

A Comparative Analysis of the Mind Styles created for the fictional characters Nick and Amy Dunne in the bestselling novel, *Gone Girl*.

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This comparative analysis will closely examine the two key characters from *Gone Girl*, Nick and Amy Dunne. The narratological term ‘mind style’, will be employed as the main tool of analysis for this article.

Mind Style is a term used in narrative which concentrates on the speech and thought process of a character. The term was coined by Roger Fowler in 1977, whom described mind style as “any distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mental self” (1977, P.103).

Fowler suggests that the linguistic choices made by a character and author will allow a reader to interpret the character in greater depth than what is told or written about the character. He suggests that a reader can judge a character by their thoughts and dialogue, which defines their personality, social standing, intellect, world view and values.

Culpeper (2001) supports Fowler’s definition as he describes mind style as a feature of characterisation, “a particular aspect of characterisation: one’s impression of the mental properties and habits of an individual.” Culpeper (p.288).

McIntyre (2006) also explains what effect mind style has on a character; ‘to reflect the way that they [a character] conceptualise and make sense of the world around them.’ McIntyre (p.142).

These definitions focus on mind style as a narratological tool; providing readers with a better insight into a character’s disposition via their lexical choices and mental & physical behaviour. This is the framework that I will be applying for my comparative analysis of *Gone Girl*.

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I decided to focus on mind style because I feel that it is an effective tool which, in my opinion, is often overlooked. Mind style allows an author to demonstrate rather than state information to a reader – providing deeper traits of a character to be presented via linguistic choices and mental processes.

Yamamoto (2006) argues that mind style ‘can display an individual’s ‘preoccupations’, ‘prejudices’, ‘perspectives’ and ‘values’, which strongly bias one’s world-view.’ (p.5) Although bias, it allows the reader to empathise and think like the character, enabling them to truly enter their world.

Mind style pairs seamlessly with written fiction because fiction is an opportunity for readers to be or see a world as somebody else; ultimately living another’s life vicariously. This view shows that if mind style is considered by the author when writing, then the character will be more realistic and viable for a reader; allowing them to imagine themselves as the character. This could be seen as the closest opportunity for a human being to actually become someone else.

My claim is supported by Elena Semino who said, “one of the main attractions of reading fiction is that it can give us a convincing and involving impression of what it is like to be somebody else – to do, feel and think things that are not part of our own personal experience.” Semino (2007, P.3)

After further reading, I concluded that mind style is most effective in writing that is written in a first person narrative. My claim is supported by Fludernik, who said, “This concept [mind style] characterizes a way of writing in which the protagonist’s use of specific lexical syntactic features suggests characteristics way of thinking which is revealed when their minds and mental process are represented in the text” Fludernik (2009, P.85). This represents that although how the character speaks is important, it is also the implication of their mental thoughts and processes that are as important for the reader to distinguish the character’s view, belief and behaviour.

The idea of adjusting and implementing mind style into an analysis tool was initially experimented by Short and Leech (2007). Their most recognised use of mind style is their study of the character Benjy from *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) by William Faulkner.

They specifically analysed extracts of Benjy because he is a character who has mental health issues. Because of this, it makes his speech and thought processes staggered and difficult to understand at times. Their analysis is a great way for me to incorporate into my own examination of Nick and Amy's mind style.

The aim of this essay is to present the significance of mind style, and why it should be acknowledged as an important writing technique and analysis tool. To demonstrate this, I will analyse the mind style of Nick and Amy Dunne from *Gone Girl*, and review how the author, Gillian Flynn, uses mind style to drive the plot and create a cunning twist in the book. I do have to warn you, there will be spoilers.

For my analysis of both Nick and Amy, I will follow a process for my examination. I will concentrate on the moment we are introduced to them, and proceed to monitor their journey, specifically concentrating on their behavioural changes in correlation to the story progression. The character's first utterances and thoughts are very important because this is when the reader is aware and open to interpretation – we as a reader want to familiarise ourselves with the characters we will follow through the book.

Gillian Flynn's novel, *Gone Girl*, was written in 2012 and later adapted into a feature film in 2014.

Set in Missouri, USA, the story begins on Nick and Amy Dunne's fifth wedding anniversary. Nick is out when he receives a call from his neighbour, who has observed that the front door to his house is open, and that his cat is outside. Nick returns home to find Amy has gone. The house is a mess, the furniture is overturned and there is blood on the kitchen floor. The novel unravels as it leads the reader to follow the clues and hints to reveal who's to blame for Amy's disappearance; shadowed by many plot twists along the way.

Nick quickly transforms from the loving husband to the main suspect of the case. As the reader follows Nick in the search for Amy, they are also shown the diary entries that were written by Amy before her disappearance.

To begin my comparative analysis, I will firstly analyse Nick.

At the beginning of the book we are introduced to Nick, he overall seems very unhappy and very careless to the people around him and closest to him. In the first chapter 'The Day Of', we are left questioning who this man is and why he's so depressed.

Nick instantly speaks about his wife. The way in which he describes her is interesting because the description of his wife is uncommon. Nick firstly speaks about her head and describes it as a "shiny, hard corn kernel or a riverbed fossil." (P.3). The description is original, and doesn't give a satisfying or attractive image for the reader. But as Nick progresses with his thoughts, the description becomes dark and gruesome, "Like a child, I picture opening her skull, unspooling her brain and sifting through it." (P.3).

In terms of mind style, we aren't completely sure what to think of Nick immediately. There is a distinct difference in which the reader needs to decide on his description; light hearted and playful, or dark and mentally unstable. The thought of opening his wife's skull seems violent and represents that Nick may not entirely trust Amy, which leaves us questioning her also. It significantly shows that they aren't as in love as they may have been in the past.

In the first few pages Nick shows Amy in a negative light, he represents their marriage as a fallen one, "To Amy, it was a punishing whim on my part, a nasty, selfish twist of the knife." (P.4). Once again, Nick uses violence and negativity to speak about Amy and their move to his hometown Missouri. This reinforces the thought that he is in a very unhappy relationship.

As we progress, Nick speaks of his family. He speaks of his sister, Go, and mentions his parents whom of which are both dying. Once again though, Nick does not speak positively of them, especially his father. Nick expresses a hard dislike toward his father, "Our dad was nearly gone – his (nasty) mind, his (miserable) heart, both murky as he meandered toward the grey beyond." (P.5). The opinion of Nick represents that even though his father is dying he does not seem to care or be afraid

of losing him. We as a reader cannot fully understand why, but it makes us ask a lot of questions about his father, and question Nick's upbringing.

The fact that Nick speaks so negatively of his wife and father is peculiar, but we can recognize that he is close with his twin sister Go. Defining his mind style is difficult at this stage, but as a reader, we can only assume that he is severely fed up, but we cannot yet distinguish who he truly is as a person.

Progressing further into the chapter 'The Day Of', we reach the moment in which truly begins the story, the disappearance of Amy.

Nick receives a phone call from his concerned neighbour explaining that Nick's front door is open and his cat is in the front garden. Nick drives home and confirms this. Nick enters the home and discovers that the house has been turned upside down.

In this situation, a husband would panic at the fact that his front door is open and the cat that his wife adores has been left outside alone for around twenty minutes. Nick's thoughts and actions though come across as false and once again, careless. We are left confused by Nick as he exclaims, "like some awful piece of performing art, I felt myself enacting Concerned Husband." (P.26). This thought provokes many questions. Pragmatically it could mean that he is either pretending to be the concerned husband or he is concerned and that's how he would look to the neighbour. However, because we are aware that Nick is negative and careless about Amy, it leaves us asking, does he dislike her that much to not care enough about her safety?

The fact that he thinks about how he looks in front of the neighbour shows a dark side to Nick. His priority should be about Amy's welfare but it isn't, it's about himself. It's interesting that Flynn made Nick think of this because it instantly portrays Nick as the suspect.

Flynn has certainly used mind style to portray Nick in a negative manner. The way he is in the opening few pages highlights that he is careless and selfish, which instantly makes him the suspect and instantly gives the reader a lack of trust towards Nick.

Further development in the book provides us more of Nick's inappropriate and clueless thoughts and actions. He has comical thoughts to himself at times in which are very serious. The counteracting emotions that Nick goes through once again highlights his lack of care for Amy, and represent his stubbornness and toughness, which could be due to his awkwardness and lack of experience, or even leading back to his upbringing.

Nick sits with the police in the interview room, his inappropriate thoughts begin, "Finally, the cops came in and sat at the table across from me. I fought the urge to laugh at how much it felt like a TV show." (P.47). I think that this thought of Nick makes him more human and slightly more relatable for the reader.

Although he is a suspect to us and the police, we can identify from this childish thought that he could be harmless. The lack of concern for his wife is shown from this thought, but a bigger implication is that this shows that he lacks experience. Possibly because he has never been interviewed by the police before, his comparison to a TV show expresses to us that he is just a normal man whom is struggling to take in his surroundings and the situation.

Even after the police officer (Boney) asks Nick "You okay, there?" Nick continues to smile. His smile only ends after Boney points out the fact he's smiling that his "giddiness slid to the floor" (P.47), representing that he realises he shouldn't be doing it in his situation.

The awkward thoughts of Nick continue though, "I wasn't sure what to say now. I raked my memory for the lines: What does the husband say at this point in the movie? Depends on whether he's guilty or innocent." (P.53). Flynn is tactful with Nick's thought. She places it to elongate the suspense and unknowing of whether Nick is responsible for Amy's disappearance.

He continues the TV programme imagination of the situation, seemingly as a way of dealing with state of affairs, but the claim of "Depends on whether he's guilty or innocent" shows us that this is inserted by the author. Nick knows whether he has anything to do with it or not, and he will know himself what he means by this. But for the reader it's unclear. We don't know if he is responsible for Amy's disappearance,

but we see it as the question in our minds, but Nick will see it as a declaration and thought process of thinking what to say; Flynn sees it as a tease for the reader.

Nick's inappropriate behaviour continues throughout the story, but a key moment of this is witnessed in public whilst Nick and Amy's parents plea for people to search for Amy. Nick is overwhelmed by the occasion, and it is made evident by his behaviour. Nick is aware of his actions but is unable to alter them, "I overcorrected and the words came out clipped, like I was reading a stock report. 'We just want Amy to get home safe... utterly unconvincing, disconnected.'" (P.71).

As this particular event progresses, it is Amy's father who pleads for Amy's safety, whereas Nick acts as a bystander. As the chapter comes to an end, Nick doesn't think as the photographers begin to take photos of him and the picture of Amy, "there it came, out of nowhere, as Rand begged for his daughter's return: a killer smile." (P.71). This for Nick not only furthers the reader's suspicion of his innocence, but also for the characters in the book.

The fact he doesn't call it a smile and instead "A killer smile" is interesting. By this we believe Nick means that this is what everyone would see this smile as, but we can't be entirely sure what Nick means, because this is a time when a husband should not be smiling.

Nick though does not learn from his mistake. As he attends the 'find Amy Dunne headquarters', Nick again fails to read the situation and what effect his behaviour would have on the people around him; only realising how it would look after it is already done, "She turned the phone around, and I saw our two sunburned faces pressed together, smiling as if we were on a date at the baseball game. Looking at my smarmy grin, my hooded eyes, I thought, I would hate this guy." (P. 109). The photo is spread on the internet, which increases the view of most of the other characters who see Nick as the main suspect in Amy's disappearance.

Throughout the first half of the book we see the many dark sides to Nick; instantly making him an unreliable narrator. However, we also see the ways in which

represent his humanity. He remains as the suspect throughout the first half of the book, until the substantial twist in the story.

Moving onto Amy Dunne's analysis, we are first introduced to her in the form of diary entries, which have been written over the time scale of hers and Nick's relationship. I believe that although this is not speech itself, it can still give us an in-depth insight into her mind style, because her written form is similar to speech. Even though it isn't spoken, it could be more accurate than Nick's. The reason being that her writing is planned and well thought out; where as Nick's speech and thoughts are not.

The first entry of Amy's which we see is the moment she speaks about meeting a man. She seems slightly childish but friendly and harmless.

Her first line is "Tra and la." (P.11) this suggests immediately that Amy is happy, light hearted and fun, in this entry at least. It may not suggest that this is her personality, but the current mind state is joy during the entry.

She then goes on to describe herself as "some technicolor comic of a teenage girl talking on the phone with my hair in a ponytail, the bubble above my head saying: I met a boy!" (P.11). Describing herself as a comic teenage character is interesting, it initially projects the thought that it's because she's happy, which works. But as she progresses, she says "I met a boy, a great, gorgeous dude, a funny, cool-ass guy." (P.11). The second use of boy is interesting; he's not a man, a boy. It makes you ask the question of how old she and this boy are.

Continuing along the sentence, she calls him 'dude' and 'guy'. It still doesn't allow us to determine her age, but the standard of her lexical usage is formal and advanced, showing us that she isn't a teenager, "this is a technical, empirical truth" (P.11).

Amy has written these entries in a colloquial style that flows and is very believable. A diary entry is the opportunity for someone to write what they think without anyone being able to read it. We of course are reading it, but the playfulness and speech like writing is represented successfully.

An interesting feature Amy uses in her entry is the use of a question with multiple answers. It once again seems childish but all in good fun. It shows a comical side to Amy which makes the reader warm to her, more so than Nick.

Although some of Amy's words signify her education level and make the reader sometimes confused, she balances this with the use non-standard forms and expressions, and this increases her likeability; "Yeah so suck it snobdouche." (P.12), "bum bum BUMMM!" (P.13) and "Well, well, well." (P.28) are examples of her good-humoured side which appeals to the reader.

Two years later into Nick and Amy's relationship, we can distinguish the stage of their relationship. Amy speaks of a night out with two friends and their husbands. As they wait forty-five minutes for Nick to show, Amy's reaction is quite surprising.

She speaks of women treating their husbands like 'Dancing monkeys' Amy distinctively shows that she isn't like other wives. Her and Nick have almost stereotypically defined women as controlling, of which Amy considers herself not to be; "I just smile: 'Who knows where he is – I'll catch him at home.' And then it is the men of the group who look stricken." (P.61). This represents that Amy wants to be different; she wants to be the odd one out and stand out from the crowd. The importance of her entries as time passes is the concentration of her own behaviour and how she believes other people think or react to her, by her actions or what she says.

When she gets home the same time as Nick, she asks how Nick's night was, he explains that he was with work friends. Amy doesn't mind and acts normal with him, once again showing Nick she isn't like other wives.

Another year passes in her diary entries and it is now their third year wedding anniversary. It is the day of their third year but they are not together. Amy though seems much different to the laid-back wife she once was, as she finds herself feeling change to their marriage, "I made two promises to myself when I married Nick. One: no dancing monkey demands. Two: I would never, ever say *sure that's fine by me...* then punish him for doing what I said was *fine by me*. I worry I am perilously close to

violating both of those promises.” (P.72), this strongly indicates a turn in their relationship.

Amy was once the fun, chilled wife of Nick. She didn't mind when he decided to do his own thing, she was a 'rare' wife. But now she has become frustrated and seemingly confused. Amy has let him do what he wants one too many times, and now it is disappointing for Amy not to be the centre of Nick's attention.

We as a reader though do not feel that it is Amy's wrong doing, and that it is Nick's fault. This suggests the beginning of a long and steep decline in their marriage.

Amy speaks of the moment Nick decides that they will move back to Missouri, we begin to see more of the decline. Amy still however trying to continue to keep Nick happy and be a good wife, but learns that it may not be that way after all.

Nick speaks of his father having Alzheimer's, which he never told Amy before, “I think, immediately, that there is something wrong with us, perhaps unfixable.” (P.111), whilst also describing Nick being in a “personal game, that he's in some sort of undeclared contest for impenetrability.” (P.111). This further supports the fact their marriage is failing and Amy doesn't feel as if she knows Nick anymore. Who was previously a fun-loving guy. Now he's a man who Amy feels she hardly knows. This suggests Amy is insecure about their relationship, but she is willing to attempt to make it succeed, “I feel a burst of anger that I swallow” (P.112).

What interests me about this chapter of Amy's entry, is that we are reading Nick's side of the story with Amy being missing, but this dramatic shift from happy entries to the sad and dismal entries makes it seem more logical that Nick is involved or responsible for her disappearance. An interesting part is how Amy describes a look of Nick, a new light of Nick we are yet to experience in the book, “He looked at me then like I was an object to be jettisoned if necessary. It actually chilled me, that look” (P.112).

The change in Nick is strongly indicated by Amy, the fact that a stare of Nick can make his own wife feel uncomfortable is haunting. It also makes Nick an even bigger suspect in the case of Amy's disappearance. As a reader, we eagerly want to know more and move closer to the point of her disappearance.

An appealing detail of Amy's entries is her expression of her emotions, they make her seem very true to herself. She acts as a perfect and supportive wife towards Nick, but is now openly revealing what she thinks of Nick now, and those thoughts are not so supportive. We as a reader are more inclined to believe Amy over the unreliable narrative of Nick during her disappearance.

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Just over half way through the book and into the second half of the book, we discover what happened to Amy as her true side is revealed. Unexpectedly, it is an outcome that was not expected or even considered – Amy set it all up to make Nick seem guilty of killing her.

In part two of the book 'Boy Meets Girl', everything is revealed. We have finished following the diary entries of Amy and are now following her on her mission to carry out her false death.

We're left surprised as Amy exclaims that she's "so much happier now I'm dead." (P.247). This first line is interesting because on a first read, the reader isn't sure how Amy is telling this, from the afterlife or in reality. The support of "Technically, missing. Soon to be presumed dead" (P.247) clears the situation slightly but still leaving the reader confused.

Although this page is important to reveal that Amy is in fact alive and has set up Nick, it is also very important in terms of her mind style. It reveals that Amy may well be physically healthy and well, but mentally she doesn't seem so well; she's become dark, unhappy and very twisted within a page.

From the diary entries we followed, Amy and Nick have declined to the point where their marriage is unrepairable; which is no surprise to us that this persists as Amy says, "I realized my face felt strange, different... and I realized I was smiling." (P.247). The fact that Amy is happy and smiling about framing her husband for murder, and the observation she has left everything and everyone behind, including her parents and so called friends is eerie. It shows her sadness but I think that it actually reveals her true side; bitterness and a mental instability.

At this stage we know Nick had cheated on her and isn't at all innocent in destroying their marriage, but we can still see that Amy's actions are barbaric and unnecessary. This supports our judgement of her mental inability to be correct.

Amy is not affected about the actions she has taken, or fears what her actions could do to Nick. She treats her personal accomplishment as if it were as easy as writing a shopping list, "My checklist today – one of my many checklists I've made over the past year." (P.247), this shows her determination to do this to Nick, further enforcing our disapproving opinion of her. Even more harrowing is the fact that Amy is proud of what she has done. She reveals, "I'd like you to know me first. Not diary Amy, who is a work of fiction" (P.248), this is interesting because it reveals that she acts as if she has a psychological issue or split personality.

It seems very much like she is a person who has a personality disorder, or did have one before leaving Nick. Amy contradicts herself enforcing the view that she may be happy with her dark antics, but is actually confused, "Nick loved a girl who doesn't exist. I was pretending, the way I often did, pretending to have a personality." (P.250). This further implicates and represents her complicated mind, showing us she has a mild personality disorder and a hatred of the people in her life.

Of course, her forged diary entries were for the police to drive the story, but also for us as a reader. It was used to manipulate us, and throw us off the idea that she could be responsible for her own disappearance.

It's a very clever ploy of both Amy and Gillian Flynn. They have both used mind style techniques. Amy wanted to create a fictional character by creating many scenarios to portray a mind set and personality for 'Diary Amy'. She created the mind and behaviour of a free, fun and loving girl who adored life and everyone in it; especially cool guy Nick. She successfully convinced everyone in the story by doing this.

In terms of fooling the reader, Flynn uses mind style successfully also. We do not know if Flynn intended to use mind style, but she has. She's used it to drive the story, creating false interpretations of Amy, and projecting differing minds and opinions of her.

To conclude, I feel that this comparative analysis of the *Gone Girl* characters Nick and Amy represents the potential importance of mind style, within the written form.

Applying mind style as an analysis tool has allowed me to intensely investigate a fictional character's language and behaviour; permitting me to distinguish their personality and mental state and qualities. This has then provoked an entertaining interaction and processing between reader and character.

We can determine that Gillian Flynn has intentionally or unintentionally used mind style as a concept to create an intriguing and unpredictable story. The way in which Flynn has contrived Amy to create a false mind and diary to deceive the reader and characters in the book is impressive. This further supports my claim that mind style should be considered and learnt by writers.

During my creative writing studies, experience and continued research, we as writers are advised to 'show and not tell', and mind style offers a new technique which embraces this approach. It's an ideal method for supporting writers to show a reader a new character or world effectively. If a writer could contrive a realistic character mind style and incorporate it into a story, then the result in their writing could become as successful as Gillian Flynn's work in *Gone Girl*.

Flynn was able to deceive us with the help of mind style. Let's not forget that the mind style of both Nick and Amy are successful. We can identify the qualities of both Nick and Amy just by their thoughts, language and behaviour. Although their mind processes are eccentric and odd at times, they still represent a strong mannerism which is clear to the reader. We can successfully become and relate to Nick and Amy – reading their thoughts and narration, we can identify with them and live within their world.

We are able to gain a lot about them from their thoughts and behaviour, but equally, enough is left out to keep the reader on the edge throughout the book. Flynn expertly reveals Nick as an awkward man whom is so overwhelmed by the

situation, that he acts inappropriately in many situations. His inappropriateness makes him the number one suspect to the other characters and to the reader.

Flynn's technique in creating Amy's two mind styles is the greatest example into making a realistic mind style, but also using it to drive the plot. 'Diary Amy' tricks the reader and the police into thinking Nick is guilty. The entries subtly make Nick seem like a dangerous man with a temper and lack of concern for Amy, but her real mind style in the second part of the book is chilling and shocking. Flynn carries it out so well that it is unpredictable and impossible to distinguish before Amy's real mind style is exposed.

I strongly believe that this comparative analysis supports my claim that mind style is and could be significant within writing. This paper highlights the importance of mind style as a narratological technique that writers use either intentionally or unintentionally when creating and portraying a character. The creation of character derives on their personality and traits, which forces the author to create a precise mind for a specific character.

If the theories and purpose of mind style was taught by teachers and learnt by writers, then we could adapt our way of writing and thinking; resulting improved fictional characters, and better creation methods.

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