, allowing her "to make her existence in Witney more exciting" and no more (p. 101). Her awareness of her masquerades is evident ("So who do I want to be tomorrow?"), and indicates that, despite her apparent childlike nature, Megan recognised that her true femininity was deviant and would attract censure, thus resorting to employing masks (Hawkins, 2015, p. 20). However, the masks that she chose were not overt challenges to the patriarchy, being "traditional feminine roles" (Miller, 2018, p. 101): "Runaway, lover, wife, waitress, gallery manager, nanny, and a few more in between" (Hawkins, 2015, p. 20). These masquerades masked Megan's unwillingness to face her true self ("her essential self"), which was "even more traditionally feminine than her external persona allows" (Miller, 2018, p. 101). However, the masquerades' objective was never "liberation" from her oppression as Megan realised this may be impossible for her to achieve within the patriarchal construct (Miller, 2018, p. 101). Therefore, she settled for temporary distractions and masking her true self from others (Scott, her sexual partners, society) and from herself. While she desired "escape" and "action", she remained trapped behind her various masks, powerless and unable to gain agency (Miller, 2018, p. 102):

All those plans I had—photography courses and cookery

classes—when it comes down to it they feel a bit pointless, as

if I'm playing at real life instead of actually living it. I need to

find something that I must do, … I can't just be a wife … there

is literally nothing to do but wait. Wait for a man to come

home and love you. Either that, or look around for something

to distract you. (Hawkins, 2015, pp. 22–23)

Despite her unwillingness to reconcile with her true self, Megan had convinced herself that her masquerade of hyperfemininity was her authentic self. Essentially, she was unable to separate her true self from her masquerades, be it as a wife (the 'perfect wife' masquerade) or as an adulterer (sexually deviant masquerades): "That's all I'm doing, being true to my real self, the self nobody knows—not Scott, not Kamal, no one" (p. 46).

While Megan's constant restlessness arose from her reluctance to accept her true self, she felt stifled by her restlessness, social norms and by Scott (pp. 24, 45, 162-163). Although she sometimes cherished how protective Scott was of her, she was bored with playing the role of the 'perfect wife' and with the gender performance she was forced to engage in (p. 46), feeling that she had been a "bad wife" (p. 287) and a "failure as a wife" (p. 55). Consequently, she engaged in multiple extra-marital affairs, relying on the excitement they provided as a distraction from her problems, treating these affairs as games that she had to win to 'get her "next high"', to avoid feeling stifled (pp. 57, 93-94). However, each attempt was only briefly successful and she was trapped in a

never-ending cycle of masquerades, from continuous affairs to new hobbies/interests that she would quickly abandon (pp. 56-57).

While she engaged in such risk-taking behaviour, she also engaged in a masquerade and gender performance of the 'perfect wife' as "Megan the happily married suburbanite" (p. 18). Despite her general dissatisfaction in her marriage to Scott and their marital issues partly resulting from his emotional abuse (Scott's abuse is discussed in Sections 6.4.1 and 6.5.1), she made an effort to provide the appearance that she was conforming to gender norms, an effort aimed at avoiding censure from Scott and society. These gender performance and masquerades of hyperfemininity allowed her to avoid censure for her deviant behaviour (infidelity). Promiscuity itself is a trait that is coded stereotypically masculine and is not accepted behaviour for women, thereby marking Megan's femininity as a pariah femininity (Connell, 2003; Schippers, 2007; Brubaker and Johnson, 2008). By engaging in extra-marital affairs, she threatened patriarchy and Scott's masculinity, despite enacting hyperfemininity with Scott and others, as she enacted a trait of (toxic) hegemonic masculinity and her behaviour suggested that he was incapable of satisfying her. Essentially, Megan employed the strategies of masquerade and gender performance of hyperfemininity to mask her pariah femininity.

While Megan struggled with her masquerade and gender performance of the 'perfect wife' ("all the things I've done wrong, my failure as a wife" (p. 55)), she was haunted by her failure as a mother due to Libby's accidental drowning (pp. 168-169, 200-211). Part of Megan's restlessness and her subsequent desire to seek endless distractions arose from her desire to forget the incident. She felt

overwhelming guilt at Libby's death and blamed herself for her failure as a mother, even demonising herself as a bad mother and person, worrying that she would endanger her second child too: "In bed this morning, I kept thinking, what if it happens again? What's going to happen when I'm alone with her?" (p. 284). Therefore, she had decided to reveal the truth about her affairs and her second pregnancy to Scott, in an attempt to make amends to Libby, hoping that this time she could be a better mother:

> I'm going to do the right thing. … I owe it to this baby, and I owe it to Libby. …
>
> … I'm not sure if I can remake myself as a good wife, but a good mother—that I have to try.
>
> … No more lies, no more hiding, no more running, no more bullshit. (p. 287)

While Megan was convinced that she had been a "bad wife" and a "bad mother", she was driven by her new-found desire to be "a good mother" to her unborn baby, prompting her to abandon her masquerades and seriously consider engaging in gender performance to fulfil her role as the 'perfect mother' (p. 287). However, her failure as a mother categorises her as exhibiting a pariah femininity as her actions resulted in her child's death. Considering that many of Megan's masquerades and gender performances of hyperfemininity were driven by her need to escape from her failure as a mother, the gendered requirement of motherhood played a significant role in her life. However, these strategies succeeded only temporarily, requiring her to endlessly continue the vicious cycle, and when she chose to abandon these masquerades and seriously attempt

to fulfil her role as a mother, she was murdered. Ultimately, employing the strategies of masquerade and gender performance did not help her shed her victimhood and gain agency.

6.2.2   *Succeeding at Wifehood and Motherhood*

In contrast with Rachel and Megan, Anna Watson was successful in fulfilling the roles of the 'perfect wife' and the 'perfect mother', enacting hyperfemininity to do so. However, she also sacrificed her ideals and comfort, and prioritised her husband, Tom, and her daughter, Evie, over herself. This is exemplified by her behaviour on her birthday, where she put Tom's needs above hers, despite the inconvenience it caused her:

> A while later, [Anna and Evie] go downstairs and leave Tom
>
> to snooze. He deserves it. … It's hot—too hot for a roast, but
>
> I'll do one anyway, because Tom loves roast beef, … I just
>
> need to pop out to get that Merlot he likes, so I get Evie ready,
>
> … and stroll down to the shops. (p. 109)

However, Anna had convinced herself that this was the life that she had wanted, telling herself that she was happier now with Tom and Evie than she had ever been, insisting to herself that the life of the stay-at-home wife and mother was the perfect choice for her: "a few years ago I would have hated the idea of staying in and cooking on my birthday, but now it's perfect, it's the way it should be" (pp. 110-111). Thus, she continued to engage in a gender performance of hyperfemininity as was required of her as a wife and a mother. This hyperfemininity however was also a masquerade that was designed to hide her

dissatisfaction with her life from others and from herself as she could not reconcile with the fact that she had changed herself and sacrificed so much:

> I actually envied [Tom] the luxury of getting dressed up and leaving the house and rushing around all day, with purpose,
>
> …
>
> I'm well aware there is no job more important than that of raising a child, but the problem is that it isn't valued. (pp. 232-233)
>
> I felt a horrible pang of envy then, a longing for Saturdays spent lying on the sofa … and a hazy memory of leaving the club the night before.
>
> Stupid, really, because what I've got now is a million times better, and I made sacrifices to secure it. Now I just need to protect it. (pp. 177-178)

She also attempted to hide the difficulties she experienced in her roles as wife and mother from Tom, as she recognised that he preferred to not discuss any serious issues, instead choosing to temporarily placate her, ignoring the issues or actively avoiding any discussion. This is evident in one of their interactions where Anna acknowledged to herself that Tom was not very considerate about her feelings as she was of his: "I'm tired, too, and I'd like to have a conversation about money and our situation here that doesn't end with him just walking out of the room" (p. 237). Therefore, despite her pride in her success at performing the roles of 'perfect wife' and 'perfect mother', she felt

undervalued by Tom, even suffering from low self-esteem and mourning her lost beauty and sexual desirability:

> I let myself cry for a minute. I allow myself these tears sparingly, only ever when Tom's not here, … It was … when I saw how tired I looked, how blotchy and bedraggled and bloody awful, that I felt it again—that need to put on a dress and high heels, to blow-dry my hair and put on some makeup and walk down the street and have men turn and look at me. (p. 233)

Anna consistently enacted a hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity that she knew Tom preferred and this performance was designed specifically to seduce Tom. She strove to provide Tom with the attention, sexual and otherwise, that she knew he was not receiving from Rachel while he was married to her, which effectively allowed Anna to secure a marriage proposal from Tom.

Her gender performance and hyperfemininity also served the purpose of setting her apart from Rachel. She despised Rachel, Tom's ex-wife, and had believed his lies about her for much of their relationship. Therefore, Anna made attempts to be different from Rachel as being similar to Rachel in any way was considered an insult by Anna and Tom: when Tom mentioned to Anna that a certain action of hers was "the sort of thing *she* [Rachel] used to do", Anna "burst into tears", interpreting this as "a punch to the gut, a low blow" (p. 264). Her desire to be as different as possible from Rachel is further evident when Tom claimed that Rachel and Anna were very similar, prompting this outburst from Anna: ""Fuck you, Tom … "Don't you lump me in with *her*"" (p. 298), and

Rachel noted that what offended Anna most was "not that her husband is a liar and a killer, but that he's just compared her to me" (p . 299). However, when Anna realised that Tom may be hiding something from her, she came to the realisation that her subsequent behaviour mirrored Rachel's, something she had avoided doing to evade censure from Tom:

> If I'm not careful they'll end up making me crazy, and I'll end up like her. Like Rachel. (p. 241)

> I'm doing the things she did: drinking alone and snooping on him. The things she did and he hated. (p. 242)

> And now I find myself behaving exactly like she used to: polishing off half the bottle of red left over from dinner last night and snooping around on his computer. (p. 265)

Anna interpreted her success at wifehood and motherhood as also factors that reflected her superiority to Rachel. For Anna, performing the roles of the 'perfect wife' and the 'perfect mother' held significant importance and she was critical towards women who failed or appeared to fail at these roles, perceiving these women as having failed womanhood. This is evident in her perception of Rachel and Megan. Upon learning of the death of Megan's first child and the tabloid newspapers framing it as a potential infanticide, Anna believed that Megan had deserved to be violently murdered by virtue of this: "I always knew there was something off about that woman. … I'm not going to lie—I'm glad she's gone. Good riddance" (p. 197).

Considering Tom's and Anna's shared hatred of Rachel, Anna constantly compared herself to Rachel and deemed herself superior, defining womanhood and sexual desirability as being the opposite of Rachel. Thus, she despised any kind of similarity between them, attempting to distance herself from Rachel because this was also what Tom expected of her. Therefore, she continued to enact a hyperfemininity that Tom desired, playing the role of the 'perfect wife' and the 'perfect mother', putting on the mask to hide her dissatisfaction with her new life from Tom and herself so that she would not be deemed a failure for not always finding wifehood and motherhood enjoyable. As such, Anna's gender performance and masquerade of hyperfemininity aligned with social norms and her conformance meant that she was perceived as the 'perfect woman' who excelled at her assigned roles of wife and mother. Despite having engaged in an affair with a man she knew was married, which would ordinarily have her categorised as exhibiting a pariah femininity, her actions did not threaten Tom's masculinity, and therefore, she was considered a woman who embodied the feminine ideal. Clearly, the strategies of masquerade and gender performance proved to be successful for Anna in seducing Tom and in allowing her to provide the appearance that she was conforming to gender norms. However, the strategies did not allow her to shed her victimhood and regain her agency, instead forcing her to stay trapped within her mask, unable to liberate herself.

6.3   Inversion of Normative Feminine and Masculine Behaviour

This is the third strategy employed by Rachel, Megan and Anna. However, it is important to note that they did not employ the strategies listed in

the theoretical framework in a linear manner, instead employing them as and when required. They engaged also in masquerade and gender performance throughout their courtships with their respective male partners, with some of these relationships including an inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour. Thus, these strategies were designed to aid in conforming to gender norms that restricted their freedom or to provide the appearance of conformance to avoid censure from their male partners and society. While all three characters engaged in gender performance, attempting to fulfil the requirements of 'perfect wife' and 'perfect mother', Megan and Anna enacted hyperfemininity that also functioned as a masquerade to allow them to appear to conform to gender norms. Thus, they combined these three strategies with varying degrees of success. However, it is important to note that their gender performances and masquerades were also in response to the hegemonic masculinity embodied by their male partners, specifically by Tom Watson and Scott Hipwell, and this aspect will also be explored. In this section, I focus on Rachel, Megan and Anna's subversion of gendered behaviour by exploring how they inverted traditionally feminine and masculine behaviour as a strategy in their relationships (focussing on Tom Watson and Scott Hipwell, the primary male characters), how this subversion affected their relationship with men and how this correlated with their gender performance and masquerade.

In the first subsection, I analyse Megan and Anna's promiscuity and how they subvert this stereotypically masculine coded behaviour. Both characters engage in promiscuous behaviour with men, using it as a tactic for seduction, in an attempt to conform to gender norms that require them to secure marriage to fulfil social requirements for women. This subsection will also examine how

their promiscuity is an enactment of hyperfemininity (gender performance) and how it relates to their masquerades, analysing the impact these have on the narrative. In the second subsection, I examine Rachel's dependence on alcoholism and how this was an inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, as it is a stereotypically masculine coded trait. Her alcoholism affected her wifehood and motherhood, affecting her definition of womanhood as dictated by society and this aspect is discussed in this subsection, focussing on how this contributed to her status as a woman embodying a pariah femininity. Both subsections will include discussions of Tom and Scott's expressions of masculinity (toxic hegemonic masculinity) as pertaining to discussions of Rachel, Anna and Megan's femininities.

The 'whore-virgin complex' of Megan and Anna's characters are also discussed in Section 6.4.2 of this chapter, focussing on this dichotomy and the implications it has on the characters.

6.3.1   Promiscuity

Sexual promiscuity has long been coded a masculine trait as it is linked to male virility (Connell, 2003; Schippers, 2007; Brubaker and Johnson, 2008). The trait itself is generally considered a trait of (toxic) hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2003; Schippers, 2007; Brubaker and Johnson, 2008). Therefore, by engaging in sexual promiscuous behaviour, both Anna and Megan are enacting a hegemonic masculinity (Schippers, 2007). However, the ways in which the two characters engaged in promiscuous behaviour differed, based on their relationship with the men with whom they involved. As this aspect is closely

connected to the 'whore-virgin complex' and this dichotomy is discussed in Section 6.4.2 of this chapter, this subsection will focus more on whether promiscuity was a subversive strategy for Anna and Megan.

Anna's promiscuity was in the form of her courtship with Tom that began while he was still married to Rachel. Anna admitted that she had enjoyed her time as a mistress, not regretting her role in contributing to further problems in Rachel and Tom's marriage. In fact, she had enjoyed the feeling of being irresistible to a man and being sexually desired by someone when it was socially unacceptable:

> I miss being a mistress.
>
> …
>
> The truth is, I never felt bad for Rachel, even before I found out about her drinking and how difficult she was … I was enjoying myself too much. Being the other woman is a huge turn-on, … you're the one he can't help but betray his wife for, even though he loves her. That's just how irresistible you are.
> (Hawkins, 2015, p. 233)

Therefore, while she knew he was married, she still enjoyed his attentions, interpreting it as proof of her irresistibility. Tom too convinced her of this, even reusing professions of love that he had previously used on Rachel (p. 34). However, despite Anna's enjoyment of her status as a mistress and her lack of consideration for Rachel, she recognised that this was socially unacceptable behaviour, and correctly identified that she would receive censure (more than Tom) for contributing to another woman's suffering:

> I enjoyed [being a mistress]. I loved it, in fact. I never felt
>
> guilty. I pretended I did. I had to, with my married girlfriends,
>
> … I had to tell them that *of course* I felt terrible about it, of
>
> course I felt bad for his wife, I never meant for any of this to
>
> happen, we fell in love, what could we do? (p. 233)

Both Anna's promiscuity and her engaging in an affair with a married man are socially unacceptable behaviour for women, which categorised her as exhibiting a pariah femininity. However, despite her enacting a hegemonic masculinity in terms of sexual promiscuity, she still embodied a hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity by catering to Tom's requirements of her as a sexual partner, thus, her pariah femininity did not threaten Tom's masculinity. Instead, Anna's enactment of a hegemonic masculinity served to complement his masculinity. Therefore, her inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour helped her achieve her aims of seducing Tom and securing a marriage proposal from him, thereby allowing her to conform to gender norms.

Tom himself embodied a toxic hegemonic masculinity with his sexual promiscuity, engaging in extra-marital affairs with Anna and then Megan. Despite his affairs, he did not attract widespread censure for doing so. Regarding his extra-marital affair with Anna and subsequent divorce from Rachel and marriage to Anna, his infidelity was justified and excused by him, Anna and others as Rachel's alcoholism and alleged violent behaviour made her an unsuitable wife. Thus, Rachel's pariah femininity served as a justification of Tom's infidelity. However, his second infidelity with Megan while he was married to Anna was perceived as unforgivable, as Anna had just given birth to their daughter. As Anna had been fulfilling her role as a mother, thereby enacting

an idealised femininity, Tom's infidelity was more egregious. His justification for his infidelity with Megan was that Anna had not been readily sexually available to him, thereby 'forcing' him to seek sexual pleasure elsewhere: ""You were so tired all the time," … Everything was about the baby." … "And Megan was so … well, she was available"" (p. 298); ""I just needed a release. That's all"" (p. 299). Despite Anna devoting her energy to fulfilling her role as the 'perfect mother', she was simultaneously expected to fulfil all of Tom's needs, regardless of whether they inconvenienced her, to fulfil the role of the 'perfect wife'. Without fulfilling both roles simultaneously, Anna had failed at embodying an idealised femininity. This was justification enough for Tom to engage in an affair, a reasoning that he had also applied in his marriage with Rachel. However, Tom's infidelities did not always draw censure as he justified his actions by accusing his wives of not embodying an idealised femininity.

Like Anna, Megan enjoyed her affairs, taking great pleasure in the thrill she received from engaging in behaviour she knew was considered deviant. She enjoyed seducing men for whom engaging in an affair with her would prove to have dire consequences. This is evident in how she treated her therapist Dr. Kamal Abdic's initial reluctance to engage in a sexual relationship with her as a challenge when he was bound by his oath ("It was exquisite, that push and pull, desire and restraint"), and perceived her attempts to seduce Tom as a game that she had to 'win', bringing out her competitive nature ("He won't say no to me") (pp. 57, 60, 47, 46). She enjoyed the feeling of being wanted and the thrill she experienced from having control over her sexual partners, which served as a distraction for her and provided a boost to her self-esteem:

that's the thing I like most about it, having power over

someone. That's the intoxicating thing (p. 47)

I just enjoyed feeling wanted; I liked the feeling of control. …

I didn't want him to leave his wife; I just wanted him to *want*

to leave her. To want me that much. (p. 292)

The extra-marital affairs allowed Megan to feel some measure of control when she lacked agency in many aspects of her life, from her marriage to Scott to motherhood and her employment. Essentially, she weaponised sex in her interactions with Kamal, Tom and Scott, and she masked this weaponisation in a hyperfemininity that presented a hypersexualised version of herself (womanliness), accurately identifying the men's preferences and weaknesses and altering her gender performances and masquerades to cater to their needs.

While the extra-marital affairs were a sufficient distraction for Megan from her unhappiness, she recognised that her behaviour was deviant but that men received little to no censure for engaging in the same behaviour: "I told myself that I wouldn't do it again, … but then … why not? I don't see why I should have to restrict myself, … Men don't." (p. 46). Sexual promiscuity is a somewhat socially acceptable and often-celebrated trait for men while the opposite is true for women. However, Megan used this realisation of male privilege in sexual promiscuity as a justification for her own sexual promiscuity and infidelities, framing this as her response to the double standards society has concerning women and men. This was a way to shield herself from her own pariah femininity, allowing her to continue her masquerades. Thus, like Anna,

Megan too found a way to justify her behaviour when she recognised that, if discovered, she would be considered to be embodying a pariah femininity.

However, unlike Anna, Megan's gender performances and masquerades of hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity and her inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour did not eventually lead to her conformance to gender norms and social acceptance. Instead, her sexual promiscuity and infidelities categorised her as embodying a pariah femininity as she was enacting a hegemonic masculinity and threatened Scott's hegemonic masculinity with the suggestion that he could not sexually satisfy her. While Megan's hyperfemininity and masquerade of the 'perfect wife' allowed her to provide the appearance that she was conforming to gender norms, her infidelities demonstrated that she ultimately failed in the role of the 'perfect wife'. Her continuous infidelities also threatened the masculinities of her partners, suggesting that they were unsuccessful in providing her with sexual satisfaction, further marking Megan as a pariah femininity for threatening the masculinities of Scott, Tom and Kamal (Scott and Tom embodied toxic hegemonic masculinity while Kamal embodied complicit masculinity). Therefore, Megan, in contrast to Tom, received more censure for her infidelities, partly due to how numerous they were, but also because they were publicised during her murder investigation. Ultimately, Megan's inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour further cemented her status as embodying a pariah femininity as she enacted a hegemonic masculinity, thereby threatening masculinity and the patriarchy. It is also significant that it is Megan's promiscuity that led to her death, suggesting that she was punished for her embodiment of hegemonic masculinity (Gwin, 2017).

6.3.2   Alcoholism

While both women and men consume alcohol, men consume far more than women, with alcohol consumption being considered a more masculine trait than a feminine one (Ely *et al.*, 1999). This also suggests that alcoholism itself is coded as a more masculine trait than a feminine one. Consuming alcohol is socially a more accepted norm for men than it is for women, with alcoholic drinks being associated with men and male fictional characters that embody hegemonic masculinity (often toxic masculinity). Examples of this include James Bond, always portrayed in novels and films consuming alcohol, among other male protagonists of the hardboiled detective and noir genres (Simpson, 2002). While there are examples of female characters engaging in alcoholism in fiction, this is more commonly associated with male characters (Grizenko, 2012). Therefore, Rachel's consumption and addiction to alcohol are considered as her embodying a hegemonic masculinity, thereby categorising her as embodying a pariah femininity.

As discussed in Section 6.2.1, Rachel's alcoholism arose because of her depression following her inability to conceive. She admitted that she continuously sought refuge in alcohol to cope with her infertility, being alienated from Tom, her friends and family as well as the increase in pressure (both internal and external) that she experienced about motherhood:

> I became lonely, so I drank a bit, and then a bit more, and then
>
> I became lonelier, because no one likes being around a drunk.
>
> I lost and I drank and I drank and I lost. (p. 79)

Rachel's alcoholism and subsequent depression due to her infertility also led to her inability to fulfil the role of the 'perfect wife'. Therefore, it is evident that, with these failures in the roles of the 'perfect wife' and the 'perfect mother', and therefore a failure to conform to gender norms, Rachel strayed even further from embodying an idealised femininity (hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity) and more towards embodying a pariah femininity. Furthermore, unlike Anna, and similar to Megan, the inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour served as a coping mechanism for Rachel and ultimately led to her failure to conform to gender norms and attracted more censure for her non-conformance. In contrast to Anna and Megan's subversive behaviour, Rachel's embodiment of masculinity, even hegemonic masculinity, did not threaten Tom nor Scott's masculinity. However, her non-conformance to the idealised femininity threatened the patriarchy, for which she received censure through constant rejection of her expression of femininity.

While Rachel, Megan and Anna all employed the third strategy of inverting normative feminine and masculine behaviour, this strategy was only successful for Anna and was detrimental to both Megan and Rachel as their employment of this strategy led to non-conforming behaviour, thereby attracting censure, while this strategy enabled Anna to conform to gender norms and gain social acceptance.

6.4   Recognising Victimhood

This is the fourth strategy employed by Rachel, Megan and Anna. With the failure of the previous three strategies in helping Rachel, Megan and Anna

shed their victimhood and regain their agency, coming to terms with their victimhood was the next step. Just as with the other strategies, each character employed the strategy of recognising their victimhood in different ways with varying success. For all three characters, reconciling with the abuse to which they had been subjected was vital and this strategy led to their attempts to find solutions to their marital and other issues. For Rachel and Anna, coming to terms with Tom's acts of emotional abuse was the pivotal point, as they were forced to reconcile with the fact that he had constantly lied to them both throughout their marriages. For Megan, her recognition of the abuse to which she was subjected by both Scott and Tom led her to seek a better living situation for herself, although she was ultimately unsuccessful.

This section explores how Rachel, Anna and Megan employed the strategy of recognising their victimhood. The first subsection examines how the three women had to reconcile with past abuse that they had experienced by their male partners. While Rachel and Megan benefitted from therapy, which led to their realisations of how they had been victimised by their husbands through physical, emotional/psychological and verbal abuse, Anna realised that she was a victim after learning of Tom's infidelity, which is an act of emotional abuse. The second subsection analyses the three characters' relationships with the 'whore-virgin complex', investigating how this affected their perceptions of each other. This discussion focusses on how Anna's and Megan's sexual promiscuity is perceived by Rachel, by Anna and Megan themselves and by the male protagonists (specifically Tom and Scott) and how it is portrayed in the novel. Furthermore, the plot of the novel also aligns with the true crime narrative

of 'the whore' and the 'the virgin' and I explore how this affects the female and male characters' perceptions of femininities and masculinities within the novel.

6.4.1   Reconciling with Past Abuse

From the outset, Rachel is portrayed as a victim of a combination of her own behaviour and restrictive gender norms, due to her alcoholism and depression that arose out of her desperate need to become a mother and her subsequent divorce and inability to find meaningful employment. As discussed in Section 6.2.1, the social pressures to perform the roles of the 'perfect mother' and the 'perfect wife' also weighed heavily upon Rachel, furthering her victimisation. Despite this, she held herself fully responsible for her dilemmas, thus increasing her dependency on alcohol as a coping mechanism (p. 79). It was in her attempts to solve Megan's murder (making therapy appointments with Megan's previous sexual partner, Kamal) that Rachel learned that Tom had emotionally abused her during their marriage (pp. 260-262, 270-272). While Tom's affair with Anna was emotional abuse against Rachel, it was the realisation that Tom had been gaslighting her throughout much of their marriage and after their divorce that allowed Rachel to finally accept her victimhood and begin the process of escaping her victimhood to regain her lost agency.

The discrepancies between Tom's accounts of her violence and her memories of these incidents had long concerned Rachel and caused her to doubt her reality, a common consequence of gaslighting, which is a form of emotional abuse designed to confuse the victim by altering narratives (Calef and Weinshel, 1981; Hightower, 2017). However, Rachel never doubted Tom, blaming her

alcoholism instead. To assuage her guilt in being responsible for Tom's suffering and for ruining her marriage, Rachel felt she needed to recover her memories so she could try to atone for them by punishing herself: ""But I want to *feel* it. I want to feel … worse"" (p. 190). Despite her guilt, a part of Rachel had always rejected Tom's accounts of her violence (pp. 193, 228-230, 261, 270-271). As she admitted to Kamal, "The memory doesn't fit with the reality, because I don't remember anger, raging fury. I remember fear" (p. 230). Her intuition was proven right when she began to recall past incidents once she had reduced her alcohol consumption, leading to her discovery and then recognition of her status as a victim of Tom's abuse both during and after their marriage. It was then that she was able to confront Tom about his abuse, hoping this would lead to her regaining her agency. Thus, while recognising her victimhood in itself was unsuccessful in terms of Rachel shedding her victimhood and regaining her agency, it was the vital first step in this journey.

As discussed in Section 6.2.2, Anna also experienced challenges due to restrictive gender norms and the social pressures of wifehood and motherhood. However, unlike Rachel, Anna engaged in a masquerade to hide her unhappiness from others and from herself, thus allowing her to conform to gender norms. As such, Anna was able to mask her own victimisation by society from herself, only allowing herself brief moments where she removed her mask to recognise her feelings and grieve for her loss of freedom (pp. 232-233). In addition, Anna too was victimised by Tom, although the abuse to which she was subjected was far less than that experienced by Rachel. Anna's abuse was in the form of Tom ignoring her concerns about their shared life and his infidelity with Megan,

which can be categorised as emotional abuse, and it is after learning of his affair that Anna realised that Tom had victimised her.

Her suspicions of Tom began after she caught Tom in a lie and then remembered his earlier admission about being "a good liar" (p. 239) while they were engaged in their affair while he was still married to Rachel (pp. 239, 240). Despite her attempts to reject her suspicions of him by insisting to herself that he could never fool her with his lies, she realised that this was untrue (pp. 240-241). While she worried that her doubts about Tom would make her as suspicious of him as Rachel had been ("If I'm not careful they'll [her doubts] end up making me crazy, and I'll end up like her. Like Rachel" (p. 241)), she decided to find out if he had any secrets. Although she was aware that she was engaging in behaviour that Tom had despised in Rachel ("I'm doing the things she did … and he hated" (p. 242)), she justified her actions by telling herself that she was owed the truth if he chose to lie to her: "If he's going to lie, then I'm going to check up on him. That's a fair deal, isn't it? I feel I'm owed a bit of fairness" (p. 242). It is then that she empathised slightly with Rachel: "It's easier to understand her behaviour when you feel like I feel right now" (p. 265). Recognising that Tom directed his talents at deception at Anna too was the pivotal point that led to her discovery of Tom's affair with Megan (pp. 265-269). After this discovery, Anna admitted to herself that she had "always known that Tom lies" but that "in the past, his lies tended to suit" her (p. 279).

While Anna recognised the irony of the situation, where Tom had engaged in an affair with her while married to Rachel and he had engaged in yet another affair with Megan while being married to Anna, the recognition of this emotional abuse, along with the emotional abuse of having been subjected to his

lies for a long period, led her to reconcile with her status as a victim (p. 279). Although recognising her victimhood was the first step towards shedding it and regaining her agency, employing this strategy was ultimately not successful in saving her marriage to Tom as he had broken her trust.

Megan too was a victim of restrictive gender norms that forced her to excel at the roles of wifehood and motherhood and was also victimised by her male partners Mac, Tom and Scott. Mac was her first partner and an older man with whom she had her daughter Libby at age seventeen (pp. 166-167). After running away from home after her brother's (Ben) death, Megan sought to start her life anew with Mac (pp. 166-167). However, despite their initial happiness together, their relationship was unstable and they argued constantly (pp. 167-169). Mac subjected her to emotional abuse, as he began a serious relationship with an emotionally vulnerable seventeen-year-old and abandoned her when Libby had accidentally drowned (pp. 166-169211-214). Her marriage with Scott too was unstable, as he was emotionally abusive, becoming verbally and physically violent when he was displeased with her. His acts of emotional violence spanned almost the entirety of their marriage, as he was deeply suspicious of her engaging in extra-marital affairs and sought to monitor and control her activities (pp. 44-49, 59-61, 46). Tom too had subjected her to abuse. His abuse included emotional abuse such as ignoring her ('the silent treatment') (pp. 163, 131, 291, 292, 304) and then dismissing her when she revealed her pregnancy to him, cruelly mocking her and her ability to be a mother: ""I don't think you're really motherhood material, are you, Megs?" … "You'd be a terrible mother, Megan. Just get rid of it."" (p. 304). In this final confrontation,

Tom physically assaulted and then murdered Megan to prevent her from exposing their affair and her pregnancy (p. 304).

It is in her continued therapy sessions with Kamal that she gradually began to recognise these patterns of abuse, despite her initial rejections of Kamal noting the abusive behaviours of her partners, especially those of Mac and Scott (pp. 59-60, 213-214). This gradual recognition of her own victimhood, combined with her desire to become a better mother to her second child, led to her revealing the truth about her extra-marital affairs to Scott and her pregnancy to Tom. While these efforts were attempts to cease her masquerades to become a better mother, she was unsuccessful. Therefore, while employing the strategy of recognising her victimhood provided Megan with the motivation to make a sincere attempt at succeeding at motherhood, and maybe even wifehood with Scott, this strategy was ultimately unsuccessful in providing her with the opportunity to shed her victimhood and regain her agency.

Thus, while employing this strategy led Rachel and Anna towards escaping victimhood and regaining their lost agency, Tom's fatal act of physical violence against Megan ensured that she would never shed her victimhood nor regain her agency. However, Tom's death brought Megan some justice, as he was punished violently just as he had punished her. Furthermore, her death resulted in Rachel and Anna regaining their agency. Certainly, Rachel would not have been able to do so if not for her involvement in Megan's murder investigation. Thus, Rachel and Anna's murder of Tom provided justice for the two women and for Megan.

6.4.2   The 'Whore-Virgin Complex'

All three female characters are portrayed as 'the whore' as they all flouted norms of femininity. While it may seem that Rachel did not fit into either the role of 'the whore' nor of 'the virgin' based on the traditional interpretation of these terms, her status as a woman embodying a pariah femininity for failing at womanhood suggests that she was perceived as 'the whore' due to her disobedience in conforming to gender norms (Simkin, 2014, p. 6). In addition, she failed at embodying 'the virgin' which represents "the maternal" by failing at motherhood (Simkin, 2014, p. 6). Therefore, Rachel is classified as 'the whore' for the disruption she caused to the patriarchy through her non-conformance, receiving censure and rejection from multiple parties, from Tom, Anna, her friends, family and society (This aspect is explored in more detail in Section 6.2.1.).

Like Rachel, both Megan and Anna are portrayed as the archetype of 'the whore'. Their classification is based on a more literal interpretation of the term, as both women engaged in sexually promiscuous behaviour, a trait which is considered unfeminine. However, Megan and Anna also engaged in enacting a hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity that provided the appearance of hyperfemininity and even innocence, essentially masquerading as 'the virgin'.

As discussed in Section 6.3.1, Megan was a sexually promiscuous woman who engaged in multiple extra-marital affairs with men, often at the same time. Furthermore, Megan also knowingly engaged in an extra-marital affair with Tom, a married man and a father. Her sexual promiscuity automatically categorised her as exhibiting a pariah femininity, and therefore a perfect example

of 'the whore'. However, her enactment of hyperfemininity allowed her to avoid censure as she gave the appearance of conforming to gender norms of the 'perfect wife', essentially embodying 'the virgin'. This is evident in how Rachel perceived Megan. Initially, when she saw Megan and Scott together and projected her visions of her life with Tom onto them, she imagined them having the 'perfect marriage', despite never having met them or having been able to verify any of the traits she had attributed to them (Hawkins, 2015, pp. 10, 29, 30–31). Rachel adored her version of Megan (pp. 29, 30-31), and upon learning of Megan's infidelities, she was angered, reliving the grief she felt when she discovered Tom's affair with Anna: "I feel as though *I* have been cheated on" (p. 29); "I was obsessing this morning about [Megan] and [Scott], … when [Scott's] world, like mine, was ripped apart" (p. 31). While Rachel's disappointment and pain were connected to Tom's infidelity, her attitude towards Megan changed significantly, with her now perceiving the latter as 'the whore', unconsciously equating Megan with Anna, thus casting both women as 'the whore'. Prior to witnessing Megan with another man, Rachel envisioned her as a woman who embodied the feminine ideal hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity, essentially 'the virgin' (pp. 4, 9): "She is one of those tiny bird-women, a beauty, pale-skinned with blond hair" (p. 4). However, following her discovery of Megan's affair, Rachel's perception of Megan changed from a positive image of an extremely hyperfeminine persona (feminine ideal) to a negative image of Megan as a selfish and cruel woman (pariah femininity), marking Megan's transition from 'the virgin' to 'the whore' in Rachel's eyes. Rachel clearly viewed Megan as a woman with no moral compass, which is characteristic of the depiction of 'the whore' (Simkin, 2014, p. 6).

Anna too was perceived as a woman with no moral compass for engaging in an affair with a married man by Rachel and Anna's own friends. Rachel viewed Anna as a 'homewrecker' and never considered her as someone trustworthy due to the initial feelings of betrayal and hurt she had felt at Anna's involvement with Tom (p. 227). Anna herself admitted that she was aware that their affair was considered immoral, and therefore she would be deemed an immoral woman, thus becoming susceptible to receiving censure for it (p. 233). She also noticed that her lack of guilt for her immorality would make her seem more evil and deserving of censure. As such, she made an effort to conceal her lack of guilt about potentially hurting Rachel with her friends, correctly recognising that she was cast in the role of the 'the whore' and realising that she needed to enact the role of 'the virgin' if she were to avoid censure for her behaviour: "I had to [pretend to feel guilty], with my married girlfriends" (p. 233). This was a conscious choice on Anna's part, so that she could masquerade as 'the virgin' when she was clearly embodying 'the whore'. While this categorises Anna as exhibiting a pariah femininity, her enactment of hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity was designed to seduce Tom and it was successful. Therefore, as Anna did not threaten Tom's masculinity nor patriarchy through her pariah femininity, she was allowed the opportunity to conform to gender norms through her enactment of the idealised femininity, despite being classified as 'the whore'. This is a marked difference from both Rachel and Megan who faced rejection and censure for being categorised as 'the whore' due to the challenges they posed to the patriarchy.

6.5   Violence

Violence is the fifth and final strategy employed by Rachel, Megan and Anna. While they employed the strategies of masquerade and gender performance, inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour and recognising their victimhood in different ways and to varying success, they were ultimately unsuccessful in escaping their victimhood and regaining their lost agency solely through the use of these four strategies. Thus, violence became the fifth, and final, strategy available to them when faced with male violence. This, too, was employed by the three women differently and had varying success for each, with Rachel and Anna regaining their agency through exerting violence upon Tom, their primary male abuser, while Megan was violently murdered by him, forever remaining a victim.

This section examines the aspect of violence within the novel, focussing on both female and male characters in the novel, exploring how these acts affected the female protagonists in question. The first subsection identifies the types of violence exerted by the female and male protagonists and analyses how these affected their relationships with each other. Through this analysis, I aim to explore how female and male violence are portrayed in the subgenre and whether violence is gendered within the novel and the subgenre. The second subsection focusses on Rachel and Anna's murder of Tom, an act committed in self-defence, paying special attention to the violent nature of the attack. The third and final subsection includes a discussion of whether Rachel, Megan and Anna can be classified as heroines, anti-heroines or villainesses, based on the ways in which female victimhood is portrayed in the novel.

6.5.1   The Gendering of Violence

Many of the relationships within this novel feature significant amounts of abuse, primarily taking the form of emotional/psychological and verbal abuse. However, acts of violence are not restricted to the male characters, with the female protagonists also engaging in violence directed at the male characters and each other. This subsection explores the violence exhibited by Rachel, Megan, Anna, Tom, Scott and Mac (Megan's ex-boyfriend).

As a result of her therapy sessions with Kamal, Rachel realised that Tom had subjected her to severe emotional/psychological and physical abuse, both while they were married and after their divorce. The emotional abuse took the form of gaslighting, a form of lying and emotional manipulation, that negatively affected her mental and physical health (Calef and Weinshel, 1981; Hightower, 2017). These acts of violence were made easier due to Rachel's alcoholism rendering her unable to recall most of the incidents, allowing Tom to alter the truth. Gaslighting Rachel seems even more egregious as Tom's choice to do so was made following her descent into depression and alcoholism as she attempted to cope with her infertility (Hawkins, 2015, p. 77). As Tom noted, he soon grew tired of Rachel's depression and centred himself as the true victim in their marriage, thereby justifying the gaslighting:

> "I did my best, you know. I was a good husband to you, Rach.
> I put up with a lot—your drinking and your depression. I put
> up with all that for a long time before I threw in the towel."
>
> …

He shrugs. "Do you have any idea how boring you became,

Rachel? How ugly? … It's no wonder I lost patience, is it? It's

no wonder I had to look for ways to amuse myself. You've no

one to blame but yourself." (p. 299)

Therefore, Tom was not apologetic of his abuse, firmly believing that he was justified in his actions as Rachel refused to behave in the way that he expected of her. Thus, he believed himself to be the victim, interpreting Rachel's behaviour as disobedient and abusive towards him.

Moreover, he was self-aggrandising and perceived himself as a hero to his female partners, as if his romantic attention was a gift to them:

[Tom] "Knight in shining armour, me."

…

[Tom] "Don't you remember? You all sad, because Daddy's

died, and just wanting someone to come home to, someone to

love you? I gave you all that. I made you feel safe."

…

… "Let's not start rewriting history. I was good to you.

Sometimes … well, sometimes you forced my hand. But I was

good to you. I took care of you" (pp. 305-306)

As with his extra-marital affair with Anna while married to Rachel, Tom justified his affair with Megan while being married to Anna, viewing himself as a victim when Anna was more focussed on caring for their infant child instead of being readily sexually available to him, blaming Anna for his infidelity:

"You were so tired all the time," … "You just weren't

interested. Everything was about the baby. Isn't that right? It

was all about you, wasn't it? All about you!" … "And Megan

was so … well, she was available." (p. 298)

Tom engaged in a masquerade where he masked his true nature from

others and himself by convincing himself that he was a "[k]night in shining

armour" and that he was victimised by these women, thereby forcing him to

engage in abusive behaviour to save himself. Rachel identified this, noting: "he

lies to himself the way he lies to me. He *believes* this. He actually believes that

he was good to me" (p. 306). This masquerade was important to Tom so that he

could give others the appearance of conforming to gender norms of hegemonic

masculinity, and in turn, convince himself of his superior masculinity, in an

attempt to stem the anxieties from his fragile masculinity:

He lied all the time, about everything. Even when he didn't

need to, even when there was no point.

… Tom's whole life was constructed on lies—falsehoods and

half-truths told to make him look better, stronger, more

interesting than he was. (p. 319)

His propensity to blame others for his own abusive behaviour is also

evident in how he perceived Megan's murder. While he believed that his abuse

of Rachel was her fault, so were the incidents that led to him murdering Megan:

""But then you came along, Rachel, and fucked everything up." … "The whole

thing was actually *your* fault, Rachel."" (p. 307). He even refused to take

responsibility for the callous way in which he dismissed Megan and their baby,

which resulted in her physically and verbally abusing him (p. 303). Regarding murdering Megan, he was convinced that he had no choice but to kill her to stop her from ruining his life and so placed the blame of the murder upon her: "I just needed her to stop [talking]. … "She was trying to crawl away from me. There was nothing I could do. I had to finish it."" (pp. 308-309). Even while he was attacking Megan in her final moments, he blamed her: *Now look. Now look what you made me do*" (p. 304). This tendency to blame others also applied to his numerous physical assaults upon Rachel after he realised that she was aware of him murdering Megan, his subsequent imprisonment and attempted murder of Rachel (pp. 295-301, 305-311, 314-317). In the same vein, he felt no guilt for his infidelities, be it his affair with Anna or Megan, feeling that he was justified in his actions as both Rachel and Anna had not prioritised him, thus forcing him to satisfy his needs elsewhere (pp. 298-300, 305-308).

Furthermore, his constant comparisons of Rachel and Anna (and later, Megan) and the insults he directed at them primarily focussed on their femininities, demonstrating that he subscribed to traditional notions of femininity, as he consistently complimented Anna when she was performing his preferred type of hyperfemininity, noting with disdain that Rachel was incapable of being a 'good wife'. This also indicates Tom's feelings of entitlement in terms of women and his female partners, believing that they must perform his preferred type of hyperfemininity to receive his affections. This was evident in his interactions with Anna, where he constantly compared her to Rachel and claimed that Anna was far superior. However, when Anna engaged in behaviour that he deemed undesirable or inconvenient for him, he would invariably comment that Anna was mirroring Rachel's behaviour, meant solely as an insult and was

designed to emotionally manipulate Anna into modifying her behaviour (p. 299). He treated Megan in the same way, and he paid attention to her when she was engaging in a hyperfemininity that he preferred but became distant when she engaged in any kind of behaviour that forced him to acknowledge the truth. Therefore, when Megan began considering a future beyond an affair with Tom, he subjected her to silent treatment, and when she revealed her pregnancy to him, he attacked her by insulting her ability to be a good mother (pp. 132, 304).

He also emotionally manipulated Rachel. While he had little respect for her and made derisive comments about her to Anna, he made efforts to make Rachel believe that he may still be interested in her. Due to this special attention, Rachel was convinced that he was still in love with her, although his intent had been to find out what she knew about Megan's murder investigation by complimenting her: ""I still care about you, Rach" … "You look … pretty."" (pp. 223-224). Later, he commented upon his intentional emotional manipulation, mocking Rachel for being fooled: ""God, the state of you. Looking like shit, stinking of wine … you tried to kiss me, do you remember?" He pretends to gag, then starts laughing" (p. 307). Just before he attempted to kill her, he again reminded her of how pathetic she was to be fooled by him, claiming that she was like "the unwanted [dogs] that have been mistreated all their lives. … they'll still come back to you … Hoping … that this time … you'll love them" (p. 316).

While Tom was responsible for subjecting Rachel, Megan and Anna to overwhelming amounts of emotional/psychological, verbal and physical violence, he never perceived himself as the perpetrator, instead choosing to

engage in a masquerade where he was always the victim and innocent of any crime or wrongdoing, thus dramatically changing the narrative in his favour.

Scott, too, was abusive and exerted violence upon Megan and Rachel. In their marriage, Scott distrusted Megan due to her numerous infidelities, resulting in Scott constantly monitoring and controlling her activities. Megan admitted that Scott secretly checked her laptop, reading her emails and browser history (pp. 45-46, 59-60). When Kamal suggested that she keep a diary to record her thoughts, she knew she could not do so because "*I can't do that, I can't trust my husband not to read it*" (p. 45). However, when Kamal pointed out that this behaviour counted as emotional abuse, Megan was furious, insisting that she was not afraid of Scott and that he had a legitimate reason to covertly monitor her due to her infidelities (pp. 45-46, 59-60). She believed Scott's behaviour was justified and insisted that she did not mind this intrusion upon her privacy if it provided Scott some comfort, suggesting that Scott's tendency to be extremely "jealous" and "possessive" was justified and acceptable:

> Perhaps I should [mind], but the fact is, I don't. He's jealous,
> he's possessive. That's the way he is. … I cover my tracks, so
> it isn't usually an issue (pp. 59-60)

Due to her guilt at how she hurt him with her infidelities, she felt she was being disloyal and unfair to Scott for letting Kamal know about how Scott monitored her (p. 45). Despite the emotional abuse, she was reluctant to blame Scott for his emotional abuse nor cease her emotional abuse towards him (infidelities and constant lying), instead justifying their abuse:

I don't mind, because it reassures him that there's nothing going on, that I'm not up to anything. And that's good for me—it's good for us—even if it isn't true. And I can't really be angry with him, … I've given him cause in the past and probably will again. (p. 46)

Although both Scott and Megan had subjected each other to continued emotional abuse, her revelation to him that she had engaged in yet another affair led to a confrontation where Scott verbally abused her and tried to strangle her (pp. 287-290). While he was apologetic soon afterwards, Megan was unable to forgive him as she had been hopeful that this was her opportunity to become a better mother than she was to Libby (pp. 287, 291). Following his apologies, Megan interpreted his crying as him victimising himself despite his attempt to kill her: "I can hear tears in his voice. It makes me angry … *Don't you bloody dare cry, not after what you just did*." (p. 290). Therefore, despite being tolerant of Scott's emotional abuse as she had emotionally abused him, it was these final acts of physical and verbal abuse that demonstrated his true nature to her.

His behaviour towards Rachel also included physical and verbal abuse. Upon learning of how Rachel was a stranger who had inserted herself into Megan's murder investigation and into Scott's life through her lies, Scott was understandably enraged. However, in his anger, he physically assaulted her and then imprisoned her in a room, then mocking her when she appeared to be terrified of him before he allowed her to leave his house (pp. 244-251). In his parting words to her, he was verbally abusive, threatening her and attacking her femininity: ""I should break your fucking neck, but … you're just not worth the hassle."" (p. 251). He clearly enjoyed terrorising her, even pretending to attack

her again as he was allowing her to leave his house: "he steps out in front of me with a boxer's feint … There must be terror in my eyes because he starts to laugh, he roars with laughter" (p. 251). However, Rachel noted that Scott had been intoxicated at that point and despite Scott's justification for his behaviour being that Rachel had lied to him (which can be considered emotional abuse), his violent nature is evident with both Megan and Rachel. However, despite Scott's violence towards both women, he is not punished by any of the female protagonists in the same way that Tom was and remained relatively unscathed, except for the emotional abuse he experienced due to Megan's infidelities.

Tom and Scott are the most abusive male characters. However, both Mac (Megan's ex-boyfriend) and Kamal also engaged in abusive behaviour towards Megan. As Kamal, in the capacity of her therapist, noted, Mac had been emotionally abusive towards Megan, as she had been too emotionally vulnerable for a relationship with the older man and not at all equipped to handle a pregnancy and motherhood: ""But he abandoned you. You were alone, afraid, panicking, grieving. He left you on your own in that house."" (pp. 213-214). Megan was doubly emotionally vulnerable as she was reeling from her brother's sudden death and she was also too young to be involved in a romantic relationship with an adult as she was still a minor at age seventeen. Megan, however, was willing to excuse Mac's behaviour (pp. 166-169), as she had been happy during the early period of their relationship, despite the constant arguments and verbal abuse to which they had subjected each other ("I can't shift the blame onto [Mac]. This is one thing I have to take as my own.") (p. 213). Yet again, despite being emotionally abused, Megan blamed only herself. Like Scott, Mac is also seemingly not punished for his behaviour.

Despite Kamal being Megan's therapist, she was sexually attracted to him from the beginning and was successful in seducing him (pp. 23-24, 57). While Kamal made efforts to avoid a sexual relationship, he was unsuccessful in resisting Megan's consistent advances despite his reservations of violating his oath as a therapist (pp. 60, 133-134). This led to a confrontation between the two where Megan was attempting to coerce him into a sexual relationship with her (considered sexual abuse), and Kamal responded by physically assaulting her after she refused to respect his boundaries (pp. 133-134, 134). As Megan drew her worth from how much she was desired by the men she was interested in, Kamal's rejection caused her distress, making her question her self-worth (p. 132). Therefore, she continued to sexually coerce him despite his reluctance, justifying her abuse by maintaining that feeling wanted was a legitimate reason for her behaviour. Being sexually desired also made her feel as if she had power over her partners and she savoured this feeling of being in control as she did not have much agency over her life in general (p. 292).

Anna continuously victimised Rachel, subjecting her to emotional and verbal abuse. Mirroring Tom's disdain for Rachel, Anna viewed Rachel as a failure and this was reflected in her lack of caring for Rachel's wellbeing. This is evident in Anna's admission of not considering Rachel's feelings when engaging in an affair with Tom and in the way she insulted Rachel after Rachel attempted to help Anna escape after learning of Tom's affair with and possible murder of Megan (pp. 233, 278-283). Megan, too, felt little guilt about engaging in an affair with Tom, knowing that Anna would feel hurt but not considering her feelings, as Megan had little respect for Anna and her daughter, Evie (pp. 19-21, 25-27, 61, 93-95, 304). However, despite Rachel and Anna's differences,

they united to exert physical violence upon Tom by murdering him to protect themselves (discussed in more detail in Section 6.5.2).

While both female and male characters exerted violence upon others, the male characters are the most violent in the novel, with much of this violence directed at the female characters. A significant amount of the violence exerted by the male characters was emotional/psychological and physical in nature and the female characters were subjected to this abuse for lengthy periods. Tom and Scott are responsible for most of the violence perpetrated in the novel, directing all the acts of violence towards the three female protagonists. Despite both characters engaging in significant amounts of emotional/psychological violence, a type of abuse that is typically coded feminine, they are not categorised as embodying femininities as their abusive behaviour was designed to maintain control and hegemony over their female partners. Therefore, engaging in more 'feminine' types of violence did not challenge their masculinities.

In terms of the female protagonists, Megan perpetrated the most amount of violence, directed primarily at the male characters. Much of the violence that she committed was 'invisible' and was in keeping with the belief that women are more likely to engage in emotional/psychological violence than any other type (Connell, 2005; Schippers, 2007). Thus, her acts of violence do not suggest that she embodied a masculinity through her violence. However, as discussed in Section 6.3, Megan's and Anna's emotional violence in terms of their affairs led to them being characterised as pariah femininities due to their embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. Likewise, Rachel's and Anna's act of physical violence against Tom (murder) is another example of how the female characters inverted normative gendered behaviour in terms of violence (discussed in Section 6.5.2).

Despite the women's violence, only Megan is fatally punished for her pariah femininity, and this maybe a result of her embodiment of hegemonic masculinity in the form of multiple infidelities (Gwin, 2017). Her harsh punishment may also be due to her failure in fulfilling the role of the 'perfect mother', especially because she was partially responsible for the death of her first child. Therefore, it is evident that while acts of violence are perpetrated by both female and male characters, the violence within the novel is primarily gendered and male, illustrating how women are consistently victimised by their past and present male partners.

6.5.2   *Murder in Self-Defence*

The climax of the novel is when Rachel and Anna murder Tom, with Rachel acting in self-defence while Anna helped ensure that Tom would die from the injury. The act itself was an inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, as the women were engaging in physical violence, a type of abuse that is typically coded masculine (Connell, 2005; Schippers, 2007). Therefore, the act of murdering their male partner automatically made Rachel and Anna pariah femininities as their act directly challenged male hegemony over women. This inversion is a marked difference from traditional crime fiction, as the female protagonists sought justice for themselves by eliminating their male abuser.

According to Miller (2018), Tom's murder was also reminiscent of and mirrored rape:

> However, in another inversion of the traditionally gendered
> roles of crime writing, it is Rachel and Anna who kill Tom,

"[t]wisting the corkscrew in, further and further, ripping into

his throat", in an act of violent penetration that mimics that of

rape. (p. 103)

To Miller, this represents an inversion of traditional crime fiction's fixation on "the head and the brain" (p. 102). While female sexual appeal has always been the facet that was found to be the "most threatening to the male gaze and therefore worthy of mutilation and objectifying", Miller (2018) suggests that "the head and the brain" constitute the "new site of bodily concern in contemporary crime fiction" (p. 102). This is a trend found in domestic noir and crime fiction, where the victims are predominantly female and the perpetrators always male, exemplified by Jo Nesbø's crime novel *The Snowman* (Miller, 2018). This type of violence is also reminiscent of male violence found in traditional crime fiction. Miller interprets Tom's attacks on Megan and Rachel as part of this fixation, as Tom applied blunt force to Megan's head to kill her and he attempted to kill Rachel through strangulation (p. 103).

There is one major similarity between how Tom attacked Megan and Rachel and how he was murdered. With both Megan and Rachel, Tom's physical assaults and murder attempts were borne out of efforts to silence them and to prevent them from threatening the life that he had built for himself with his lies (Hawkins, 2015, p. 308). This is evident in his justifications for attacking both women: ""Christ, [Megan] just wouldn't fucking shut up. … I just needed her to stop"" and ""I gave you [Rachel] a smack to shut you up"" (pp. 308, 309, 307, 314-316). With Megan, his efforts to silence her were successful and he attempted to do the same with Rachel. With Rachel, his intended method of silencing her was more literal as he attempted to do so through strangulation,

essentially taking her voice away as well as killing her. While Tom made no attempts to kill or hurt Anna, he effectively silenced her by threatening their daughter (p. 310). This threat ensured that Anna would not seek help for an injured Rachel so that she could keep her daughter safe, knowing that Tom would not hesitate to hurt Evie and herself if he felt threatened. Essentially, this verbal threat was designed to silence Anna and keep her complicit in his violence against Rachel.

However, he was ultimately unsuccessful in silencing Rachel, as, similar to how he attempted to permanently silence her through strangulation, Rachel was successful in permanently silencing him by attacking his throat, essentially taking his voice away: "I jam the vicious twist of the corkscrew into his neck. His eyes widen as he falls without a sound." (p. 317). Once Rachel had attacked Tom with the corkscrew, Anna ensured that he would die: "she wasn't trying to stop the bleeding. She was making sure. Twisting the corkscrew in, farther and farther, ripping into his throat" (p. 322). This motion, while mimicking rape by violating him (Miller, 2018), was also a literal silencing of their male abuser in retribution for how he had silenced them.

Upon the arrival of the police, Anna defended Rachel, maintaining that Rachel had committed the act in self-defence when Tom had approached her with the corkscrew, intent upon murdering Rachel (p. 318). She also claimed that she had attempted to help him but was unsuccessful. However, both claims were fabrications as, while Rachel had acted in self-defence, she had manipulated Tom into a situation where she could fatally attack him before he could kill her, and Anna had ensured Tom would die from the injury (pp. 316-317). In attempting to save herself, Rachel employed the strategies of

masquerade and gender performance, seducing Tom (p. 316), hoping that this would provide a sufficient distraction to Tom and her attempts at finding a weapon to attack him would go unnoticed, as her previous attempts to escape had resulted in Tom physically assaulting her (pp. 316, 301, 305-311, 314-316). She enacted this plan following Tom's insults, after realising that he derived sexual pleasure from terrorising her. She was able to lull him into a false sense of security by engaging in a masquerade and gender performance of hyperfemininity by responding positively to his sexual advances:

> I let his tongue slip between my lips and press my hips against
>
> his. I can feel him getting hard.
>
> … I slip my hand into the drawer behind me
>
> … my right hand closes around a familiar object. I smile and
>
> lean into him, closer, closer, snaking my left hand around his
>
> waist.
>
> … it's then that I lunge forward (p. 316)

By engaging in a hyperfemininity that reasserted his dominance and reinforced his masquerade of hegemonic masculinity, Rachel was able to distract Tom momentarily. Thus, despite being unsuccessful at masquerade and gender performance during and after their marriage, Rachel successfully employed these strategies against him to avoid being murdered, effectively allowing her to escape her victimhood and regain her agency.

The manner in which Tom's murder was perpetrated signals the shift in the female and male roles within domestic noir, demonstrating that the act itself

was retribution for the female characters, and not just for those involved in his murder (Rachel and Anna), but for all the women that Tom had abused (including Megan). Murdering Tom was a pivotal point for Rachel and Anna as the act allowed them to shed their victimhood and regain the agency they had lost because of Tom. Unfortunately, Megan was unable to do so, thus forever remaining a victim, despite obtaining some justice and retribution posthumously through Rachel and Anna's act of violence.

6.5.3   Rachel, Megan and Anna: Heroines, Anti-Heroines or Villainesses?

6.5.3.1 Rachel

Despite Rachel's victimisation by Tom for an extended period, she was also responsible for his murder, a factor which complicates her classification. However, in the novel itself, she is portrayed sympathetically, as a woman who was a victim of an abusive man and a society which constantly rejected her.

Rachel did not conform to gender norms by failing at the roles of the 'perfect wife' and the 'perfect mother'. Therefore, she was perceived by others as being a failure in terms of her femininity. This inability and refusal to conform, along with her alcoholism, led to her embodying a pariah femininity, thereby threatening the patriarchy. This suggests that Rachel was an anti-heroine instead of a heroine as her actions did not serve to uphold the patriarchy.

Her primary act of violence was murdering Tom. While it was committed in self-defence, there was an element of premeditation to it, as she recognised the need to attack Tom before he murdered her. Thus, while committing murder,

especially of a man, would classify her as a villainess, the fact that she was acting in self-defence against her abuser indicates that she could be categorised as a female hero.

An important factor to consider is Rachel's kindness towards Anna and her daughter. Rachel, upon realising that Tom had murdered Megan, rushed to inform Anna and to convince her to escape before Tom arrived, knowing that he would not hesitate to hurt Anna and Evie. It is her decision to inform Anna that leads to Tom holding her hostage, and her decision to help Anna was an act borne out of kindness and genuine concern, despite the hurt Anna had caused her by engaging in an affair with Tom. Therefore, Rachel never made any attempts to confront Tom nor punish him, only resorting to violence when all other modes of escape were unsuccessful. In this sense, and as she was acting in self-defence against her abuser, she could be classified as a female hero.

While Rachel had many character flaws and engaged in unwise and often questionable behaviour such as seemingly abducting Tom's and Anna's daughter, inserting herself into Megan's missing-person and murder investigations, lying to Scott about having a close relationship with Megan and her reliance on alcohol, she is portrayed as a victim. Her infertility, the resulting depression, the subsequent devolution of her marriage due to his infidelity and his years of emotional abuse towards her all indicate that she suffered due to gender norms. However, despite finally defeating her male abuser would ordinarily classify the female protagonist as a female hero, Rachel's inability and unwillingness to conform to gender norms suggest that she is an anti-heroine.

This is also in keeping with the modern understanding of the term the 'anti-heroine', where anti-heroines represent a novel type of "imagery of female power and subjectivity" (Buonanno, 2017, para. 2). Rachel too, was attempting to navigate a patriarchal society that makes contradictory demands of women, and through her non-conformance was labelled a 'bad woman' (a pariah femininity) (Buonanno, 2017, para. 5). As Buonanno notes, both heroines and anti-heroines differ in terms of their moral compasses as they approach addressing feminist issues in different ways (Buonanno, 2017). According to this interpretation, the anti-heroine challenges both the patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity (Tally, 2016; Buonanno, 2017). Like most anti-heroines in fiction, Rachel also attempted to protect herself and seek justice for herself from her male abuser, inadvertently challenging the patriarchy through her actions. Therefore, while within a feminist framework, considering her victimisation and the act of murder, Rachel could be classified as a female hero, her non-conformance to gender norms suggest that she is an anti-heroine.

6.5.3.2 Megan

Megan's classification is made complicated by her status as a victim despite also having subjected others to acts of abuse (e.g., Scott). Unlike Rachel, Megan was unapologetic about engaging in acts considered immoral by society, such as her multiple infidelities and affair with Tom, a married man and a father. Therefore, it is evident that Megan cannot be classified as a heroine and could only be either an anti-heroine or a villainess.

Megan engaged in hyperfemininity to mask her gender non-conformance, therefore masking her pariah femininity that challenged both the patriarchy and the masculinities of the men with whom she was involved. Through her sexual promiscuity, she also embodied a hegemonic masculinity, further categorising her as exhibiting a pariah femininity. This suggests that Megan could be classified as a villainess.

Her continued infidelities indicate that she was unsuccessful in enacting the role of the 'perfect wife', which also points to her status as a woman exhibiting a pariah femininity for her 'failure' at wifehood. Furthermore, her part in the death of her first daughter, Libby, also indicates that she embodied a pariah femininity through her inability to perform the role the 'perfect mother'. As being successful at wifehood and motherhood are requirements for women, Megan is categorised as a villainess in this sense too.

However, Megan engaged in a masquerade and gender performance of hyperfemininity to ensure that she provided the appearance of gender conformance. This would have her categorised as a villainess as she made efforts to manipulate patriarchal ideals of femininity to avoid censure for not actually conforming to gender norms.

Despite her abusive behaviour, Megan herself was a victim. She constantly struggled with conforming to gender norms, finding that she was unwilling to enact the idealised femininity and being forced to do so nonetheless. Furthermore, she was also a victim of Scott's abuse, as he monitored her activities and attempted to control her to ensure that she did not engage in affairs. Apart from this, Megan also had to silently cope with the childhood traumas of

her brother's and her first child's death when she was a teenager. Throughout the novel, she is seen attempting to escape reminders of these traumas and was persistently haunted by her role in Libby's death, believing herself to be a murderer. However, she did attempt to redeem herself by trying to become a better mother to her second child, despite this being the decision that eventually led to her being murdered by Tom, thereby becoming unable to regain her agency. Considering that she was victimised in multiple ways and that her masquerades and gender performances were attempts to cope with her victimisation, Megan could be considered an anti-heroine.

Although, based on Megan's infidelities and her gender non-conformance would classify her as a villainess, her being murdered makes her a character with whom the reader is expected to empathise. Especially because she was brutally murdered when she was pregnant with her second child to whom she was trying to be a better mother, in an effort to redeem herself. Therefore, due to her victimisation by Tom and her final redeeming acts, her categorisation changes from a villainess to an anti-heroine despite having challenged the patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity.

6.5.3.3 Anna

While Anna conformed to gender norms by successfully performing the roles of the 'perfect wife' and the 'perfect mother', she was victimised by her husband and helped Rachel murder him, thereby complicating her classification.

Anna engaged in hyperfemininity, engaging in gender performance and masquerade to provide the appearance of conforming to gender norms despite her dissatisfaction with being limited to the roles of wife and mother. In her attempts to conform, she prioritised Tom and Evie over herself at her expense, engaging in the type of hyperfemininity that Tom preferred to satisfy him and to avoid censure. In this sense, Anna can be categorised as a heroine as her actions upheld patriarchal values and satisfied her husband.

However, Anna did engage in an affair with a married man (Tom) while being aware of his marital status. She even admitted to feeling little concern for Rachel when she had begun her affair with Tom, indicating a callousness for Rachel's suffering. Her choice to engage in such an affair was an act that would attract censure from society. While Anna engaged in a hyperfemininity of Tom's preference, her choice to engage in this affair categorised her a pariah femininity. Thus, Anna could be considered a villainess.

Despite these factors, Anna was abused by Tom, experiencing emotional abuse throughout their marriage, finally culminating in his affair with Megan. Considering this, and the fact that she had been forced to conform to gender norms by engaging in a hyperfemininity where she had to prioritise others at her expense, Anna was a victim of both society and of Tom.

In response to Tom's violence, Anna made the choice to help Rachel murder him, thus enabling both her and Rachel to shed their victimhood and regain their agency. While her act of violence against Tom did not appear premeditated, she ensured that he would die. Her act appeared more egregious as it was directed at a man, thus challenging his hegemonic masculinity, and the

patriarchy itself. Therefore, the level of violence in her act, along with her seemingly ruthless attitude towards it, suggest that she is a villainess. However, considering that she committed the murder out of necessity to protect her daughter and herself from her abuser, she can be categorised as an anti-heroine.

Thus, while Anna was victimised by restrictive gender norms and by Tom and engaged in brutal physical violence against him, she can be classified as an anti-heroine as her acts of violence were designed to protect her daughter and herself. However, her lack of compassion for Rachel and Megan and her selfish nature make her a more unsympathetic character than Rachel and Megan.

6.6   Conclusion

The following charts provide a chronology of events in the novel and demonstrates how Rachel, Megan and Anna used the five strategies provided in the theoretical framework to cope with their victimhood and regain their agency:

During Courtship and Early Stages of Marriage to Tom
- Gender Performance of hyperfemininity

- Rachel's infertility leading to depression and alcoholism
- Inversion of Normative Feminine and Masculine Behaviour (alcoholism)

Maintain Normalcy in Marriage to Avoid Separation
- Gender Performance (but increasingly unable to maintain it)
- Attempts to mend their relationship (planning a surprise vacation)

- Discovering Tom's extra-marital affair with Anna
- Divorce from Tom
- Tom's marriage to Anna and the birth of their daughter

- Rachel's involvement in Megan's murder investigation
- Begins therapy sessions with Dr. Kamal Abdic

Recognising Victimhood
- Gradually realises Tom had been gaslighting her for years

- Attempting to help Anna by revealing to her that Tom may have murdered Megan
- Held hostage by Tom before she could convince Anna to escape with her

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Violence
- Gender Performance
- Hyperfemininty as a mask (Masquerade)
- Physical violence (murder)

Figure 6: Rachel's Use of the Five Strategies

During Courtship and After Marriage to Scott

- Gender Performance of hyperfemininity
- Hyperfemininity as a mask (Masquerade)

- Feeling stifled in her marriage to Scott
- Haunted by the death of her first child, Libby

- Engaging in extra-marital affairs to satisfy her restlessness
- Inversion of Normative Feminine and Masculine Behaviour (sexual promiscuity)
- Constant conflict with Scott due to him finding out about her affairs
- Scott secretly monitoring and controlling her online and offline activities

Maintain Normalcy in Marriage to Avoid Separation

- Gender Performance of hyperfemininity
- Hyperfemininity as a mask (Masquerade)

- Extra-marital affair with Tom
- Therapy sessions with Dr. Kamal Abdic provided her closure regarding Libby's death
- Learning that she is pregnant again, deciding to be a better mother

Recognising Victimhood

- Gender Performance of hyperfemininity
- Hyperfemininity as a mask (Masquerade)

Violence

- Physical violence (assault), verbal abuse (insults regarding manhood), emotional/psychological abuse (threats to expose him to his wife) directed at Tom

- Murdered by Tom

Figure 7: Megan's Use of the Five Strategies

During Courtship and After Marriage to Tom	• Gender Performance of hyperfemininity • Hyperfemininity as a mask (Masquerade) • During courtship: Inversion of Normative Feminine and Masculine Behaviour (sexual promiscuity)

• Unhappiness with her new but limited roles as stay-at-home wife and mother • Conflicts with Tom about Rachel

Maintain Normalcy in Marriage to Avoid Separation	• Gender Performance of hyperfemininity • Hyperfemininity as a mask (Masquerade)

• Finding out about Tom's affair with Megan • Rachel attempting to convince Anna to escape • Intercepted by Tom

Attempts at Reconciliation	• Gender Performance of hyperfemininity

• Anna's confrontation with Tom about his infidelity • Tom apologising and attempting to appease Anna • Tom's attempts to silence Rachel (physical violence)

Violence	• Gender Performance • Hyperfemininty as a mask (Masquerade) • Physical violence (murder)

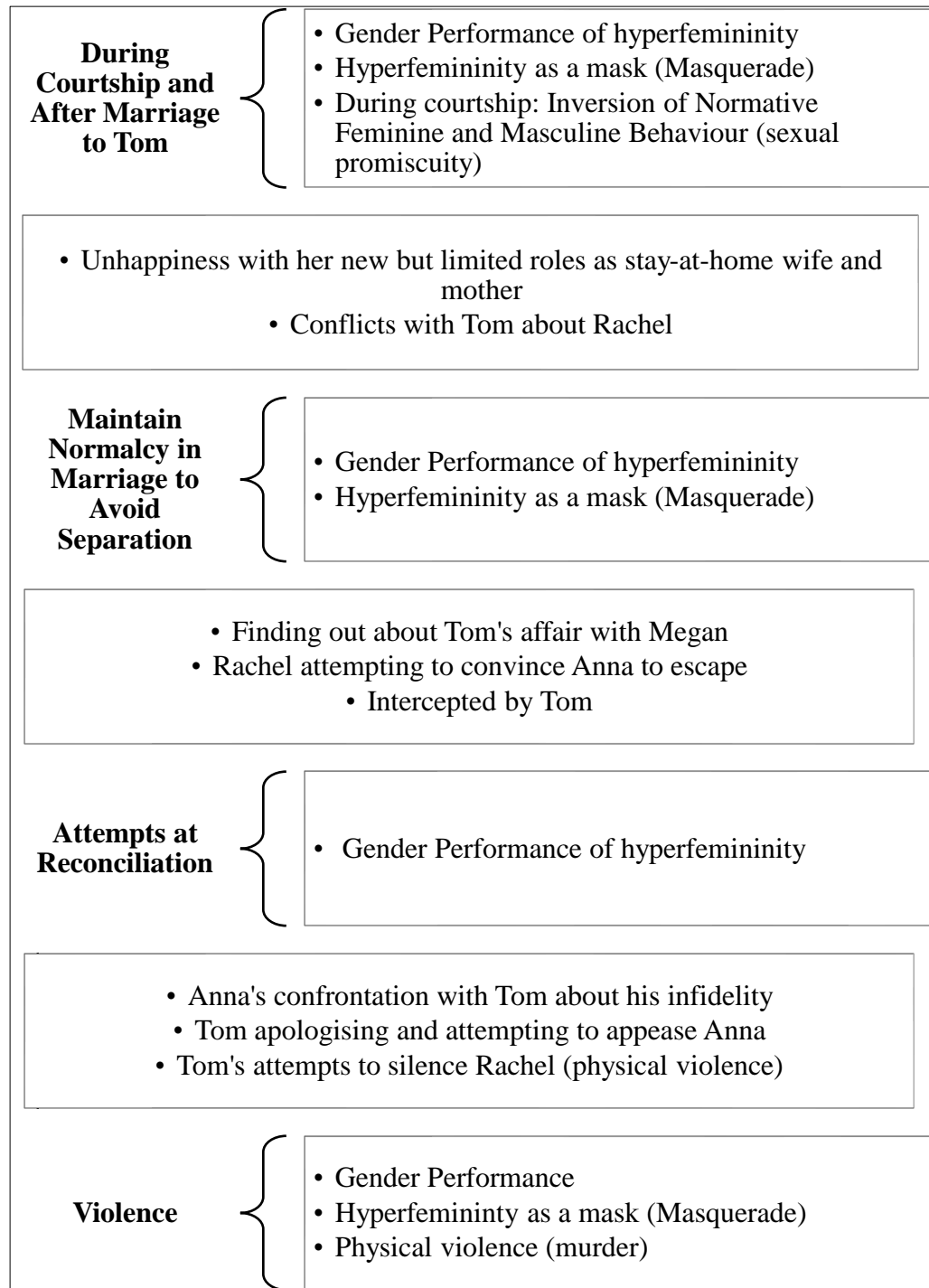*Figure 8: Anna's Use of the Five Strategies*

For Rachel, her infertility, inability to be the 'perfect wife' and her non-conformance to gender norms led to her being labelled as a woman embodying a pariah femininity. However, she did not engage in masquerades to mask her

pariah femininity nor enact hyperfemininity to avoid censure, instead becoming passive, focussing her fantasies of heteronormative marital bliss onto Scott and Megan, and then focussing on solving Megan's murder. Thus, these strategies only directly contributed to her status as a woman embodying a pariah femininity due to restrictive gender norms. Out of the three women, only Megan and Anna found some success through these two strategies. Despite this, their masks and gender performance of hyperfemininity did not translate to total liberation from their victimhood and led to little to no agency for both. However, they were successful in conforming or giving the appearance of conforming to gender norms by employing these strategies, thus avoiding censure for their pariah femininities. With Megan, her enactment of hyperfemininity (a masquerade and gender performance) allowed her to provide the appearance of conformance while she grappled with her inability to fulfil the requirements of wifehood and motherhood. For Anna, these strategies allowed her to provide the appearance of conforming to gender norms and led to her successfully performing the roles of the 'perfect wife' and the 'perfect mother'. However, despite Anna being an example of idealised femininity, she was trapped in the roles of the wife and the mother, unable to regain her agency. Therefore, Megan and Anna used the strategy of masquerade to mask their pariah femininities from themselves. Thus, ultimately, employing the strategies of masquerade and gender performance did not help Rachel, Megan nor Anna escape their victimhood and regain their agency, instead remaining trapped.

In attempting to cope with the challenges they faced, they resorted to engaging in inverting normative feminine and masculine behaviour as a strategy. Megan and Anna engaged in sexually promiscuous behaviour. For Megan,

sexual promiscuity served as a distraction from her failures at wifehood and motherhood, functioning as part of her masquerade to mask her true self from others and herself. However, Megan's subversion threatened the patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity as she threatened Scott's and Tom's masculinities and embodied hegemonic masculinity, thus being categorised as exhibiting a pariah femininity. For Anna, sexual promiscuity was a tool which provided her the opportunity to conform to gender norms by seducing Tom and then securing a marriage proposal from him, and subsequently giving birth to their daughter. Although Anna's sexual promiscuity and affair with a married man were considered deviant behaviour, she did not threaten the patriarchy nor hegemonic masculinity through her actions. Despite their deviancy, both women continuously enacted their male partners' preferred hyperfemininity, thus attracting little censure for their deviance. Therefore, for both Megan and Anna, the inversion of normative gendered behaviour provided them with opportunities to continue their masquerades and gender performances. However, for Rachel, her inversion of normative gendered behaviour was with alcoholism. Using alcohol as a crutch, Rachel was able to find comfort in being numb to the pain of failing at motherhood and wifehood. However, Rachel's adoption of this masculine-coded behaviour attracted more censure and she was labelled as a woman embodying a pariah femininity through her inability to conform to the idealised femininity.

Failing to shed their victimhood and regain their agency with the previous three strategies, Rachel, Megan and Anna gradually recognised their victimhood. For Rachel, this recognition arrived through her therapy appointments with Dr. Kamal Abdic, where she attempted to come to terms with

her abusive treatment of Tom as told by him. However, through Kamal's counselling, Rachel was able to identify her position as Tom's victim, which liberated her from the years of guilt and self-blame led to her escape from her own victimhood. For Anna, the recognition of her victimhood at the hands of Tom came with the revelation of his affair with Megan. This incident led her to realise that she had been engaged in a masquerade directed at herself to convince herself of her own happiness with Tom and that she had been victimised by him throughout their marriage, in the same way that she had contributed to Rachel's victimisation when she had engaged in an affair with Tom. Despite this, she too was able to escape her victimhood recognising her victimhood. Unfortunately, this was not the case for Megan. While she realised that she had been the victim of her male partners and of society through her therapy sessions with Kamal, she had finally come to terms with her role in Libby's death and had made the decision to become a better mother to her second child, However, her attempts to mend her relationship with Scott and to be honest with Tom were unsuccessful, resulting in being subjected to physical assault and attempted murder by Scott and murder by Tom. Therefore, unlike for Rachel and Anna, recognising her victimhood and attempting to remedy her past actions were unsuccessful, with Megan forever remaining a victim, unable to escape her victimhood and regain agency.

Both the female and male characters engaged in significant amounts of violence. Tom and Scott were responsible for much of the violence that was directed at the female protagonists. While both characters attempted to suggest that their acts of violence were justified as they were in response to female violence, this is not accurate, as both male characters aimed to control the women

they abused. For Tom, his acts of violence were committed primarily to mask his true self from himself and from others, using violence to engage in this masquerade and to reinforce his lies. This is evident in his gaslighting with Rachel and the lies he told all three female protagonists about himself. Scott's violence was directed primarily at Megan and Rachel, and with both, he despised them for lying to him, and wanted to punish them. For Megan, her acts of violence, directed primarily at the male characters, served to reinforce her masquerade (like Tom). Her violence was borne out of a desire to feel wanted and her attempts to mask her failures as a wife and a mother. In contrast, Anna directed much of her violence towards Rachel, having believed Tom's lies. However, at the end of the novel, she aided Rachel in murdering Tom who had abused them both (as well as Megan, whom she had despised), in an exceedingly violent crime that was an inversion of normative gendered behaviour. Therefore, violence is gendered and primarily male in this novel. In addition, Rachel, Megan and Anna can be classified as anti-heroines due to their victimisation by their male partners and their attempts to escape their victimhood using violence.

Rachel, Megan and Anna did not employ the five strategies in a linear fashion, instead using them as and when required. However, despite their efforts at employing the first four strategies to shed their victimhood and regain their agency, they were ultimately successful only through the use of the strategy of violence. Even through violence, only Rachel and Anna were able to escape their victimhood by eliminating their male abuser, whereas Megan was murdered by her male abuser. Although their acts of violence may seem egregious, the strategy was in response to the abuse they were subjected to by their male abusers and the victimisation they experienced due to patriarchal gender norms.

Their victimisation is also the reason that they are classified as anti-heroines. For Rachel, her final act of physical violence against Tom was committed in self-defence and as retribution for being subjected to years of severe emotional abuse. For Anna, murdering Tom allowed her to regain her agency by protecting both her daughter and herself from future violence. For Megan, despite her acts of violence against others labelling her a villainess, her murder by Tom rendered her powerless, leaving her in perpetual victimhood. While murdering Tom saved Rachel and Anna from their violence, and Megan's murder led to an end of her constant victimisation, all three female protagonists are essentially seen to be embodying pariah femininities and therefore were unable to fully conform to gender norms. This is especially true for Rachel and Megan, as Rachel remained a failed and pariah femininity while Megan was perceived as embodying a pariah femininity due to her multiple infidelities, her role in the death of her first child and pregnancy from her infidelity. Therefore, while Rachel and Anna were able to permanently silence their abuser, both women would struggle to be accepted for their true femininities, while Megan would always be perceived as a failed femininity.

Chapter Seven – Discussion of Analysis: Exploring Similarities and

Differences in the Selected Texts

7.1   Introduction

This chapter explores the similarities and differences between the three

novels and examines the same between the female protagonists Amy Elliott

Dunne (*Gone Girl*), Jodi Brett (*The Silent Wife*), Rachel Watson, Megan Hipwell

and Anna Watson (*The Girl on the Train*) as well as between the male

protagonists and characters Nick Dunne (*Gone Girl*), Todd Gilbert (*The Silent

Wife*), Tom Watson and Scott Hipwell (*The Girl on the Train*). This chapter

offers comparisons and similarities between the protagonists as they offer insight

into domestic noir's portrayals of female and male protagonists. Their

similarities and differences are explored in terms of the major aspects of the

novels, such as their gender expressions in terms of their gender performance

and masquerade, femininities and masculinities, victimhood and use of violence,

to address the following research objectives:

1. Identify how the conventional stereotypes of feminine and masculine
   behaviour are subverted within the subgenre.
2. Explore how female protagonists of domestic noir engage in gender
   performance and masquerade.
3. Analyse how women's victimhood is portrayed within the subgenre.
4. Examine how female and male violence are portrayed within the
   subgenre.

The following four sections discuss the novels and the characters in terms of the four major aspects, with each section focussing on one research objective. However, all four objectives are intricately connected and this will be reflected in the discussion. The first section focusses on gender performance and masquerade, discussing the types and purposes of gender performances and masquerades employed by the female protagonists and explores how these affected their sense of self and their marriages. The second section discusses the femininities and masculinities exhibited by the female and male protagonists, examining their expressions of gender and their inversions of gendered behaviour and how these affected their marriages. The third section is focussed on female victimhood and analyses the types of female victims who range from villainesses to anti-heroines. The fourth section discusses the types of female and male violence employed by the female protagonists and how violence is employed to regain agency.

7.2   Gender Performance and Masquerade

The five female protagonists employed gender performance and masquerade as strategies, often incorporating hyperfemininity into these. While the specific purposes of these masquerades and gender performances varied, their primary goal was to provide the impression that they were conforming to gender norms to avoid censure for their pariah/deviant femininities. This section explores the findings of the research on this aspect, addressing the following research objective: Explore how female protagonists of domestic noir engage in gender performance and masquerade.

They all enacted hyperfemininity with their male romantic partners and this masquerade and gender performance were designed to help them conform to gender norms by attracting male romantic partners to marry. However, they had varying successes in terms of achieving their goals. While Jodi and Anna continued enacting hyperfemininities preferred by their husbands (Todd and Tom respectively), Amy, Rachel and Megan were unable to sustain their performances. Jodi enacted hyperfemininity solely to accommodate Todd's hypermasculinity/hegemonic masculinity, choosing to mask her true femininity (which was more akin to a masculinity due to her independence) to satisfy his needs for a traditional family. Her hyperfemininity was the compromise she made to appease Todd and she maintained this masquerade and gender performance until Todd ended their relationship. Similarly, Anna enacted a hyperfemininity that she knew Tom preferred, and this allowed her to set herself apart from his wife, Rachel, and eventually resulted in his separation from Rachel and his subsequent marriage to Anna. Despite her misgivings about her life, she continued her masquerade and gender performance of hyperfemininity with Tom as she recognised their importance in terms of pleasing and appeasing Todd and satisfying his needs to have a traditional family. In contrast to Jodi and Anna, Amy, Rachel and Megan were incapable of maintaining their masquerades and gender performances of hyperfemininity during the entirety of their marriages. Amy, obsessed with the need to please Nick and present a version of herself she knew he would love, enacted a hyperfemininity that he preferred. However, she began to shed this persona after their marriage, expecting Nick to love her true self. Unfortunately, Nick was both shocked and repulsed by her change in personality, leading to the devolution of their

marriage. Like Amy, Rachel too could not sustain her gender performance of hyperfemininity, although for her, this was the result of her inability to conceive despite her strong desire to become a mother. Thus, Rachel's refusal to continue to enact hyperfemininity was due to the trauma she experienced from being unable to fulfil her roles in terms of wifehood and motherhood. This is somewhat similar to Megan's situation. While, like Amy, Megan enjoyed engaging in hyperfemininities specifically designed to attract and maintain the attention of male romantic partners, unlike Amy, she managed to maintain these personas in her extra-marital affairs (e.g., with Tom) but was less successful with her husband, Scott. Even then, her masquerade and gender performance of hyperfemininity failed only because she refused to continue them any further, in her attempts to remedy her past mistakes.

Amy, Jodi, Megan and Anna engaged in constant and elaborate masquerades of hyperfemininity with varying agendas, predominantly attempting to conform to gender norms by seducing male partners to secure a romantic relationship or marriage. Their gender performances of hyperfemininity allowed them to provide the appearance of gender conformance and functioned as a mask to hide their pariah femininities (evidenced by their non-conformance and enactment of hegemonic masculinity). While Rachel mostly avoided engaging in such masquerades and gender performance following her failure to become a mother, the other four characters continued to engage in hyperfemininity. However, their masquerades also affected their sense of self, calling into question each individual female protagonist's true self. Of the four, Amy had the strongest sense of self, being extremely self-aware of the distinction between her gender performance and masquerade of hyperfemininity

and her true self. While Jodi demonstrated a high level of self-awareness, a result of her training as a therapist, she chose to change her personal beliefs and worldview to accommodate and justify Todd's abusive behaviour, essentially engaging in a masquerade from herself, resulting in losing track of her true self. Anna too had chosen to alter her worldview to accommodate and both consciously and unconsciously ignore the inconsistencies of Tom's lies. This is evident in her admission that she had always been aware of his lying but that she had never confronted him about it before because his lies had benefitted her in the past. However, this had only led her to engage in a masquerade that hid her true self from her, and she allowed herself the luxury of admitting the challenges posed by Tom's behaviour only in certain moments when she felt completely overwhelmed. Like Jodi, Anna too was self-aware but chose to mask her true self from herself to accommodate her partner, losing track of her true self in the process.

Out of all five female protagonists, Amy and Megan engaged in significantly more elaborate masquerades than the others. Like the other characters, Amy used masquerades to hide her true self as she recognised this was necessary, being aware that her pariah femininity would not be accepted by society. However, underneath this masquerade, she had a strong sense of self, being aware of her true self or her 'essential self', and at least on a superficial level, experienced some level of self-acceptance (Miller, 2018). Therefore, Amy was able to separate her masquerades and gender performances from her true self, thereby maintaining her identity. However, this is not the case with Megan. For Megan, her masquerades hid her true self not only from others but from herself as well (Miller, 2018). This was a result of Megan's deep dissatisfaction

with her life, her lack of motivation to actively change her life and the restrictions that were placed upon her ability to do so. Unlike Amy, who was extremely self-aware, Megan's inability to distinguish between her masquerades and her true or 'essential self' arose from her lack of self-awareness and her debilitating inability to escape, instead choosing to mask her dissatisfaction from herself. Consequently, although Megan desired liberation, she was unable to enact a plan to achieve the freedom she desired, thus remaining stagnant and trapped.

There was relatively little difference between Megan's masquerades and her true self, with both being equally hyperfeminine (Miller, 2018). This is exemplified by her list of masquerades and roles. Once having been dubbed "a mistress of self-reinvention", she took pride in her ability to employ mask after mask, constantly reinventing herself: "Runaway, lover, wife, waitress, gallery manager, nanny, and a few more in between. So who do I want to be tomorrow?" (Hawkins, 2015, p. 20). These are similar to Amy's masquerades and roles, even mirroring Amy's desire and ability to move between different masks, creating new ones as and when required.

Despite the similarity between Amy and Megan in terms of their love for engaging in masquerades of hyperfemininity to further their own agendas, Amy's masquerades were designed to seduce male romantic partners to allow her to conform to gender norms and fulfil social expectations of her, thereby making an attempt to convince herself of her own worthiness. While some of Megan's masquerades were employed to seduce male romantic partners (Scott and extra-marital affairs), they were her attempts at reinvention to avoid the truth of her stagnating life.

This feeling of "playing at real life" demonstrates her desire to escape yet her debilitating inability to enact a plan (Hawkins, 2015, pp. 22-23). While Amy created an elaborate plan and enacted it to achieve her goals, thus playing an active role in shaping her future, Megan remained passive, victimised by her own inaction, choosing instead to resort to temporary distractions such as her ever-changing hobbies and extra-marital affairs. In an effort to counteract this inaction and its monotony, Megan actively sought out conflict, engaging in risky behaviour for the thrill of the activity and the thrill of conflict from being caught. This is evident in her continued infidelities despite knowing that being caught by Scott would be dangerous for her and also in her excitement to confront Tom about her pregnancy by him. However, this only led to a "living death" until her "actual death" when Tom murdered her (Miller, p. 102).

7.3   Femininities and Masculinities

All five female protagonists exhibited pariah/deviant femininities as they enacted both hyperfemininities/hegemonic femininities and hegemonic masculinities. Gender norms forced the female and male protagonists to enact certain expressions of gender to conform, thereby negatively affecting their marriages and leading to subversions of femininities and masculinities with their partners. This section discusses the femininities and masculinities exhibited by the female and the male protagonists and how this affected their relationships. In terms of the protagonists' femininities and masculinities, this section addresses the following research objective: Identify how the conventional

stereotypes of feminine and masculine behaviour are subverted within the subgenre.

An important aspect in their expressions of femininities and masculinities were whether they threatened the masculinities of their male partners, thereby threatening the patriarchy. Despite being pariah/deviant femininities, only Amy and Megan directly threatened the masculinities of their spouses (Nick and Scott respectively), while Rachel and Anna did not threaten the social order and Jodi maintained an intermediate position. Part of Nick's concerns in their marriage arose from how he felt emasculated by Amy through her planning their anniversary treasure hunt (thereby assuming the masculine role) and by financially supporting both of them. Therefore, her enactment of hegemonic masculinity directly threatened his masculinity, forcing him into a subordinated masculinity in their marriage. Scott too felt threatened by Megan, specifically due to her multiple infidelities, which threatened Scott's hegemonic masculinity in multiple ways: Megan's embodiment of a hegemonic masculinity served to emasculate him by her assuming a practice coded as being masculine and by suggesting that he could not adequately sexually satisfy his wife. In comparison, Rachel's embodiment of masculinity through alcoholism did not threaten masculinity, instead functioning as further proof of her pariah femininity due to her inability to fulfil the requirements of hegemonic femininity. To distance herself from Rachel's status as a woman embodying a pariah femininity, Anna made a concerted effort to enact Tom's preferred hyperfemininity. However, despite her initial act of engaging in an illicit affair with a married man being considered a more masculine practice, thereby categorising her as a woman embodying a pariah femininity, Anna evaded

censure for her deviancy because her enactment of hyperfemininity succeeded in accommodating Tom's hypermasculinity instead of threatening him. Therefore, despite her enactment of a masculinity, she did not threaten Tom's masculinity as her deviancy catered to his needs. The same applies to Jodi, as her enactment of hyperfemininity was designed to not only mask her status as a woman embodying a pariah femininity from Todd but also to accommodate his hypermasculinity, thereby avoiding censure. While certain masculine aspects of her femininity made Todd uncomfortable (e.g., her being more educated than him), her ability to mask these 'imperfections' by enacting Todd's preferred hyperfemininity allowed Todd to maintain his sense of superiority over her.

Of the four male protagonists in the novels, Nick Dunne and Tom Watson aspired to hypermasculinity/hegemonic masculinity and struggled with their subrdinated masculinities while both Todd Gilbert and Scott Hipwell unapologetically embodied toxic hypermasculinity/hegemonic masculinity. Each character abhorred engaging in any behaviour deemed feminine, demonstrating that they subscribed to traditional ideals of femininity and masculinity, even harbouring misogynistic beliefs.

Unlike with the other male protagonists, Nick's wife (Amy) was a more dominant personality and continually enacted hegemonic masculinity. Examples of this include Amy organising their treasure hunts on their anniversary and her financially supporting herself and Nick. Combined with Amy's constant mocking of his inability to perform traditionally masculine tasks such as household repairs, Nick constantly felt emasculated by Amy. Thus, while within his marriage and in society Nick embodied a subordinated masculinity, he was convinced that through Amy's attempts to emasculate him, she had cast herself

in the position of the man in their marriage, automatically relegating him to the position of the woman. In addition to this being indicative of his deeply held misogynistic beliefs, he felt forced to seek validation of his masculinity elsewhere. He found this in his extra-marital affair with his student, Andie Hardy. With Andie, Nick was able to enact a hypermasculinity as her relative inexperience, her young age and his position as her authority figure allowed him to assume a dominant position in their relationship. Therefore, Nick chose to counteract his insecurities and shame from his true masculinity, his emasculation by Amy, his subordinated masculinity and embodiment of male femininity by engaging in an affair that provided him with the space to enact hypermasculinity. This gender performance can also be interpreted as a masquerade, as Nick pretended to perform the role of his and society's idealised masculinity but limited it only to his relationship with Andie due to his insecurities. Similarly, Tom also chose to combat his insecurities and shame about his true masculinity by engaging in a gender performance that also functioned as a masquerade. However, unlike Nick, whose masquerade was directed mainly at Andie as he felt insecure about enacting a hypermasculinity with others, Tom's masquerade had no such limitations, with him choosing to mask his true masculinity from everyone around him. Dissatisfied with his apparent failures as a man who was unable to succeed in traditionally masculine practices such as becoming a soldier (denoting physical strength and aggression) and financial endeavours (role as the 'breadwinner'), Tom felt the need to mask his perceived inadequacies by performing his idealised masculinity. In addition, Tom battled his insecurities about himself by constantly belittling his female romantic partners, insulting the femininities of Rachel, Megan and Anna and questioning their ability to be the

'perfect' wife and 'perfect' mother. Both men employed gender performance and masquerade to quell their insecurities about their own masculinities just as their female counterparts attempted to mask their own pariah femininities. The men's insecurities arose from the social pressures placed on them to embody a hypermasculinity/hegemonic masculinity and because both men embodied masculinities that were deemed insufficiently masculine (Tom) or too feminine (Nick). This indicates that Nick and Tom were also victims of the patriarchy just as their female counterparts were and were also forced to fulfil certain gender roles. However, despite the similarities in their predicaments, Nick and Tom felt they could assuage their insecurities regarding their masculinities solely by passively and actively abusing and oppressing their female partners. Ultimately, their gender performances and masquerades of hypermasculinity necessitated their female partners' gender performances and masquerades of hyperfemininity.

In contrast, Todd and Scott embodied traditional norms of masculinity through enacting hypermasculinity, thereby conforming to social norms, upholding the patriarchy and receiving no censure. Therefore, unlike Nick and Tom, Todd and Scott appeared to be secure in their masculinities. In addition, their enactment of hegemonic masculinity was toxic, and their toxic behaviours were primarily directed at their wives and other women. In Todd, his toxic masculinity led him to engage in multiple extra-marital affairs, as he believed himself to be a great lover of women and felt justified in his infidelities despite being in a monogamous relationship with Jodi. While he knew that Jodi sas exceedingly unhappy with his infidelities, this was of no consequence to him and he prioritised his own desires over her. As he did not accept that he was in the

wrong, he never made sincere attempts to remedy his behaviour. Ultimately, his toxic behaviour resulted in an oppressive homelife for Jodi. However, for Scott, it was his wife who was engaging in extra-marital affairs, and he dealt with this situation by continuously monitoring and controlling Megan's communications and movements. Within their marriage, Megan had to inform Scott of all her activities, which led to an oppressive and stifling homelife for Megan. Through his controlling behaviour, Scott sought to fully exert control over Megan, justifying his toxic behaviour as necessary to curb Megan's impropriety and to maintain the sanctity of their marriage, using Megan's infidelities as an excuse for his own toxic and abusive behaviour. While both characters engaged in toxic and abusive behaviour with other women (Todd with Natasha and Ilona, and Scott with Rachel), they both primarily victimised their wives, with Todd emotionally abusing Jodi and Scott emotionally abusing Megan to establish their male dominance and validate their hypermasculinity. Both characters' toxic expressions of hegemonic masculinity (hypermasculinity) resulted in both men passively and actively oppressing their wives because their masculinities were focused on exerting power and control over the women to maintain their power within their relationships. However, despite these expressions of power and strength and their appearances of being secure in their masculinities, their embodiments of hypermasculinity were designed to counteract their personal insecurities. Engaging in hypermasculinity allowed Todd to combat his insecurities regarding ageing (concerns about his virility, physical attractiveness and physical strength) by presenting himself as his idealised masculinity. Thus, his infidelities with much younger women were meant to validate his masculinity to others and to himself. In turn, Scott's hypermasculinity was

connected to Megan's infidelities and their perceived attacks on his masculinity, as Scott felt emasculated by Megan's embodiment of hegemonic masculinity through her affairs. By attempting to exert control over Megan, Scott was able to maintain some power in their relationship dynamic and establish himself as the dominant partner, thereby validating his masculinity. To Scott, his controlling behaviour was a necessary step in enacting his idealised masculinity. Therefore, despite appearing to be fully secure in their masculinities due to their enactment of hegemonic masculinity, their expressions of hypermasculinity and toxic hegemonic masculinity were direct responses to perceived challenges to their masculinities to assuage their fragile masculinities. By embodying toxic hegemonic masculinity, Nick, Todd, Tom and Scott were able to oppress their romantic partners, further validating their dominance and their masculinities.

7.4   Female Victimhood

The three novels include five female protagonists who demonstrate varying types of victimhood. While they all engaged in a range of violent acts directed at other women and their own male abusers, this does not delegitimate the violence to which they were subjected. This section aims to explore similarities and differences in terms of the female protagonists' victimhood, drawing attention to the different types of victims found within domestic noir, thereby addressing the following research objective: Analyse how women's victimhood is portrayed within the subgenre.

All five female protagonists were victimised by their male partners, past or present, as well as by society due to the restrictive gender norms to which they

were expected to adhere. In addition, some female protagonists were also victimised by other parties, such as their families, which affected their victimhood and the violence in which they later chose to engage.

In discussing these themes of violence and victimhood, the aspect of childhood trauma is especially significant in terms of Amy, Jodi and Megan (no childhood trauma is mentioned in relation to Rachel and Anna). All three women experienced psychological trauma as children that forced them to seek comfort in various unhealthy coping mechanisms and this trauma is often cited by them as having directly affected their victimisation by their male partners and their violence towards their male abusers. Amy's parents' constant rejection of Amy's true self by forcing her to engage in an idealised American girlhood led to Amy's need to engage in masquerades for validation. While the emotional abuse of constant rejection caused her psychological trauma and remained unresolved, her masquerade of Cool Amy also led to the devolution of her marriage to Nick. Jodi suffered childhood trauma in the form of witnessing the devolution of her parents' marriage as a result of her father's infidelity. Jodi noted that it was her parents' tumultuous marriage that drove many of her life decisions regarding marriage and having children, the two main factors that affected her relationship with Todd. Megan's first traumatic experience was the result of her brother, Ben's death. In response, 17-year-old Megan became a runaway, soon becoming involved with an older man who introduced her to alcohol and drugs. She was further traumatised when she gave birth to a daughter who accidentally drowned in the bathtub. As a result, Megan spent much of her life attempting to distract herself from these incidents.

For all three women, the source of their trauma was their parents (Amy, Jodi) or a parental figure (Megan). Despite their differences, all three felt a sense of isolation due to their traumatic experiences, made more vulnerable by the fact that they were unable to find adequate support, thus propelling them to seek escape instead. However, the forms their coping mechanisms took varied greatly. All three women chose to engage in masquerades of hyperfemininity to provide the appearance of conforming to gender norms to avoid censure for being pariah femininities, essentially an avoidant coping strategy as adopting the strategies of gender performance and masquerade only masked the true cause of their problems from others and from themselves. For Amy, the feelings of rejection continued into her adulthood and she masked her insecurities by moulding new personalities to match the expectations of her audience to ensure that she would be liked. While this allowed her to attempt to conform to gender norms, she still retained her self-hatred and her inferiority complex, leading to a desire to punish those who challenged this perfect image of herself. In her obsessive attempts for vengeance and validation, she even directed violence at herself to portray herself as an "authentic" victim, thereby engaging in performative victimhood. While Amy was responsible for her violence, her desire for validation and vengeance when denied validation were influenced by her parents' emotional abuse. For Jodi, who grew up watching her mother's resigned attitude, the need to avoid subscribing to gender norms became an obsession. Although she relaxed some of the rules she had devised for herself upon meeting Todd, she never wavered from her decisions to never be trapped like her mother by refusing wifehood and motherhood. However, Jodi had only been punishing herself with these self-imposed rules, a fact made abundantly

clear when Todd had separated from her and Jodi regretted not marrying Todd, accepting that she had allowed her parents' troubled relationship to dictate her life choices. Even when faced with Todd's constant infidelities, Jodi quickly chose an avoidant coping strategy by actively ignoring his emotional violence, hoping this would help maintain a semblance of normalcy. However, this only led to Jodi engaging in acts of emotional and physical violence towards Todd in the form of passive-aggressive behaviour and ultimately murder. Megan also chose avoidant coping strategies to distract herself from thinking about her traumatic experiences by engaging in thrill-seeking activities such as extra-marital affairs and engaging in new hobbies such as photography. However, they were ultimately unsuccessful in providing her with a sufficient distraction for long periods, as, whenever Megan was haunted by the deaths of her brother and her daughter, she was forced to seek a distraction in yet another affair or reinvention of her identity. Some of her coping mechanisms were also acts of violence, such as her infidelities which were acts of emotional abuse against Scott. Instead of remedying her behaviour, she justified her acts of violence by maintaining that she was not capable of conforming to gender norms by being a good wife and mother. Ironically, it is once she made the decision to remedy her behaviour and become a good mother that Megan was murdered, indicating that even her eventual noble intentions could not excuse her previous violence and she deserved punishment on some level.

From the ways in which they utilised avoidant coping strategies, it is evident that Amy and Jodi used them as retaliatory tactics designed to punish their male partners for their acts of real and perceived abuse while Rachel, Megan and Anna used them to distract themselves from focusing on their

traumatic experiences. Although Amy's and Megan's masquerades were elaborate and numerous while Jodi's and Anna's were less exuberant, they all chose to engage in masquerades with the intention of masking their pariah femininities and their trauma from others and from themselves. In Rachel's case, instead of masquerades, she relied on alcohol to distract herself and to avoid confronting the realities of her life. However, these avoidant strategies only served to exacerbate Amy's and Anna's self-hatred and feelings of inferiority and resulted in their projecting this onto others (e.g., Hillary Handy for Amy and Rachel for Anna), while Jodi, Megan and Rachel tended to direct their self-hatred and feelings of inferiority and dissatisfaction inwards towards themselves. For Amy, Jodi, Megan and Anna, this ultimately, led to unmitigated violence directed at those who made them question their self-worth: Hillary Handy, Tommy O'Hara, Desi Collings, Nick and her parents for Amy; Todd and Natasha Kovacs for Jodi; Dr. Kamal Abdic, Scott and Tom for Megan; and Rachel, Megan and Tom for Anna.

While childhood trauma played a significant role in the female protagonists' victimhood, the trauma they experienced as adults served as catalysts for their violent behaviour. Much of their adulthood trauma was a result of the patriarchy, forcing them to conform to restrictive gender norms. For all five women, societal pressure to fulfil the roles of the 'perfect wife' and the 'perfect mother' placed an immense burden on them, and they sacrificed their personal beliefs and autonomy to fulfil them. Despite their initial avoidance and reluctance to become wives and mothers, Amy and Jodi decided to conform to gender norms and social expectations by marrying. However, Jodi maintained more autonomy than Amy in that she decided to be in a common-law marriage

with Todd, thereby liberating her from the social expectations of a traditional marriage. Despite this compromise, both women refused motherhood, although both Nick and Todd wished to become fathers. For Amy and Jodi, this was one way they could continue to maintain some agency over their lives. In contrast, Rachel and Anna willingly chose to be wives and mothers, even seeking pleasure in these roles. However, only Anna was successful in achieving both wifehood and motherhood, although she was unhappy with her life, therefore choosing to engage in a masquerade to mask her dissatisfaction from others and herself. Thus, ultimately, Anna's choice to conform to gender norms did not bring her liberation. Unlike Anna, Rachel was unable to fulfil the role of mother due to her infertility. As she herself noted, her inability to become a mother meant that society did not value her as she did not conform to idealised femininity either. In addition, her resultant depression led to the devolution of her marriage with Tom, thereby making her a failure at wifehood too. Therefore, gender norms also caused Rachel significant trauma due to her inability to fulfil all roles required of her. While gender norms put significant pressure on Megan, much of her decision to marry Scott was based on her attempts to escape from her past, and were therefore, a part of her masquerade where she was continuously reinventing herself. Despite having fantasies of playing the 'perfect wife' was initially perceived as a welcome challenge and distraction, Megan was ultimately unable to succeed at wifehood due to her childhood trauma, instead continuing her pattern of abusive behaviour.

The trauma the five women experienced due to patriarchal gender norms were exacerbated as a result of their husbands' abusive behaviour, with all of them being victims of emotional/psychological abuse. Amy, Jodi, Rachel and

Anna suffered from the rejections caused by their husbands' infidelities. In the cases of Amy, Jodi and Rachel, their husbands (Nick, Todd and Tom respectively) rejected the women's expressions of femininity and sought relationships with women who engaged in a femininity that they preferred (usually hegemonic femininity/hyperfemininity). Nick chose to engage in an affair with young, impressionable and hyperfeminine Andie as he could exhibit his hegemonic masculinity with her simply because he felt emasculated with Amy due to her enacting hegemonic masculinity within their marriage. He used the affair with Andie prove his masculinity to himself as he felt he was forced into a subordinated masculinity, and thereby the submissive and feminine position in their relationship due to Amy's dominant nature. Todd engaged in multiple affairs with women who embodied hyperfemininity when he was in a monogamous relationship with Jodi in response to her refusal to conform to traditional gender norms of wifehood and motherhood. These affairs allowed Todd to exhibit his hegemonic masculinity as he felt somewhat threatened by Jodi's sense of autonomy. Tom engaged in an affair with Anna while married to Rachel and with Megan while married to Anna because of his dissatisfaction with Rachel and Anna's performance as wives. In both marriages, he perceived Rachel and Anna as being inadequate at being wives when all of his needs were not being met. He had unrealistic expectations for both women, expecting Rachel to prioritise his needs over hers when she was depressed over her infertility and expecting Anna to satisfy his sexual needs when she was still recovering from giving birth while taking care of an infant. While infidelity itself is a serious act of emotional abuse, Tom subjected Rachel to multiple acts of severe physical, verbal and emotional abuse as revenge, taking great pleasure in this violence.

Clearly, the male protagonists' infidelities were the result of their rejection of their wives' expressions of femininity, which in turn was in response to feeling that their masculinity was threatened in some way by the behaviour of the female protagonists. In contrast with Nick, Todd and Tom, Scott did not engage in extra-marital affairs in response to threats to his masculinity. Instead, he engaged in emotional abuse, sometimes resorting to verbal and physical abuse, to control Megan as he felt that her numerous infidelities threatened his hegemonic masculinity. In fact, these acts of abuse were his attempts at asserting his dominance and masculinity within their marriage. Therefore, while Scott was not unfaithful to Megan, his behaviour is in keeping with the pattern of the male protagonists subjecting the female protagonists to acts of violence when they felt that their hegemonic masculinity was threatened.

7.5   Violence

Violence as a strategy is inextricably linked to the female protagonists' victimhood as all five female protagonists engaged in violence in response to male violence. However, their justifications for these acts and the ways in which they were violent differed. While their trauma and victimhood do not legitimise their violence, they are important factors to consider. Thus, the five female protagonists' use of violence is explored in this section, noting any similarities and differences between their approaches. In addition, male violence is also explored, especially in terms of how they affected the female protagonists. These discussions address the following research objective: Examine how female and male violence are portrayed within the subgenre.

Undoubtedly, Amy engaged in the most egregious acts of violence such as murder (Desi Collings), framing others for physical and/or sexual assault (Nick Dunne, Hillary Handy, Tommy O'Hara, Desi Collings) and reproductive coercion (Nick), apart from her acts of verbal and emotional violence against many of these same people. In addition, Amy manipulated gender norms and social and media narratives of female victimhood to masquerade as a victim through self-victimisation, where she exerted physical violence upon herself to legitimise her false accusations against others. These actions also required significant amounts of preparation, signalling the premeditated nature of her violence, indicating that she had active motivations in terms of violence. Therefore, for Amy, violence served as a strategy with which she could regain her agency to exercise control over others and to seek retribution against them. This was because Amy viewed any real or perceived threat to her self-image (her masquerade as Amazing Amy) as meriting violence in response.

Jodi's acts of violence appear more benign in comparison with Amy's, as Jodi primarily engaged in subtle acts of emotional abuse which seemed less significant than Todd's infidelities. Her engagement of passive-aggressive behaviour allowed her to seek retribution against Todd while still maintaining a semblance of normalcy in their marriage. However, her final act of violence of murder by proxy is committed mainly as a solution to her financial struggles instead of as retribution against Todd, as she herself admitted. This indicates that Jodi was driven primarily by practical concerns instead of motives like retribution. Despite the despair and self-disgust she had felt at arranging Todd's murder, she seemed to view the act as being necessary on some level. While this helped her justify her act of violence to herself, Jodi nevertheless used violence

with active motivations, although she seemed to claim that her act was in fact in defence of herself.

Megan too used violence with active motivations as her primary reason for engaging in multiple infidelities (acts of emotional violence) was as a coping mechanism in response to her childhood traumas of her brother's and daughter's deaths. Thus, her infidelities served as a distraction from her traumas, and her various reinventions of herself allowed her to engage in a masquerade designed to mask her true self from others and from herself, giving her the opportunity to protect herself from reconciling with and processing her traumas. However, while she sought agency from her acts of violence, she was only successful in subjecting Scott and others (e.g., Dr. Kamal Abdic and Anna) to abuse. Furthermore, Megan refused to accept responsibility and excused her violence by offering the justification that the extra-marital affairs were a necessity for her. In reality, she enjoyed exerting control over others, especially her sexual partners (e.g., Tom and Kamal), as this allowed her to have a sense of agency, as she constantly felt as if she was not in control of her own life.

In contrast, Rachel and Anna used violence with defensive motivations, being forced in a way to murder Tom in fear, self-defence and to defend Evie (Anna's daughter). While both women engaged in emotional abuse in the form of Anna having an affair with Tom and then treating Rachel as someone inferior to her, and Rachel lying to Scott as part of her own investigation Megan's murder, they were mostly self-serving in nature. However, both women justified these acts to themselves, despite their perceived immorality. For Anna, learning of how Tom had been lying to her about his past and about Rachel helped her recognise that she had been unfair to Rachel, but this also highlighted to her how

her life as the 'perfect wife' was solely a masquerade. While this recognition delayed her attempts to help Rachel escape Tom, she eventually chose to help Rachel murder Tom in fear for herself and for her daughter, knowing that Tom would endanger both of their lives. Rachel too acted out of defensive motivations, choosing to murder Tom in self-defence as she was fully aware that Tom intended to murder her as he perceived her as a threat to his masquerade of hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, both Rachel and Anna justified their murder of Tom by recognising that he posed a direct threat to their lives.

Amy and Jodi were undoubtedly the most calculated of the five female protagonists. Amy's plans were meant to benefit only herself, aimed at punishing Nick (and numerous others) while allowing her to portray herself as the sole victim and the heroine. The same is true for Jodi, where murdering Todd was meant to alleviate her financial burden and had the benefit of portraying her as the primary victim and the heroine. Both women made calculated decisions that would benefit them at the expense of others. However, while it can be said that Anna's efforts to ensure that Tom would not survive were extremely cruel, hers was a more impulsive action, as the decision to pre-emptively murder him was Rachel's intention. While this suggests that Rachel was exceedingly violent, her premeditated violence was planned moments before the murder and she resorted to it only because she knew that Tom intended to murder her. Thus, with Amy, Jodi and Megan, all three characters justified their violence by placing blame on their male partners without taking full responsibility for their actions and without recognising the self-serving nature of their violence. However, unlike Amy and Jodi, who also had active motivations in terms of violence, Megan is the only character that is punished for her violence by being denied any regaining of

agency. Out of all the female protagonists, only Rachel and Anna have a more legally legitimate justification for their violence as it was committed entirely in self-defence and are then able to regain their agency. Therefore, it is evident that most of them employed violence with active motivations while some others utilised violence purely with defensive motivations. While this is true in terms of Swan and Snow's theory, all five female protagonists, even Amy, Jodi and Megan, would justify their violence as being conducted out of defensive motivations, as their primary focus was to protect their sense of self.

7.6   Conclusion

This chapter draws from the previous three analysis chapters, with the intent of demonstrating the connections between the five female protagonists, their individual processes of moving from victims of male violence to perpetrators of female violence and the similarities between the three male protagonists. While the female protagonists employed the same five strategies in shedding their victimhood, they offer different types of femininities, female victims and violent female perpetrators, thereby redefining the concepts of femininity, female victimhood, violence and agency. This chapter also examines the male protagonists, making connections between their masculinities and their use of violence towards the female protagonists. Furthermore, this chapter explores the similarities between the female and male protagonists, adding an important layer to discussions of gender expressions of femininities and masculinities within the novels.

Chapter Eight – Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1   Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the findings from this study drawn from the analysis of the three selected texts, Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*, A. S. A. Harrison's *The Silent Wife* and Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*. The findings are discussed in terms of the four aspects of femininities and masculinities in domestic noir, gender performance and masquerade, female victimhood and violence, and gender and violence, exploring how these findings address the objectives of this research. In addition, another subsection discusses the female protagonists' process of shedding their victimhood and regaining their agency, examining how they achieve this through the use of five strategies (gender performance, masquerade, inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, recognising their victimhood and violence). Finally, the chapter presents the implications of this research, as well as my contributions to the existing literature on domestic noir and recommendations for further study based on the limitations of this research.

8.2   Summary of Findings

The aims of this thesis have been to analyse domestic noir novels featuring heterosexual marriages and romantic relationships in terms of the aspects of femininities and masculinities in domestic noir and the inversion of conventionally feminine and masculine behaviour; the use of gender performance and masquerade; the concepts of female victimhood and agency;

and the relationship between gender and violence. Through analysis of these aspects, this research addressed the following research objectives:

1. Identify how the conventional stereotypes of feminine and masculine behaviour are subverted within the subgenre.
2. Explore how female protagonists of domestic noir engage in gender performance and masquerade.
3. Analyse how women's victimhood is portrayed within the subgenre.
4. Examine how female and male violence are portrayed within the subgenre.

By examining these four major aspects and achieving the above four objectives, the ultimate aim of this research is to identify whether the female protagonists of domestic noir actually subvert patriarchal gender norms and the norms of traditional crime fiction, if they successfully shed their victimhood and whether their victimhood and violence categorise them as heroines, anti-heroines or villainesses.

In the following five subsections, I present the five main findings of my research. The first four subsections present the findings aligned with the four research questions while the fifth presents the findings in terms of the process of the female protagonists' shedding of their victimhood and regaining agency.

8.2.1   Femininities and Masculinities in Domestic Noir

My main finding regarding this aspect is that the female protagonists enact hegemonic masculinities, and the male protagonists enact complicit or subordinated masculinities, and, as a result, the women are labelled as pariah

femininities for their non-conformance to gender norms, and the men attempt to reassert their masculinity and dominance by abusing their female partners so that they are not perceived as being feminine.

The female and male protagonists engage in masculine and feminine behaviours that are not always aligned with their gender identity; therefore, they do not always conform to gender norms. While both sexes engage in an inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviours, this is primarily practised by the female protagonists. The female protagonists' non-conformance to gender norms results in them being labelled as pariah femininities by society due to the threat they pose to men, masculinity and the patriarchy. The term 'pariah femininities', offered by Mimi Schippers was particularly useful in exploring the female protagonists' gender non-conformance and I recommend that this term be used when referring to the female protagonists of domestic noir who do not conform to gender norms.

In exhibiting their authentic femininities, the female protagonists often exhibit masculinities as their authentic version of femininity does not align perfectly with idealised femininity. The female protagonists also exhibit masculinities in their rejection of patriarchal gender norms of hegemonic femininity/hyperfemininity and receive censure for their non-conformance to ideals of femininity. Therefore, to avoid censure from society and their male partners, the female protagonists enact a gender performance of hegemonic femininity/hyperfemininity to mask their true expressions of femininity which include elements of masculinity. This is further discussed in Section 8.2.2 in terms of the gender performance and masquerade.

The female protagonists' authentic expression of their femininities (also known as pariah femininities) emasculated their male partners who felt forced to reclaim their 'lost' dominance in their marriages. To battle this emasculation, the male protagonists engaged in hegemonic masculinity practices to prove their masculinity to others and to themselves, thereby aiming to reassert their dominance in their relationships. To achieve this, the male protagonists often engaged in extra-marital affairs and controlling behaviour directed at their female partners. This is evident with Nick from *Gone Girl*, Todd from *The Silent Wife* and Scott from *The Girl on the Train*. All three men felt their masculinities were threatened by their wives' embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, Nick by Amy playing the 'masculine' role in their romantic treasure hunt and financially supporting both of them, Todd by Jodi having more formal education than him, and Scott by Megan's continued infidelities. To combat their emasculation, all three men subjected their wives to emotional abuse; Nick and Todd engaged in extra-marital affairs where they could assert their dominance and reclaim their masculinity while Scott controlled and monitored Megan's activities to prevent her from emasculating him further by engaging in more extra-marital affairs.

8.2.2   Gender Performance and Masquerade

In terms of gender performance and masquerade, my main finding is that the female protagonists are forced to engage in a gender performance and masquerade of hyperfemininity/hegemonic femininity to avoid censure for their pariah femininities and to gain acceptance. However, despite the necessity of the

gender performance and masquerade, they are nevertheless manipulations of patriarchal gender norms.

As they exhibit pariah femininities, the female protagonists are forced to engage in gender performance to provide the illusion that they are conforming to gender norms to avoid censure from society for challenging the patriarchy. In doing so, they compromise their personal ideals and beliefs and attempt to successfully perform the roles of the 'perfect wife' (Amy, Jodi, Rachel, Megan and Anna) and the 'perfect mother' (Rachel, Megan and Anna). To make their gender performance of hyperfemininity more convincing, they often employ the strategy of masquerade, masking their pariah femininities by enacting hegemonic femininity/hyperfemininity.

While the female protagonists employ gender performance and masquerade in their attempts to seek acceptance and to avoid censure for their true selves, the ways in which they use the strategies are manipulations of patriarchal gender norms. This is evident in Amy's enactment of the Cool Girl (Cool Amy), which was explicitly designed to seduce Nick, engaging in a hyperfemininity of Nick's preference to seek a romantic relationship and then marriage with him. While this gender performance and masquerade were required for women, engaging in this hyperfemininity was a manipulation of gender norms as the women masked their true femininity. In her attempts to maintain normalcy in her marriage to avoid separation, Jodi engaged in gender performance and masquerade of hyperfemininity to provide the illusion of her conformance to gender norms, thereby manipulating these norms by masking her true femininity. Furthermore, Amy, Jodi, Rachel and Anna also manipulated

gender norms by engaging in a hyperfemininity after committing violent crimes to evade suspicion and punishment.

The female protagonists successfully manipulated social and media narratives of female victimhood and enacted the role of a more conventional and socially accepted female victim to lend authenticity to their gender performance and masquerades to avoid both censure and punishment for their crimes. While Amy enacted her Diary Amy persona, Jodi, Rachel and Anna also enacted a similar type of hyperfemininity that alluded to their innocence and heroism in the face of male violence. Whether this type of justice is warranted or not, the female protagonists manipulated gender norms of femininity to avoid repercussions for their actions.

8.2.3   *Female Victimhood and Agency*

My main finding regarding the aspect of female victimhood and agency in domestic noir is that the female protagonists are simultaneously victims and perpetrators of violence; however, they are not all equally powerful nor agentic.

The female protagonists of domestic noir are not always only victims: they can also simultaneously be perpetrators of violence, in direct response to the violence they have been subjected to by their male partners, while also being victimised by their families, friends and society due to patriarchal gender norms. Essentially, the co-existence of their victimhood with their violence is indicative of the complexities of female victimhood and female violence.

As the patriarchy is supportive of the abuse and villainisation of pariah femininities, the male protagonists' violence keeps their female partners

powerless and trapped in unhappy marriages, thereby decimating their agency. However, some female protagonists have more power, and therefore agency, in their marriages, which is entirely dependent on factors such as the types and levels of male violence they experience and whether they are financially and/or emotionally dependent on their male partners. For example, Amy had more power than others due to her financial independence while Anna had some measure of power as she could perform the roles of wife and mother Tom had wanted, thereby being subjected to less violence.

Consequently, not all female protagonists are able to regain their agency (Megan is murdered by Tom), and the ones who do differ in terms of how agentic they are. Every female protagonist who regains their agency does not always gain complete control over their own narrative. For example, Rachel had to process the trauma Tom had subjected her to even after his death, indicating that she does not regain complete agency as Tom continues to play a role in her narrative. Tom's abuse may have affected Anna less as Tom's abuse towards her had been severe than Rachel's and she was less emotionally vulnerable, therefore Anna regained more control over her narrative. Meanwhile, Jodi had to contend with the severity of her violence, suggesting that Todd continued to play a role in her narrative too. In contrast, Amy regains near complete agency by silencing Nick through blackmail, gaining control over both hers and Nick's narratives.

8.2.4   Gender and Violence

Regarding the aspect of gender and violence, my main finding is that, to successfully shed their victimhood and regain their agency, the female

protagonists had to become perpetrators of physical violence. In doing so, they invert feminine and masculine behaviour in terms of their violence, directing male violence at their male abusers.

The male protagonists' violence towards their female partners often takes the form of emotional abuse, usually infidelity or controlling behaviours (Nick with Amy; Todd with Jodi; Tom with Rachel, Anna and Megan; and Scott with Megan and Rachel), while some male characters subject their female partners to physical assault (Nick with Amy; Tom with Rachel and Megan; and Scott with Megan and Rachel). While the male protagonists are often victims of the patriarchy themselves which affected their treatment of their female counterparts, they are nevertheless considered perpetrators of intimate partner violence and the villains of the novels. Nick is an example of this as his emasculation and feminisation due to his inability to be the primary financial provider led to his acts of emotional abuse against Amy. Despite the male protagonists' initial roles as perpetrators of violence, they eventually become victims of intimate partner violence themselves, as they are subjected to violence by the female protagonists when the women seek to shed their role of victim and regain their agency. Therefore, while Nick, Todd and Tom subjected the female protagonists to violence, they became victims themselves when Amy, Jodi, Rachel and Anna sought to regain their lost agency, with Nick being silenced by Amy through blackmail while Todd and Tom were permanently silenced through murder by Jodi, and Rachel and Anna respectively.

Both the female and male protagonists commit physical and non-physical acts of violence towards their spouses. While a majority of both sexes' violence constitute acts of emotional abuse, more often, it is primarily the female

protagonists that engage in physical abuse. There is also an inversion of femininities and masculinities occurring in terms of the types of violence used: the female protagonists are consistently engaging in stereotypically male violence such as physical abuse (e.g., Amy from *Gone Girl* violently stabbing Desi, Rachel and Anna from *The Girl on the Train* violently stabbing Tom), whereas the male protagonists employ stereotypically female violence such as verbal and emotional abuse (e.g., Nick from *Gone Girl* undermining Amy through manipulative and rude comments, Tom from *The Girl on the Train* using silent treatment to punish his partners when they displeased him).

8.2.5   *The Process of Shedding Victimhood and Regaining Agency*

My main finding in terms of the process of shedding their victimhood and regaining their agency is that the female protagonists do not use the five strategies in a linear manner and that their recognition of their status as victims of their male partners' abuse is the crucial step in the process of shedding their victimhood and regaining their agency.

As discussed in the three analysis chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6), the female protagonists do not always follow these five strategies in a linear manner, instead employing them in conjunction with other strategies as and when required. For example, while engaging in gender performance and masquerade, they may also engage in inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour. This is evident with Amy from *Gone Girl*, who inverted the feminine and masculine roles with Nick by financially supporting him and organising their annual treasure hunts, thereby adopting the masculine role and relegating Nick

to the feminine role, while she simultaneously engaged in a gender performance of hyperfemininity and masquerade of Cool Amy. Furthermore, as the female protagonists advance through this process of shedding their victimhood and regaining their agency, they may continue to use the strategies they used previously, depending on their requirements. Rachel from *The Girl from the Train* demonstrates this when she engages in a gender performance of hyperfemininity to momentarily distract Tom so that she could escape.

While the female protagonists use the five strategies in a non-linear manner according to their requirements, it is only by employing these strategies in the order listed in the theoretical framework that they were able to regain their agency as they had to follow a specific pattern of behaviour to shed their victimhood.

The most crucial point in this process is recognising their victimhood, and it is once the female protagonists reach this point that they are able to regain their agency by employing the fifth and final strategy of violence. Without the vital fourth strategy of recognising their victimhood, employing the other strategies would not lead to the female protagonists regaining their agency. Thus, it is through their recognition of their own victimhood and their subsequent use of violence, that the female protagonists are able to escape their victimhood and regain their agency, thereby renegotiating their positions within their marriages and in society.

8.3   Contributions to the Field of Domestic Noir

In this study, I have demonstrated that female protagonists of domestic noir reflect the complexities of the concepts of female victimhood, violence, and agency; while they are victims of a social order that is designed to oppress them (the patriarchy), they are also violent perpetrators who often rely on violence as a coping strategy when faced with violence, especially from their male partners. With this research, I have made five contributions to the field, and they are discussed below.

8.3.1   *Providing a Framework to Analyse Domestic Noir Novels*

This current research developed a framework drawn from the existing literature that can be used to explore the female protagonists of domestic noir novels that focus on heterosexual marriages and romantic relationships, especially in terms of the inter-connected aspects of femininities and masculinities in domestic noir, the use of gender performance and masquerade, the concepts of female victimhood and agency and the relationship between gender and violence through examining how they employ the five strategies of gender performance, masquerade, inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, recognising their victimhood and violence. While the strategies are drawn from the existing literature, the framework organises the strategies used by female protagonists to demonstrate the complex relationship the characters have with female victimhood and violence. Although used to analyse *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn, *The Silent Wife* by A. S. A. Harrison and *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins, the framework is not limited to these three texts but can be employed to analyse other domestic noir novels (especially

of this sub-type) by outlining the female protagonists' shift from victim to perpetrator. While this framework was the starting point of the research, the analysis of the novels led to the discovery that the female protagonists do not employ the five strategies in a linear manner, instead opting to use a combination of them as and when required. The analysis also indicated that, to successfully shed their victimhood and regain their agency, the female protagonists had to follow the five strategies in the order listed in the theoretical framework and that the strategy of 'recognising their victimhood' was the catalyst of this process.

8.3.2   Introducing the Term "Recognising their Victimhood" as a Strategy Used by the Female Protagonists of Domestic Noir

While four of the strategies used by the female protagonists are drawn from the existing literature (gender performance, masquerade, inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour and violence), the strategy of 'recognising their victimhood' is a term not found within the literature and was introduced in this study to analyse the stage where the female protagonists finally realise that they are being victimised. As discussed in Section 8.2.5, this stage is the key strategy that allows them to finally take action to shed their victimhood and regain their agency. This study also explores how various types of female victims apply the strategy of recognising their victimhood in varied ways.

8.3.3   Providing a Methodology to Analyse Domestic Noir Novels

The methodology used in this study can be used to examine other domestic noir novels as well as their female and male protagonists as it is drawn

from multiple theories and concepts, which allows for a deeper exploration of the four aspects (femininities and masculinities in domestic noir, the use of gender performance and masquerade, the concepts of female victimhood and agency and the relationship between gender and violence) while also analysing the relationships between these aspects and how they affect the protagonists and the narratives. While these aspects have been discussed in the existing literature, very few examine how the four aspects affect each other. In contrast, the methodology employed in this research can be useful in exploring all four aspects in relation to the female and male protagonists of domestic noir novels. The use of sociological and philosophical theories on gender provides an alternative method to analyse domestic noir novels, their protagonists and the four aspects mentioned above. While some researchers such as Emma V. Miller, Eva Burke, Stephanie Gwin, Elena Avanzas Álvarez, Patrick Osborne and Meredith Jeffers have explored some combination of these aspects, their primary focus has been on masquerade, victimhood, manipulations of gender norms and violence. Some studies also use a single theory or concept to examine a certain aspect, such as Emma V. Miller's use of Joan Riviere's concept of womanliness as a masquerade to explore female protagonists' use of masquerade and Patrick Osborne's use of Raewyn Connell's concept of multiple masculinities. However, this study's use of Judith Butler's theory of performativity along with Riviere's concept of masquerade allowed an exploration of the relationship between gender performance and masquerade as well as how they affect each other and the other three aspects.

Similarly, using Mimi Schippers' theory of gender hegemony and multiple masculinities and femininities along with Raewyn Connell's gender

order theory and concept of multiple masculinities allowed for a more in-depth study of the female and male protagonists' expressions of gender, how these affect each other and themselves as well as how female protagonists embody masculinities and male protagonists embody femininities. The use of all four theories and concepts in the same study enables an analysis of how femininities, masculinities, gender performance and masquerade affect each other and how these in turn can affect other aspects such as victimhood, agency and violence of the female and the male protagonists. Moreover, using Suzanne C. Swan and David L. Snow's model of women's violence allows an exploration of female violence, victimhood and agency, enabling a deeper analysis of how these three affect and are affected by the other aspects. Essentially, this multi-dimensional approach to analysing domestic noir is a novel approach enabling an in-depth examination in terms of the four aspects and their relationships with each other.

8.3.4   *Demonstrating how Raewyn Connell's and Mimi Schippers' Theories on Gender Can Be Used to Analyse Domestic Noir Novels*

This current research uses both Raewyn Connell's gender order theory and concept of multiple masculinities and Mimi Schippers' theory of gender hegemony and multiple masculinities and femininities to examine the female and male protagonists of domestic noir, an approach that has not been used in-depth prior to this. While Connell's concept of multiple masculinities offers a helpful way in which masculinity can be studied, the theory does not sufficiently address femininities, apart from a brief discussion of the concept of "emphasized femininity" and suggesting that there can be no hegemonic femininity as

femininity is subordinate to masculinity (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). However, Schippers' theory offers a framework to analyse the concept of multiple femininities, exploring how femininities relate to each other and to masculinities. While Connell's theory offers an opportunity to study the male protagonists' masculinities, Schippers' theory provides a way to analyse the different types of femininities exhibited by the female protagonists and how these expressions of femininity affected the other three aspects. The concept of 'pariah femininity' was particularly useful in the analysis of the female protagonists of domestic noir and enables an exploration of their deviance in terms of patriarchal gender norms, which in turn informed how they engaged in masquerade, how they were victimised and how they used violence as a tool.

As it accurately explains how women's gender non-conformance is treated by society, I recommend this term to be used for such instances where women engage in behaviours that challenge the patriarchy. This theory also allows an analysis of masculinities by exploring how the patriarchy perceives men embodying femininities, which contributed to the analysis of characters such as Nick Dunne from *Gone Girl* and how this apparent femininity led to their conscious attempts to enact hegemonic masculinities and subject their wives to violence. By using Schippers' theory of gender hegemony in this study, I have demonstrated that it can be used to provide a deeper analysis of domestic noir and its female and male protagonists. Furthermore, using Connell's and Schippers' concepts of masculinities and femininities together has led to a more in-depth analysis of femininities and masculinities in domestic noir and how they affect the other aspects. As femininities and masculinities play a significant role

in domestic noir, these two theories enable a more thorough analysis of gender roles, gender norms and female and male expressions of gender in the subgenre.

8.3.5   *Demonstrating that Swan and Snow's Theory on Violence Can Be Used to Analyse the Female Protagonists' Violence in Domestic Noir*

Typically, studies of domestic noir novels have included philosophical and sociological theories on gender such as theories by Judith Butler, Joan Riviere and Raewyn Connell to study both expressions of gender as well as violence. However, in this research, I have employed a different sociological theory on violence that has not been used to analyse domestic noir novels before. Suzanne C. Swan and David L. Snow's theory of women's use of violence in intimate relationships focusses on female-on-male violence in heterosexual intimate relationships and offers a model that can also be used to examine the motivations behind domestic noir female protagonists' use of violence. Swan and Snow's model also provides a framework to explore how other aspects such as childhood trauma and being victimised can affect how the female protagonists respond to male violence. This has been particularly useful in studying Amy Dunne from *Gone Girl* and Jodi Brett from *The Silent Wife* as both characters suffered from childhood trauma, Amy from being forced to enact an idealised girlhood and Jodi from witnessing how her father's infidelity affected her mother and their family life. The model also helps to identify the types of avoidance behaviour the female protagonists engaged in and how these mechanisms exacerbated their issues. An example of this is Rachel Watson's alcoholism,

which developed as a way to cope with her infertility and marital tension with Tom in *The Girl on the Train*.

Therefore, it is evident that this theory has enabled a deeper analysis of the female protagonists' use of violence as a strategy, while allowing an exploration of other factors that increase the likelihood of violence. Furthermore, although this theory focusses on real life domestic violence/intimate partner violence, it is still applicable to abusive relationships presented in domestic noir novels as the latter are based on and inspired by women's lived experiences.

8.4   Recommendations for Further Study

While this study explores four key aspects within domestic noir, it is not possible to analyse all the sub-types of the subgenre with this research as that goes beyond the scope of this study. As such, I recommend that more research is conducted on the other sub-types of domestic novels that focus on heterosexual marriages and relationships that include the female protagonists killing themselves to avoid further victimisation and storylines with children of the female and male protagonists' marriages featuring prominently. As there is little research on these variations of the subgenre and domestic noir's relevance to contemporary society, this suggests that there is value in exploring these types of novels. While they are a minority, novels that have female protagonists who die by suicide present a different type of female victimhood and agency, which are worth exploring. In addition, the relationship dynamics between couples when children are involved differ from the novels analysed in this thesis, and exploration of these novels can provide insight into the femininities and

masculinities as well as the concepts of victimhood, violence and agency presented in them.

This study was solely focussed on female protagonists of domestic noir and explored the male protagonists and characters very briefly and only in terms of how they affected the female protagonists. However, despite the female-centric nature of this subgenre, the male protagonists and characters play important roles within the novels and therefore, deeper analysis of these characters is required, especially in terms of the four aspects of their femininities and masculinities and the inversion of conventionally feminine and masculine behaviour, their use of gender performance and masquerade, male victimhood (victimisation by their female partners, their families and friends, society and the patriarchy) and male violence. Therefore, an analysis of domestic noir novels from a men's studies perspective can offer new insight into men and masculinities in the subgenre. The use of Raewyn Connell's gender order theory and concept of multiple masculinities will enable a deeper exploration of the masculinities in domestic noir.

Childhood trauma is a key element of victimhood (both female and male) and an indicator and driver of violence. This is an element that significantly affected several of the protagonists in the novels analysed, however, the scope of this study limited a deeper exploration into the characters' histories of childhood trauma and how it affected them as adults. Therefore, it is vital to further analyse how childhood trauma influenced both the female and the male protagonists and characters in terms of their gender expressions (their femininities and masculinities), their victimhood and their use of violence.

8.5   Conclusion

In this research, I examined how the female protagonists of Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*, A.S.A. Harrison's *The Silent Wife* and Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train* employed the five strategies of gender performance, masquerade, inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, recognising their victimhood and violence to cope with their status as victims by using a theoretical framework drawn from the existing literature to analyse the female protagonists' process of shedding their victimhood and regaining agency.

The study's findings indicate that the female protagonists employed these five strategies in a non-linear manner to avoid, minimise and stop their victimisation. While recognising their own victimhood was the key factor that led to the female protagonists' eventual shedding of their victimhood and regaining of agency, they could not have achieved this without the use of violence directed at their male abusers. Although their pariah femininities led to their victimisation by their male partners and by the patriarchy, the female protagonists were able to manipulate gender norms (through gender performance, masquerade, the inversion of normative feminine and masculine behaviour, and violence) to regain their lost agency. However, not all female protagonists were able to regain their agency, and of those who did, their triumphs over their abusive male partners did not necessarily mean that they overcame the restrictions placed upon them by the patriarchy.

The focus of this research has been the sub-type of domestic noir novels focussing on heterosexual marriages and relationships, and I have provided a

framework, a methodology and suggestions of theories that can be successfully applied to other domestic noir novels for an in-depth analysis. This research also demonstrates that the four aspects of femininities and masculinities in domestic noir, gender performance and masquerade, female victimhood and agency, and violence are interconnected, which suggests that any analysis of domestic noir novels and its female protagonists should consider all four of these aspects.

Domestic noir marks a radical shift from male-dominated traditional crime fiction as it offers more central and diverse roles for women within the genre of crime fiction. Furthermore, the subgenre's depiction of female violence has prompted discussions about female victimhood while shedding light upon the epidemic of domestic violence/intimate partner violence. Essentially, domestic noir has reshaped and redefined crime fiction by depicting women's lived experiences and focussing on issues that directly affect women, thereby portraying the complexities of the concepts of female victimhood, female agency and female violence.

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