

"She's a Cool Girl": Gillian Flynn's Gone Girl, Media Ethics and True Crime

IDH2930



"You are not dating a woman; you are 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."

- Amy Dunne

| <u>Instructor Information</u> | <u>Course information</u> |
|---|--|
| Eric Vallee eric.vallee@ufl.edu | IDH2930 Fall 2025 Little 119 |
| Peer Instructor Peyton Harris Peyton.harris@ufl.edu | Mondays 7th period: 1:55-2:45 pm Office Hours: Tuesdays 10-11 via Zoom or by appointment. Course Website: Canvas |

Course Description:

"Men actually think this girl exists. Maybe they're fooled because so many women are willing to pretend to be this girl. For a long time Cool Girl offended me. I used to see men – friends, coworkers, strangers – giddy over these awful pretender women, and I'd want to sit these men down and calmly say: You are not

dating a woman, you are 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.”

These lines are from the infamous “Cool Girl” monologue, recited by Amy Dunne, the central pro/antagonist in Gillian Flynn’s 2012 crime thriller *Gone Girl*. The novel explores the disappearance of Amy Dunne, an educated, beautiful, quintessentially perfect New York native. Her husband, with whom she shares a picture-perfect life, is suspected and pursued for her murder— but the truth reveals something much more sinister.

In this course, we will explore *Gone Girl* as a cultural medium at the intersection of true crime and gender stereotypes. Amy Dunne provides a lens into the oft-underrepresented female villainy, rage, and revenge, and offers a critique of media and ethics in modern true crime. Through our weekly class discussions, we will explore Amy as a modicum of female antagonism, analyze the notorious “Cool Girl” monologue, reflect on “Gone Girls” past and present, and analyze on how the novel both lends itself and challenges modern feminism.

Course Objectives:

- (1) Synthesize and analyze connections between literature and true crime through media analysis and discussion
- (2) Critically examine common narratives and tropes surrounding women in literature through cross-text analysis and discussion.
- (3) Demonstrate literary and media analysis proficiency through independent projects and study.
- (4) Recognize and apply literary devices and news strategies through close reading and media analysis.

Required or Recommended Textbooks:

Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* (Special Edition)

Course Communications:

Students may ask general questions in the “Course Questions” discussion post. For individual questions, students may email the peer instructor at peyton.harris@ufl.edu.

Course Goals:

Gone Girl is a novel that finds its beauty in uncomfortable cultural norms. The book challenges every underlying essentialist perspective we attribute to men and women and flips them on their heads. Through a close reading of *Gone Girl*, students will challenge their preconceived notions of gender stereotypes. Students will gain a deeper understanding of unreliable narrators, perform thorough character analysis, analyze and critique news media, and reflect on contemporary applications of the novel. These skills are highly transferable in literature and daily life; students will form or strengthen the ability to critically analyze media and create connections between what they read and what they do.

Instructional Methods:

The class format will generally begin with a brief lecture and then move into large group discussion. If time remains, students will be allowed to break into small group discussions.

Grading Policies:

Methods by which students will be evaluated and their grade determined:

Students will be evaluated using a holistic grading practice. Specific rubrics can be found alongside individual assignments.

Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points:

- <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Grade Breakdown:

| Assignment | Points or percentage |
|--|----------------------|
| Attendance and Class Participation (Includes Debates) | 30% |
| Weekly Discussion Posts or Persuall Annotations | 20% |
| Midterm Case Analysis (Includes peer evaluation forms) | 25% |
| Final Creative Project or Essay | 25% |

Grading Scale:

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|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| A = 4.00 940-1000 | B- = 2.67 800-839 | D+ = 1.33 670-699 |
| A- = 3.67 900-939 | C+ = 2.33 770-799 | D = 1.00 640-669 |
| B+ = 3.33 870-899 | C = 2.00 740-769 | D- = 0.67 600-639 |
| B = 3.00 840-869 | C- = 1.67 700-739 | E = 0.00 0-599 |

Course Schedule:

Critical Dates:

Final Exam: Due by 11:59 p.m. on **Dec. 1, 2025**.

A Weekly Schedule of Topics and Assignments:

| Week | Date | Topic | Reading (to be completed by the start of class) | Assignment Due |
|------|-------|---|---|---|
| 1 | 8/25 | Introduction | N/A | Introduction Survey |
| 2 | 9/8 | Nick and Amy's relationship dynamic, setting, Nick character analysis | Page 1-70 (<i>The day of - one day gone</i>) | Discussion Post 1 |
| 3 | 9/15 | Nick's analysis continued... How media narratives form The suspects | Page 71-142 Watch Nancy Grace clips | Discussion Post 2 |
| 4 | 9/22 | Andie and Nick's contrast to Amy and Nick | Page 142-215 | Discussion Post 3 Structured Debate |
| 5 | 9/29 | Amy analysis | Part 2: 219-300 Watch "Cool Girl" monologue From Cool Girl to Dead Girl: <i>Gone Girl</i> and the Allure of Female Victimhood | Discussion Post 4 Case selections and individual meeting signups |
| 6 | 10/6 | Amy and Nick's transformations Amy analysis | Pages 300-360 Performativity and Fluctuating Hierarchies: A Postmodern Feminist Study of Gillian Flynn's <i>Gone Girl</i> | Discussion Post 5 Structured Debate 2 Persuall Annotation |
| 7 | 10/13 | Final Project Overview <i>Gone Girl</i> through different frameworks | Pages 360-end Distortion of Reality in <i>Gone Girl</i> | Discussion Post 6 Persuall Annotation |

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|----|-------|---|--|--|
| | | In-depth character analysis | | |
| 8 | 10/20 | <i>Gone Girl</i> Frameworks Continued | True crime podcast ‘It doesn’t feel right to say how much I enjoyed this’: Listener perspectives on ethics in true crime podcasts | Discussion Post 7 Structured debate 3 |
| 9 | 10/27 | True crime and media ethics Case presentations 1-4 | <i>Gone Girl</i> film | Midterm Case Analyses due |
| 10 | 11/3 | Case presentations 5-9 Final project Q&A | | |
| 11 | 11/10 | Case presentations 9-14 | | |
| 12 | 11/17 | Any remaining case presentations | | Peer evaluation form |
| 13 | 12/1 | Class wrap-up and takeaways | | Final Project due |

Disclaimer: This syllabus represents my current plans and objectives. As we go through the semester, those plans may need to change to enhance the class learning opportunity. Such changes, communicated clearly, are not unusual and should be expected.

Course Policies:

Attendance Policy:

Students are allotted **one** unexcused absence without penalty. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Make-up Policy:

Late papers and other assignments earn a 10% grade reduction for every day late. Work submitted over a week late will earn an E unless you have an extension.

Assignment Policy: Assignments will include weekly discussion board posts and replies, analytical presentations describing true crime cases, Persuall annotations peer evaluation, and a final creative project or essay. Full rubrics for each assignment will be made available on Canvas under the “Assignments” tab.

Course Technology: Students will use Canvas as their primary form of submission and evaluation for this course. Turnitin and AI analyzers may also be used for assistance in assignment evaluation pursuant to UF’s Academic Honesty policy. For help with Canvas, please reach out to:

- <http://helpdesk.ufl.edu>
- (352) 392-HELP

Online course evaluation: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semesters, but students will be given specific times when they are open. The summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.

UF Policies:

University Policy on Accommodating Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

University Policy on Academic Conduct: UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Getting Help:

For issues with technical difficulties for Canvas, please contact the UF Help Desk at:

- <http://helpdesk.ufl.edu>
- (352) 392-HELP (4357)
- Walk-in: HUB 132

Any requests for make-ups due to technical issues MUST be accompanied by the ticket number received from the Help Desk when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You MUST e-mail your instructor within 24 hours of the technical difficulty if you wish to request a make-up.

Other resources are available at <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/getting-help> for:

- Counseling and Wellness resources
- Disability resources
- Resources for handling student concerns and complaints
- Library Help Desk support

Should you have any complaints with your experience in this course please visit <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaints> to submit a complaint.