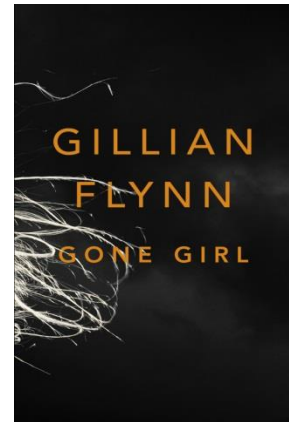




Discussion Questions for Gone Girl by Gillian Flynn

These discussion questions were prepared by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) for the *Reader with a Cause* book club on Goodreads.

If you like our questions please feel free to use them – and don't forget to join the conversation online at https://www.goodreads.com/topic/group_folder/200204



1. The Myth of the Intergenerational Cycle of Violence:

Near the end of the book, Amy quasi-defends her actions as follows:

“I just want you to be happy, Amy.’ How many times did he say that and I took it to mean: ‘I just want you to be happy, Amy, because that’s less work for me.’ But maybe I was unfair. Well not unfair, but confused. No one I’ve loved has ever not had an agenda. So how could I know?” (394)

NNEDV’s VP of Development & Innovation, Cindy Southworth, decries the “intergenerational cycle of violence” as follows: “When you think that one in three girls, one in six boys will be a victim of child sexual abuse before they’re 18; one in three women, or one in six men are not perpetrating crimes against people every day. So the majority of victims are resilient and strong and fabulous and live wonderful lives and don’t hurt anyone. [Abusers] make intentional choices to do these horrific acts, and while I feel bad for the small child [they were], there’s no excuse.”*

What do you think about “the intergenerational cycle of violence”? Do you think abusers are victims of their past, or do they make choices to harm others?

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* All In with Chris Hayes <http://video.msnbc.msn.com/all-in-/52648253#52648253> (August 1, 2013)

2. Just One Olive Though:

I think we could talk all day about relationships and *Gone Girl*.

We weren’t sure what to think about “just one olive though.” Was there love there at the beginning? Did Nick & Amy have a desire for a “regular,” loving relationship? Or was it manufactured from the beginning?

Amy’s fixation on the “Just one olive though” concept seemed to be fraught with a desire for true love and perfection from the start that we see so often in popular culture (*the current spate*



of YA novels would have you believe that if you haven't met *The One* by graduation/ initiation/ whatever-coming-of-age-ritual-is-appropriate-for-the-story, *You're Doing It Wrong*). This is a troubling and damaging concept for adults as well – not to mention the difficult [impossible?] expectations it dredges up for each partner to try to live up to.

We think [Tamora Pierce](#), a prominent YA author, would agree – she has talked about the dangerous concepts currently being sold to young adults in glittering packages: “[While] there are people who have met their first love, and it has worked out for the rest of their lives, they are a lot more rare than the current spate of novels would have you believe. A lot of us don't find a really good love...until we've been through quite a few other false starts and some other fun times first...It frightens me that girls are growing up reading books that say, ‘You'll meet him in high school, and you'll live together forever, and ever, and ever.’”*

What do you think about the state of relationship and the search for love in our modern world? In popular culture?

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* Tamora Pierce, National Book Festival

http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=6065 (September 22, 2013)

3. Are Nick and Amy Likable?:

In the “First Impressions” thread, many of you commented that you didn't like the characters. What about them didn't you like?

Did anyone like Nick or Amy? And does whether or not we like the characters matter?

What about the other characters – Go, Nick's father, Desi, the detectives? Was there anyone you could root for, or identify with?

4. Let's Unpack This:

We think that some people will be quick to point to Amy and say “*See??! All women are crazy*” or “*Women are crazy and 'just as violent or controlling' as men!*” While we always recognize that men are victims of domestic violence, this is a troubling perspective, since statistics* clearly document that violence is perpetrated predominantly by men against women. This may make for an interesting, chilling read – but it's not an accurate reflection of domestic violence in real life for many reasons.

It's almost as if this book solidifies a concept that is clearly the exception and not the rule – yet it's getting a lot of attention** largely probably due to the “female violence” angle. The author has said that she writes her books because “[men] have a vocabulary for sex and violence that women just don't,” that her books give people the space to talk about female violence, both physical and mental.



Amy's [SPOILER] false rape claim at the end of the book upholds a very dangerous and damaging concept that constantly gets bandied about in popular culture (season three of *Veronica Mars*, *The Life of David Gale* [film], *Wild Things* [film], *Atonement* [book & film], season four of *South Park*, *Under the Dome* [book], and many, many more), thus contributing to a rape culture that disproportionately demonizes and disbelieves victims.

But what do you think? What did you think about while you were reading this book?

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* (1) Across all types of violence, the majority of female victims reported that their perpetrators were male. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS_Executive_Summary-a.pdf

(2) Nonfatal intimate partner violence is most frequently committed by individuals of opposite genders...on average from 2001 to 2005 - about 96% of females experiencing nonfatal intimate partner violence were victimized by a male and about 3% reported that the offender was another female. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ipvus.pdf>

(3) Nearly 75 percent of family violence victims are female, and nearly 75 percent of family violence perpetrators are male. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fvs.pdf>

** Did you hear there's a movie coming out this fall? We have another thread going all about that!

5. What is with the obsession with dead women in pop culture?:

A movie version of *Gone Girl* is slated to come out October 3, 2014 – and the cover of *Entertainment Weekly* this week is a teaser for the movie* that features Nick Dunne (Ben Affleck) spooning the apparently dead corpse of Amy Dunne (Rosamund Pike) on a morgue tray, surrounded by mortuary equipment.

The decision to style the actress playing Amy as a corpse is disturbing and confusing, considering [SPOILER] Amy doesn't actually die in the book, nor does a scene resembling this tableau appear anywhere in the story. Why do you think *EW* made the decision to promote the coming movie this way? What message is this image sending about women and the book?

It's not hard to think of examples where dead female bodies are used to sell products or as window dressing – yet every time we see it happen in popular culture, it is shocking, disturbing, and distressing. What do you think we can do to combat this trend?

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* *Entertainment Weekly* (January 8, 2014) <http://popwatch.ew.com/2014/01/08/cover-david-fletcher-gone-girl/>



Want to learn more about the media’s portrayal of women? Check out the following resources:

- (1) Jean Kilbourne, Videos <http://www.jeankilbourne.com/videos/> and the Killing Us Softly 4 – Trailer https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWKXit_3rpQ#t=176
- (2) *PolicyMic*, Elizabeth Plank, “Dear Advertisers, There’s Nothing Sexy About Violence Against Women,” <http://www.policymic.com/articles/74785/dear-advertisers-there-s-nothing-sexy-about-violence-against-women>
- (3) *The Representation Project*, “How the Media Failed Women in 2013” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NswJ4kO9uHc>
- (4) *TED*, Cameron Russell, “Looks aren’t everything. Believe me, I’m a model.” (October 2012) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KM4Xe6Dlp0Y>
- (5) *MamaMia*, Nicky Champ, “Dear advertisers: Violence against women is not sexy,” <http://www.mamamia.com.au/style/fashion-advertising-should-be-targeted-to-women-not-targeting-women/>

6. Diary Amy vs. “Real” Amy:

We hope we weren’t alone in silently cheering for Diary Amy – during several passages, we found ourselves nodding and thinking “been there!”

“As I go to endless rounds of parties and bar nights, perfumed and sprayed and hopeful, rotating myself around the room like some dubious dessert.” (33)

“My dating life seems to rotate around three types of men: preppy Ivy Leaguers who believe they are characters in a Fitzgerald novel; slick Wall Streeters with \$ in their eyes, their ears, their mouths; and sensitive smart-boys who are so self-aware that everything feels like a joke.” (14)

“We are all overdressed in our little flashy frocks, our slasher heels, and we all eat small plates of food bites that are as decorative and insubstantial as we are.” (60)

When we discovered that Diary Amy was a fairy tale, many of us balked – how could we have fallen for that hook, line, and sinker?? And then we found more to enjoy...

“Tampon commercial, detergent commercial, maxipad commercial, Windex commercial. You’d think all women do is clean and bleed.” (275)

“Being the Cool Girl means I am a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, & burping...Cool Girls are above all hot. Hot & understanding. Cool Girls never get angry; they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner and let their man do whatever they want.” (250)

*“Again, I don’t get it: If you let a man cancel plans or decline to do things for you, you lose. You don’t get what you want. It’s pretty clear. Sure, he may be happy, he may say **you’re the coolest girl ever**, but he’s saying it **because he got his way**. He’s calling you a cool girl to fool you!”*



(253)

What did you think about the construction of gender and femininity according to either Diary Amy or “Real” Amy’s passages? Did anything resonate with you?

7. Police Investigation: Real or Not Real:

In the book, Amy denounces and criticizes the local police and their investigation. Do you think they did a good job of investigating her disappearance? Do you think that this portrayal of law enforcement procedure is true-to-life, or is it more like something you’d see in an episode of Law & Order?

8. First Impressions about Gone Girl?:

I know this is a dangerous topic to start with this book, since -- as one of our readers has already pointed out -- it's easy to say "I'll just read a couple of pages..." and then finish the book!

Has anyone picked up Gone Girl yet? What do you think so far?

Please avoid posting spoilers -- or insert spoiler tags if you can't avoid it.

9. Spoiler Thread!:

Wow. I don't know about you, but that book was...I mean, I don't even...yeah. Did you see any of that coming??

It seems like people either give this book one star or five stars – with not much in between. Why do you think this book elicits such strong, polarized reactions?

And, more specifically, what did you think of the ending? * What do you think is in store for Amy, Nick, and their child?

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* Read Gillian Flynn’s take on the ending over on *Entertainment Weekly*: <http://shelf-life.ew.com/2012/12/04/gillian-flynn-gone-girl-ending/>