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**Analysing Hyper masculinity and the Socially  
Constructed Ideal of Masculine Identity in Bret Easton  
Ellis's American Psycho**

A Thesis Submitted as Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of *Master* in Literature and Civilisation.

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### **Declaration of Originality**

I hereby declare this thesis as a result of my own original research and independent work, except, where otherwise stated and acknowledged. I affirm that it has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for any academic degree or diploma at any other institution. All sources and materials used in the preparation of this thesis have been properly acknowledged.

## **Dedication**

To my parents, who reminded me to stay level-headed throughout stressful instances

To my sister for sharing her own experience with me and offering advice

To my friends for being there for me in moments of doubt and uncertainty

To anyone whose presence during this journey was encouraging and inspiring

This work is for you

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## **Abstract**

This thesis portrays how Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho* portrays and criticizes the hyper-masculine environments and investigates the consequences of extreme capitalist society that is male dominant and centered around competition, it focuses on the protagonist, Patrick Bateman's experience with inferiority complex, psychopathy and ultimate madness, by dissecting his behavior, the study offers a critical analysis of his personality and how he can be placed in today's contemporary setting, the study explores the dangers of unchecked male mental health which can potentially lead to extreme violence, hyper-sexuality and criminal tendencies. By examining the novel's setting through close reading and critical analysis, the research warns against the yuppie culture and hierarchal societies that have damaged individuals beyond repair, this study also provides insights on the protagonist and offers a new perception, by diving deeper into his behavior, Patrick Bateman becomes more humanized in the eyes of the reader, showing that he is a complex layered character who is cunning and calculated, rather than simply a comically exaggerated psychopath.

**Keywords:** American psycho, Capitalism, Consumerism, Identity, Masculinity, Psychopathy, Yuppie culture.

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"And you know what wickedness is, and shame, and fear. There were days when you peered into yourself, into the secret places of your heart, and what you saw there made you faint with horror. And then, next day, you didn't know what to make of it...Yes you know what evil costs."

(Sartre, 1946, p.43)

## **General introduction**

The human condition remains a primordial mystery that beckoned the ever-so-curious mind of man. Since the beginning of time, humans curiosity about their own nature and behavior has been an innate part of their biology and mentality, fueled by the timeless question of "why", man have spent sleepless nights in attempts to solve their own puzzle, to figure out what kind of riddles their mind poses on them and whether or not their agency is their own or it is simply a slave to their temperament, this curiosity and intrigue have set the scene for the emergence of cognitive fields designated for the sole purpose of studying the human mind; philosophy, epistemology, phenomenology and more importantly psychology; man's conscious decision to embark in a journey of self-discovery, to dismantle his insides and see what is within by holding a mirror to himself and studying closely each part of his own psyche, especially the uncomfortable ones.

In reality, there has not been much focus on male's psyche as much as women's, the softer gender's mental processes have been under scrutiny for ages that men's inner being was completely overlooked, although it is as equally complicated and intriguing; their hardcore mask, the need to conform to a certain image, the conflict between their true self and the imposed masculinity, these are all aspects that have effected male's mental health since the age of dawn and continue doing so even during these modern times.

For that reason, numerous intellectuals and psychologists invested their time and effort into researching both the male psyche and hidden mechanisms working overtime to construct the masculine identity; evolving from the discovery that their emotional expression is suppressed not absent and moving onto the realization that " identity and purpose" are the core motivators for men -hence the risk of depression and low self-esteem when not being able to meet society standards- although male's mental health studies have come a long way, yet it is still ambiguous to the complicated relationship between a man's inner self and the outside world; an interaction that is so entangled and often hindered by obscure feelings and emotions possessed by a person towards his surrounding, the manner with which this interaction unfolds determines the trajectory of the male's life, if it goes right then success is guaranteed, however, if the encounter between a man and his outside environment is bad and harmful this can lead to disastrous results, mainly self-fragmentation.

About that, self- fragmentation has been a frequently revisited subject, not only in psychology but also literature, writers have took it upon themselves to illustrate the emotional turmoil

caused by the long standing existential crisis which seem to worsen as time progresses, because as the world evolves and as countries grow and cities are filled to the brim with more and more people, saturation occurs and fear culture takes place which ultimately results in alienation; the human experience of isolating one's self, whether willingly or forced by social norms. This entire observation fuels the author's interest in writing about self-fragmentation, either to express what they have gone through personally or to be the voice of the voiceless who suffer in silence.

On that note, Bret Easton Ellis has shown a great deal of interest in the male's experience of self-fragmentation and destructive coping mechanisms, for that reason, his characters are often angry, violent and seem to suffer from mental issues and desensitization towards their surroundings, the author himself has expressed how he as a man, finds his characters relatable, for instance, he mentioned that he has been through a period where he felt as alienated and estranged as his character Patrick Bateman; he had a great deal of hatred towards his society yet he still wanted to fit it, the desperation to be just like everyone else would make him spiral and cause him daily agony, and that is why he felt the need to write about it. The study in question entitled *American Psycho* is one of his most popular and controversial works, which gained him the title of L'Enfant Terrible, due to its explicit nature and violent themes; a novel which explores the protagonist desperation to fit in a hyper masculine environment while also portraying his decent into madness as his self-image contradicts with the outside world's perception.

This research, therefore, aims to offer a deep analysis of the complexity of masculine identity in hypercompetitive environment while shedding light on the serious mental issues that can come to surface when violence, sex, and wealth are the head honchos of a capitalist society. By focusing on Bateman's identity, the study engages with broader cultural discourses on male performance, severe psychological issues, and toxic masculinity. This analysis sheds light on how fiction can be employed to critique societal expectations and offer a mirror to the pressures faced by men in capitalist and image-driven environments.

In this regard, the present study aims to address the following questions:

1. What are the underlying mental processes responsible for the construction of masculine identity?

2. How does the capitalist society encourage the emergence of a toxic competitive environment?
3. How does the novel in hand portray the extreme pressure of society and its dire consequences on individuals (mainly men)?

To answer the previous research questions, the following hypotheses are provided:

1. The construction of masculine identity is shaped by internalized social norms, cognitive conditioning, and psychological reinforcement of gender roles by society.
2. Capitalist society promotes a toxic competitive environment by valuing status, dominance, and wealth over genuine human interaction and emotional well-being.
3. The novel portrays the crushing weight of societal expectations on men, illustrating how relentless pressure can lead to emotional repression, alienation, and self-destruction.

To inspect this research critically, it is crucial to apply psychoanalysis as it is the ideal method which help scrutinize the protagonist behavior through a professional scope, Firstly, Robert Hare theory of the masked self in his book the mask of sanity; a theory which suggests that psychopaths hide beneath a perfect veil of charm and social intelligence in order to cover their unhinged tendencies, secondly, Freud's tripartite theory of the id, ego and super ego which can be employed to analyze different parts of Bateman's psyche and reveal the relationship between his polished outer image and his inner primitive desires, while also applying several of theories concerning the protagonist's masculine identity and the role of societies' gender norm in creating an emotional gap inside him which results in further alienation from his surroundings. Therefore, the research is divided into five sections, which include a general introduction, a chapter which is thematicchapter, another chapter which deals with the theoretical research methodology used to analyze the case study, followed by a section which includes thorough analysis, and lastly, a general conclusion.

The first chapter will include a discussion of the major theoretical methods used to analyze the study in question, encompassing theories of masculinity, to analyze the character identity, the concept of the masking of one's self alongside numbering psychopathic symptoms, and Freud's tripartite theory to dismantle the protagonist and break down his character.

The second chapter is a presentation of different themes discussed in the research, it clarifies the relationship between the character's environment and his behavior through analyzing all different aspects of Bateman's 80s society, starting from the glorification of wealth and status that lead to the creation of yuppie culture and moving into the toxic lifestyle of people of that period that helped set the scene for the emergence of hyper competitive environment characterized by conspicuous consumption, violence and emotional suppression.

The final chapter will provide an in depth psychological analysis of the protagonist, following his journey from the first encounter has with the reader until his final descent of madness in the latest chapters, through breaking down Patrick's character by the use of the dark triad and Freud theories, this research can critically analyze the main character criminal and violent behavior and predicts a never ending loop of the same happenings occurring to him over and over again due to the serious mental damage he suffers from.

It is important to note that although every effort was made to conduct a thorough investigation, constraints in available resources posed certain limitations that future research could overcome.

# Chapter One

## **Chapter one: Research Context and Theoretical Framework**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The Human psyche is a myriad of complex emotions, feelings and thoughts, all of which can be considered the core components of one's personality; shaping his behavior and the manner through which he perceives those around him, and how he relates to their own unique human experience.

One of the universe bestowed gifts upon humans solely, is the ability to undergo an enigmatic series of numerous sentiments, so intense that they govern and dominate a person's attitude and alter his demeanor differently with each passing day.

Melancholy, rage, pride, joy, and excitement are all core parts of humans that represent the nexus connecting a person and his environment, although it seems natural for all humans to possess this intricate web of sensations and act according to such assumptions, it has been proven that a considerable amount of people who live among us are, as a matter of fact lacking these simple humane traits. These emotions and feelings may seem simple and ordinary one would not expect that a person's whole course of life may depend on their presence or lack thereof. The absence of basic human emotions and feelings has been proved to be the essential characteristic that draws the line between human normalcy and what is considered to be its opposite, its threat, and nemesis, that is psychopathy.

In this chapter, light will be shed on the unique male experience of dealing with psychopathy, the awareness that it exists within them, how they realize they are different from those around them, and what could be the cause of such harsh deviation from human nature.

## **1.2 Psychology and Male Identity.**

Identity, as defined by psychology, includes the qualities, convictions, values, and character traits that set a person apart and make them special. It is a complex idea that has evolved over time to influences such as personal experiences, cultural background, environmental factors, and genetics.

Psychology has devoted major efforts and time to studying the human identity, that of males especially, to better comprehend the masculine figure and the significant role which it represents in society, it should come as no surprise that these studies have shown that the female and masculine binary are distinctively different from each other; each of which possessing disparate traits, characteristics, and persona.

The manner through which both the female and male figures choose to present themselves to society is different, psychology seeks to analyze the inner process that results in such a wide gap between the two of them while taking into consideration the ambiguous nature of the human psyche.

Professional Psychology: Research and Practice published a paper entitled "The New Psychology of Men" in 1996, in this paper Ronald Levant described a new field of theory, study, and practice focused on comprehending the effects of the socially constructed concept of; masculinity on men, women and society overall (levant,1996).

In his paper, he argues that the male identity is constructed based on societal norms and conditions which perform as a restrictive boundary and a threat to the free authentic male spirit, he substantiates his argument with evidence from the literature on the psychology of men, the GCR paradigm or the gender conflict roles has been one of the most fruitful areas of research which has been able to analyze how contemporary male identity is shaped by restrictive and rigid societal standards imposed on men.

Through numerous studies and research, four general patterns of male GCR have been recognized (O'Neil et al., 1995), each representing a crucial component of the male identity witnessed in modern society and further reinforced by public expectations. The first pattern;

(SPC) which stands for success, power, and competition that investigates the extent to which men are conditioned to prioritize achieving personal goals through competitive endeavors. The second pattern, called restricted emotionality (RE), talks about how much men are taught not to express their emotions verbally in order to avoid coming across as weak and susceptible, another detectable pattern is restricted affectionate behavior between men (RABBM) which examines how men are socialized to find it difficult to show other men that they care about them. Lastly, the final and fourth pattern is conflict between work and family relationships (CBWFR), which describes the male struggle to fulfill the demands related to work and family relations.

The function of these patterns and their exhibition in the lives of men is illustrated in males inability to show emotions, boys are taught from a young age that expressing their feelings is a sign of vulnerability and that men should present as stoic, apathetic, impassive and phlegmatic, all of which are characteristics that men are awarded and praised for in their work field as it can lead to career advancements and recognition; however the real conflict arises when men find themselves restrained by these traits when it comes to other areas of their lives; as they delve into interpersonal relationships, their incapability to display vulnerability will present itself as an issue; hindering the process of communication with those around them, hence creating an emotional gap and frozen interactions, the conflict here lays under the question how can they be rewarded for these traits in areas of their life yet shamed for possessing them in certain situations, here men are left confused and puzzled; dealing with a fracture in their identity.

### **1.3 The Psychopathic mask**

Similar to any other mental disorder, there have been numerous research and, studies dedicated to analyzing and comprehending the psychopath, one could even say that this one particular disorder gains special attention from psychiatrists and researchers due to its lethal nature and dangerous effect on society, unlike other major noticeable disorders, psychopathy is silent, it creeps in slowly and secretly; these people live among us in total normalcy, and it is the psychiatrists mission to unveil their pretentious ordinariness and figure out the warning signs which appear when their mask slips, the mask of sanity. In his book *The Mask of Sanity*, published in 1941 and considered to be a foundational text in the study of psychology and criminology, Harvey Cleckley devoted his time and effort to studying psychopaths and

analyzing their behavior. He revealed that, unlike other mentally ill individuals who exhibit clear visual signs of the disorder, psychopaths implicitly coexist with ordinary people; one would have to be extensively attentive to their manners in order to catch the slightest glimpse of their hidden intentions.

According to Harvey, while psychopaths appear normal from the outside, internally they suffer from a neurological defect that causes what he called 'semantic dementia' which means that these individuals cannot emotionally understand the meaning of life as lived by ordinary people, it also refers to their words hence the famous saying " they know the words but not the music"(Johns and Quay, 1962).

In his book, Harvey argues that the psychopath presents a perfect mimicry of a whole and normal person. He can use words, imitate emotions, and produce a convincing picture of a person who has feelings, social responsibility, and a sense of conscience. Beneath the mask, however, lies a void absence of any of these qualities. He reveals that several of his patients who have shown clear signs of psychopathy all lead equally normal lives on the surface, they had families and friends - although they did not consider them to be ones- and they had jobs, some even excelled in their careers compared to ordinary people, this fake normalcy, according to Harvey, is the real threat, since it is not detectable to the laymen and can lead to dire consequences. In order to help psychiatrists accurately diagnose psychopaths and protect ordinary people from the danger of these individuals, Harvey has outlined sixteen descriptors that define the profile of what psychopathy is and how it manifests in patients.

### **Superficial charm and good intelligence**

On the first encounter with a psychopath, one would be left with an overall positive first impression, they appear as charming, sociable, and of good nature, they are great individuals with a normal set of interests and characteristics with seemingly no sign of queer or abnormal behavior and they generally embody the idea of a contented, well-adjusted person in every way. In contrast, they do not appear to be artificially exerting themselves in an attempt to deceive you or cover-up. They are rarely mistaken for a professional backslapper or someone attempting to gain favor for a covert agenda. Excessive affability or signs of affectation are not typical. They look like the real thing. The psychopath appears to be neither fragile nor odd on the outside, even though their internal emotional deficiencies and deviations maybe similar

to those of the masked schizophrenic. Everything about him probably suggests that he has strong mental health and desirable, superior human qualities. (Cleckley, 2016).

### **Absence of delusions and other signs of irrational thinking**

The psychopath is unchained from any sign or indications that are commonly considered to be symptoms of psychosis, unlike Schizophrenics, they do not suffer from delusions or delirious hallucinations, in fact, they seem to be healthily rational and aware of the consequences of their actions, yet they hold no remorse whatsoever for those affected by their wrongdoing, their perceptual senses of the external world are alert and active; the psychopath can discuss all and every field of interest with total rationality and awareness without triggering suspicion that they are not mentally adequate to live within ordinary individuals.

### **Absence of "nervousness" or psychoneurotic manifestations**

The psychopath does not suffer from any anxiety nervousness or typical hysterical behavior associated with the neurotic diagnosis, he holds an extraordinary level of poise and composure, free from agitation or excitement, even during a moment of disturbance, he remains resilient except for certainly some; minor restlessness when held in captivity in jails prisons or mental health institutions, where they show little to no patience to their confusion and anger towards their inability of leaving or being the one in control of the situation. Overall, the psychopath's previously mentioned lack of remorse seems to be intertwined with his inability to experience anxiety.

### **Unreliability**

While the psychopath may appear first as reliable responsible and authentic, as the interactions with him turn more frequent and prolonged, the other person will start to notice their unreliability and failure to keep their promise, stay true to their word ,and take responsibility, even though they face confrontation by those around them, psychopaths seem not to hold themselves accountable. Psychopaths are characterized by infrequent, unexpected behavior, it is unpredictable when or how their whole demeanor could shift, hence the untrustworthy unreliability.

### **Untruthfulness and insincerity**

The psychopath exhibits a striking lack of regard for reality and should not be believed more in his historical narratives than in his future assurances or declarations of current goals. It appears as though he will never be able to achieve a realistic understanding of a mindset in others that makes them respect truth and treasure honesty in themselves (Cleckley, 2016).

He is extremely convincing due to his lack of nervousness or agitation, he lies comfortably and at ease, whether he is making a statement or defending himself, his power of conviction hides within his simple and persuasive declarations which are free from any sign of obvious tension or stress.

### **Lack of remorse or shame**

By all accounts, the psychopath has been proven not to feel any sort of remorse or empathy towards his misconducts or how they affect those around him, he is completely detached and utterly unmoved by the horrendous drawbacks of his actions, their shameless nature overpowers them and they seem to even partake a sense of pride in what they do, following his words concerning the impudent personality of the psychopath, Clerkly explains.

Yet he does not, despite his able protestations, show the slightest evidence of major humiliation or regret. This is true of matters about his personal and selfish pride and to the esthetic standards that he avows as well as to moral or humanitarian matters. If Santayana is correct in saying that "perhaps the true dignity of man is his ability to despise himself," the psychopath is without a means to acquire true dignity. (p.375)

### **Inadequately motivated antisocial behavior**

In addition to being untrustworthy, the psychopath engages in more aggressive behaviors such as lying, cheating, ignoring, arguing, and failing without seeming to feel qualm. For incredibly low stakes and with far higher chances of being caught than the typical scoundrel, he will engage in unethical malpractice. In actuality, he will carry out such actions without any apparent purpose.

### **Poor judgment and failure to learn by experience**

Although the psychopath possesses exceptional reasoning abilities, he exhibits atrocious judgment when it comes to achieving what one might expect his goals are, he wastes numerous chances of obtaining better financial status, gaining closer proximity with his wife or kids, and leaving the mental institution, although it can be reasonably argued that he simply does not care about his wife nor his financial success that is why he conveys such poor judgment related to these two, yet it cannot be denied that he indeed does want to leave the hospital where he shows impatience and clear detest towards his fellow patients whom he considers to be 'beneath' him seeing that, ultimately, the psychopath considers himself 'average' and feels as though he does not belong there.

Paired with his poor sense of judgment, the psychopath fails to learn from his previous experiences and finds himself in the same crisis as before, yet he shows remarkable abilities in judging theoretical situations; not suffering from any inadequacy when asked what he would do in certain situations or how will he handle it, it is when the action actually arrives, that he is exposed to be incompetent.

### **Pathologic egocentricity and incapacity for love**

Psychopaths are too often characterized by a large emphasis on their ego, their self-centeredness is never unnoticed due to their centric nature and large personalities, this intensiveness of this trait can vary from one patient to another depending on multiple circumstances, and their egocentrism eventually leads to their incapacity of feeling emotion; mainly love.

The word itself seems all too ambiguous to their repertoire, however, it is not all absolute as they can experience simplistic emotions. Harvey explains: "He is plainly capable of casual fondness, of likes and dislikes, and of reactions that, one might say, cause others to matter to him. These affective reactions are, however, always strictly limited in degree."(p.347)

### **General poverty in major affective reactions**

Furthermore, the psychopath suffers from general poverty in effect, he can feel excitement, enthusiasm and, rage, even wails and weeps; complaining about his ill fortune, and one observing him would distinguish these behaviors as readiness of expression rather than strength of emotion.

His emotional spectrum includes vexation, spite, fleeting and erratic bursts of quasi-affection, peevish resentment, shallow moods of self-pity, puerile attitudes of vanity, and ridiculous and ostentatious poses of indignation. Reactions that are unlikely to fall within this range include deep joy, genuine despair, sustaining pride, honest, solid grief, mature, wholehearted anger, and true or consistent indignation.

### **Specific loss of insight**

In a particular sense, the psychopath rarely has insight. He cannot perceive himself the way others do, he cannot understand how they feel when they see him, indeed he is incapable of undergoing such subjective experience, all of his traits and attributes are overlooked by him, such ignorance from his part is puzzling considering his perfect sense of reasoning, his detachment from any delusions or signs of psychosis.

The psychopath always finds a way to blame others for his misconduct with convincing rationalization and elaborate reasoning, yet, occasionally he accounts for his actions through careful analysis of his situation.

Harvey considers this lack of insight to be shown especially in those who are incriminated, as they exhibit genuine dissatisfaction with the penalties they receive; believing these legal punishments should not and do not apply to them.

### **Unresponsiveness in general interpersonal relations**

One should not count on the psychopath to show any ordinary responsiveness to basic human kindness or trust, despite being shown all forms of goodwill and thoughtfulness by his friends 'spouse, or family, he seems to feel not an ounce appreciation, minus the rare cases when there is a personal gain for him. Psychopaths occasionally act in ways that make them seem incredibly thoughtful, cooperative, and responsive in relatively trivial situations. It may be hard for acquaintances who meet them on the basis of minor disagreements to accept that they are not extremely appreciative and willing to help others. Even though they are occasionally ready or even quite simple, such responses and intents never build up enough power to be decisive in truly significant matters.

### **Fantastic and uninviting behavior with drink and sometimes without**

Although the psychopath's overly performative and theatrical exploits publicly are a direct result of alcohol, they still seem to prevail in these patients even without drinking, all of the

unacceptable conduct and misbehavior normally associated with drinking alcohol seem to be exhibited by the psychopath without intoxication, the reason behind this performance? Unknown, it is ambiguous whether it is for mere bizarre enjoyment or it serves some utile hidden purposes.

### **Rarely carried out suicide**

Harvey explains that it is unlikely for this group of patients to carry out suicide and put an end to their own lives, although it is not entirely ruled, it is scarce, according to him the possibility of psychopath suicide is very thin due to various elements, one of these reasons is that they do not stay hospitalized or under supervision, and that as previously mentioned; these patients' threats of suicide are identical to promises, which yet again, as explained in the unreliability element, are rarely kept or taken seriously by the psychopath.

### **Sex life impersonal, trivial, and poorly integrated**

Needless to say, in light of the previous explanation that the psychopath is incapable of object love, his sexual interests also seem to be empty of any personal meaning such as the desire to share an intimate experience with their partner, their sexual activity is consistently limited to the physical aspect only, devoid of any emotional attachment, it is purely carnal without the boundless sentimental complexities which create the thrilling experience of adults interpersonal relations.

The male psychopath, despite his usual ability to complete the physical act successfully with a woman, never seems to find anything meaningful or personal in his relations or to enjoy significant pleasure beyond the localized and temporary sensations. The female, whether or not she has a physiologic orgasm, behaves in such a way as to indicate similar evaluations of the experience. Even these sensations seem to wither precociously and leave the subject a somewhat desiccated response to local stimuli. Sensations so isolated are, no doubt, peculiarly vulnerable to routine and to its justly celebrated antidotes for excitement. (Harvey, p 376)

### **Failure to follow any life plan**

The psychopath is fundamentally unable to consistently follow through with a strict life plan, whether that plan is benevolent or malevolent, conversely, he seems to put more effort into turning into a failure at life, he abandons any activity midway even if he is succeeding, the

self-sabotage and resistance to help are central characteristics of the psychopath suggest that he is not failing due to external circumstances but because of their internal compulsion, these traits and behavior are too erratic and nonsensical to the average person that it can be regarded as a sign of the psychopath's madness yet they are still legally considered sane.

In essence, the psychopath figure encompasses numerous unconventional traits and characteristics that are constantly under scrutiny due to its bizarre inhumane nature that poses a threat to society and to psychopaths themselves, it is not an easy task to pinpoint what is exactly wrong with this group of people or understand why they act the way they do but experts are always wary of new indications and signs which help them get a glimpse of the psychopath's true identity and who he is when his disguise wears off and his mask of sanity slips away.

#### **1.4 The struggle between the id and the superego**

"Where *Id* was, *ego* shall be" famously said by the Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud; who is considered to be the father of psychoanalysis, a theory aimed to aid those who are mentally distressed.

Sigmund Freud's creation of psychoanalysis is considered to be a foundational discovery for psychology and human existence entirely; however, his studies always fostered controversy and criticism due to his tendentious theories, especially those involving infant sexuality.

Freud argued that human behavior is mainly determined by the unconscious needs that develop during one's childhood, chiefly through experiences with love, sexuality, death, and complex emotions developed towards parents and siblings.

He believed that the human psyche operates at three levels of awareness; the pre-consciousness, the consciousness, and the unconsciousness, each of these parts plays a crucial role in monitoring human behavior and monopolizing the individual's actions.

Whatever the name, "conscious" refers to an irreducible and irreplaceable phenomenon. The same concept has been referred to by several names, including phenomenal awareness, reflective awareness, awareness, and phenomenal representation. Awareness has been used to describe both the latent knowledge of something and what it means when individuals are currently conscious of it. The term "conscious" can refer to what is immediately, subjectively,

and introspectively given in experience, unless it is burdened with additional meaning. Thus, people might be aware of a hallucination, an obsessive preoccupation, or a logical abstract idea. Intoxication, dissociative states, psychosis, and other conditions all cause them to become conscious. However, each of these depicts a very distinct mental arrangement of experiences, existing on various levels of abstraction and classification, and adhering to various organizational principles (Kihlstrom, 1987).

Freud considered consciousness an epistemological tool to discover certain attributes of mental state, during his time scientific evidence proposed that there are various mental states which exist outside one's awareness; hence, Freud rejected the idea that all mental states are ontological (conscious). However; he upheld the epistemological tenet that awareness can access all conscious states. The reduction of consciousness to an element of only an epistemological nature sparked debate among psychologists as it was considered to be a failure in their field due to its demotion of a significant part of the human psyche into something of less value.

The concept of consciousness seems to be an ambiguous area to numerous psychologists, especially Freud, it gives rise to different questions; what purpose does the consciousness serve? What role does it play in peoples' lives? How does it occur and what functions it performs aside from how the various organizational principles and levels of abstraction function? According to Wakefield (2018, p. 47–49 & 301), despite being an identity theorist, Freud was adamant that consciousness could not be physically explained and remained completely enigmatic. Such knowledge most likely exists outside of our comprehension, according to Freud's Kantian epistemology. However, this does not imply that the mind and brain are not the same, even though consciousness cannot be explained in terms of brain functions. Non-explainability does not imply non-identity, and identity is an ontological relation that does not imply explainability.

Second to the consciousness, the pre-consciousness is placed in the center of Freud's topographical model; between the conscious and unconscious minds is the preconscious. The phrase was coined by Freud to refer to mental states, ideas, memories, or information that are not instantly available to conscious awareness but can easily become so. If someone asks another the name of a friend from their youth, for example, that memory may not be in their active consciousness, but it can be readily recalled when asked. Freud distinguished between

the preconscious and the unconscious, which is much more difficult to access and contains repressed or hidden thoughts and desires, however, some modern scholars have critiqued Freud's rigid model of the mind, especially the idea of the preconscious as too simple or limiting. Some argue that it does not account for the complexities of cognition and how thoughts emerge into consciousness.

In her critique of psychoanalytic theory, Koertge (1999) questions whether the rigid distinctions Freud made between conscious, preconscious, and unconscious states are scientifically tenable in light of new cognitive neuroscience findings. She suggests that contemporary cognitive science offers a more fluid understanding of mental states that might not require such sharp boundaries.

The preconscious is frequently seen through the prism of automatic processing from the standpoint of cognitive science. These are unconscious processes that can become conscious if necessary. According to cognitive scientists, the preconscious mind plays a critical role in processing information that is "on the tip of the tongue" or easily remembered, as Freud put it.

According to Dennett's (1991) explanation in *Consciousness Explained*, what Freud considered preconscious memories can be viewed as "buffered" memories that are stored in the brain but are not instantly accessible to the conscious mind. He relates this concept to the stream-of-consciousness theory and how dynamic awareness shifts are made possible by cognitive processes.

The preconscious mind is a crucial intermediate in his model of mental structure that permits the dynamic interaction of conscious and unconscious processes. Philosophers, cognitive scientists, and psychoanalysts are still investigating and developing Freud's original idea, which is resulting in a deeper, more complex understanding of how humans' access and process memories, thoughts, and experiences.

Moving forward to the third and perhaps the most intriguing element of Freud's tripartite structure; unconsciousness, it is a perplexing concept which is considered to be the veil covering humans' buried traumas, unwanted emotions, and repressed experiences that are far too melancholic to resurface on an individual's awareness (unless evoked through the use of professional psychological methods). Freud himself expressed the mysterious nature of unconsciousness in his book *The Ego and the Id* (1923):

As far as I can see, it is impossible to avoid this ambiguity; the distinction between conscious and unconscious is in the last resort a question of perception, which must be answered 'yes' or 'no', and the act of perception itself tells us nothing of the reason why a thing is or is not perceived. No one has a right to complain because the actual phenomenon expresses the dynamic factor ambiguously (p.15).

Placing the perplexity of this concept aside, Freud elaborated the different elements which compose unconsciousness and explained its functions and significant role in shaping individual identity, he distinguished three major mental processes that are the id, ego, and superego, each of which has a tight grip on the human psyche and performs different tasks which ensure a balanced harmony (undoubtedly this balance is not so elaborated in the mentally ill who suffer from the dominance of one of these elements over the other two).

The id is entirely in the unconscious while the ego and the super ego sort of float between the consciousness and the unconsciousness, the id is the innate instincts of human beings, it represents the primal animalistic desires all individuals possess and thrive on, this element is child-like as it seeks instant validation and satisfaction, Freud further explains the primal drives which are fundamental forces of the id; the libido, Eros and Thanatos, all of which he considered to be the main parts of the id, the libido represents the vitality of life instincts, according to Freud. This term, which has Latin roots and means "desire" or "lust," encompasses more than just sexual cravings; it also refers to the basic motivation that drives a variety of human endeavors. According to Freud, libido is the life force that drives not only sexual behavior but also survival-related behaviors like eating and interacting with others. Freud also elaborated the binary opposition of Eros and Thanatos as primal instincts, at first, he only developed Eros; the life instinct which drives people to continue living, it promotes survival, reproduction, and social cooperation. The preservation of life, both individual and species, is the main goal of the life drive. People are compelled by this drive to take actions that support and nurture their lives, such as ensuring their safety and health. Sexual drives are another way it manifests itself, inspiring people to bear and raise children, nurturing the notion of recreation. Eventually, Freud realized that Eros alone was not sufficient, this epiphany was the product of his experience with soldiers during the aftermath of World War who often revisited the traumatic events of the war in their dreams, and through his observation he noted that humans possess an unconscious desire to die (Thanatos) whereas the life force (Eros) navigates this desire and manages to somehow dismiss this wish, while Eros promotes life Thanatos engages in self-destructive behavior, aggression towards others and

suicidal tendencies, Freud argued that these two forces constantly clash and the tension between them is everlasting and a natural part of the human psyche (unless one is taking over the other).

Following the tripartite structure, the element placed above the id is the ego; or the I, it is the self, the decisions a person makes, and it functions based on the reality principle as it is guided by the norms and laws, it is the moderator between the id desires and societal circumstances, instead of the immediate gratification which the id craves the ego works on delaying it until it can be achieved through acceptable manner agreed upon by society, the ego represents the rational part of humans, it also meditates between the id primitive instincts and the super ego moral constraints. The id gives birth to the ego during infancy. The ego's objective is to safely and socially appease the id's demands. Since the ego functions in both the conscious and unconscious mind, it adheres to the reality principle in contrast to the id.

The ego is concerned with coming up with a practical plan to achieve pleasure, but it shares the id's desire for pleasure (i.e., reducing tension) and avoidance of pain. It does not know what is right or wrong; it only knows that something is good if it fulfills its purpose without endangering the id or itself (Simply Psychology, 2024).

Unlike the id and ego, the final part of Freud's mental structure is much more strict and severe than the previously mentioned elements, it is the moral conscience, an individual's inner voice which tells them what is right and what is wrong, it develops from the early stages of childhood during the phallic stage of psychosexual development when the child starts identifying with the same sex parent.

Similar to the id's basis on the pleasure principle and the ego guidance through reality principle, the super-ego functions based on the morality principle i.e. it motivates individuals to behave in a morally acceptable manner, and it is the source of certain emotions such as pride and satisfaction (rewards) and guilt alongside shame (punishment). The superego's function is to control the id's impulses, especially those that society forbids, such as sex and aggression. It also persuades the ego to turn to moralistic goals rather than simply realistic ones and strive for perfection (Simply Psychology, 2024).

The superego consists of two systems: the conscience and the ideal self, as previously mentioned the conscience is responsible for doing what is right and what is wrong, it punishes the ego through the feeling of guilt once it succumbs to the id's irrational desires. While the

ideal self is a fictitious unreal image of what a person should be like, often derived from the individual's first great love attachment (usually a parent) the ideal self is what a person strives to be, it includes career aspirations, moral ambitions, how to be a useful member of society ...etc.

Each element of the mental trio interacts differently with the id, for instance ,while the id is the primal force and is driven by the pleasure principle ,therefore, offering no control over its demands, the ego manages its desires with the reality principle, balancing immediate pleasure and reality and finally, the superego which represents the strictest element clashes with the id as it disagrees with anything that goes against the moral compass, this struggle between the superego and the id seems to be the heart of all humans inner conflicts and being caught between two pulling forces each seem to have a tight grip on one's mind.

Contrary to the times of the past when individuals valued morality, a good conscience ,and ethical behavior and all that are considered to be crucial goals of the superego, today's community seems to be undergoing a moral dilemma as the modern society has inclined to overlook traditional humane values and lean towards the ids high demands, to live in the moment seems to be today's motto which induces people to indulge their immediate pleasure overlooking their current circumstances and people around them, the selfish nature of the id appear to be dominating the modern individual whose sole purpose became satisfying his needs no matter what it takes, the superego downfall in contemporary society is the highlight of humans continuous struggle between the nature of his desires and the necessary constraints of his moral conscience and the moral decay in the external world is nothing but a mirror of what is actually happening inside individuals minds.

The struggle between the id and the superego takes place at the level of the ego, which tries to mediate between the two opposing forces, as the ego attempts to find acceptable ways to satisfy the id's needs it also appeases the moral values of the superego, however when the conflict between the two is too overwhelming and the ego can no longer function as a moderator, anxiety surfaces, and the ego attempts to deal with it through the use of defense mechanisms such as repressions, denial and rationalization. This conflict leads to mental distress and gives birth to other Freudian concepts such as guilt and anxiety, for instance when a person is overwhelmed by his sexual desires yet feels morally wrong or guilty by these desires he begins to experience shame and self-loathing.

Since the ego is essentially the ground above which this conflict occurs, it is its role to find ways to deal with the anxiety caused by this struggle; repression is one way to cope with it as the ego buries humans' undesirable emotions and feelings in order to protect him from psychological harm, another coping mechanism is projection which refers to instances when a person attributes his own unacceptable feelings onto others, a sublimation which is the third coping mechanism and it encourages individuals to channel their destructive impulses into socially acceptable activities such as art, writing or work.

Despite the ego's constant efforts to regulate the tension between the id and the super ego, there can be instances when it fails, when this failure occurs dire consequences can take place, mainly neuroses; severe depressions, self-hatred and chronic anxiety are the direct result of the ego inability to lessen the conflicts tension, additionally, a crippling strong sense of guilt and shame can be the result of this struggle as the individual feels incapable of meeting moral standards, and although repression is one of the coping mechanisms employed by the ego to deal with the anxiety caused by the conflicts, yet it still introduces serious issues to one's mental health, repression's danger lies within its hidden nature, surely it is buried in the unconscious mind but it can resurface in other implicit ways which makes a person ponder why he does certain things or behave in a certain manner, because the repressed content does not simply vanish and technically it is still there it can always resurface in other manners, whether in dreams, as phobias or strange sexual fantasies especially the repressions of traumas and memories.

### **1.5 Schizophrenia and the ego's pathology**

Feeling estranged in one's own body, constant voices telling what to do, the feeling as though you are watching yourself from afar, unable to have a say in what you do and what you say and the madness behind not knowing what is real and what is not, they are all component of a serious mental disorder that is schizophrenia a disorder which drives individuals insane leads them to their death or causes others deaths as most people who commit horrendous murders seems to be suffering from this illness, and not just murderers, it can be recognized in insane politicians, world leaders and self-proclaimed prophets who claim they are meant to rule the world, cleansing it from all those who are different.

As it can be noticed this mental illness does not only bring doom upon people who suffer from it but also to those surrounding them, that is why it is very necessary to educate individuals about it and its threat.

The term schizophrenia was coined by the Swiss psychiatrist Eugene Bleuler, in 1908, from Ancient Greek (skhízō, “to split”) + (phrēn, “mind, heart diaphragm”) + English -ia, and was intended to describe the separation of function between personality, thinking, memory, and perception.

Comprehending the significance and dynamics of schizophrenia's phenomenological manifestation requires a deep and thorough analysis of the ego self-axis as their interaction can reveal the reason behind schizophrenic behavior.

As previously mentioned the inner self of a person consists of two main elements necessary for self-organization, they are connected to form what is known as the Ego Self axis; a Jungian theory that refers to the ego attempting to separate itself from the Self. The Self is the embodiment of wholeness and the more spiritual, transcendent, and unconscious aspect of the self, while the Ego is the conscious personality, eventually, the ego must give up its separation from the Self and return to it to become more integrated or balanced with it. Stated differently, an awareness of the ego and how it interacts with the outside world. The self is the outside world, and the ego is the inside one.

In schizophrenia, the ego consciousness is overloaded with unconscious material, making it impossible to discriminate between internal and external reality. The Ego loses its boundaries and becomes part of the Self. During this process, the ego completely loses interest in reality which seems to be less significant and it becomes more enamored with the endless possibilities of limitless unconsciousness, the absorptive ego assumes the characteristics of the self and considers them its possession; therefore, the illusion of immortality, power, and omniscience. This usually manifests as delusional thoughts and experiences of omnipotence. Either the ego's weakness or the rise in pressure from unintegrated complexes in the unconscious can lead to the assimilation and inflation of the ego in schizophrenia. In schizophrenia, the Ego-Self axis shifts in the direction of the Self, signifying the retreat of the Ego, which actively engages in reality and passively witnesses the unconscious's contents on an individual and a collective level, this said retreat, signifies the beginning of the ego pathology which later on manifests into schizophrenia.

The ego pathology is a concept developed by Ernst Scharfetter, a psychiatrist who focused on the role of the ego in the development of psychotic symptoms, Scharfetter expanded Sigmund Freud's ideas about the ego and its functions by incorporating them into the context of schizophrenia and other severe psychiatric disorders, According to his theory, ego pathology is the term for abnormalities or dysfunctions that occur within the ego and can result in symptoms like self-monitoring issues, depersonalization, and derealization. When the psychological process that supports the person in maintaining a consistent sense of reality and self is disrupted, this is called ego pathology, these disturbances result in issues with the perception of the outside world, the sense of self, and general awareness, these perceptive issues bring about what Carl Jung called "*abaissment du niveaumental*" i.e. the lowering of the consciousness as a result of an ego that is too vulnerable and weak to resist the onslaught of unconscious content.

The process of ego pathology can be gradual as the disturbances develop over time, Patients may experience subtle self-disruptions (e.g., feeling disconnected from themselves or others), which can eventually worsen as the illness progresses. While in other cases the process is rapid and fast due to psychotic episodes that lead to serious symptoms such as depersonalization and derealization frequently brought on by stress or psychotic triggers. Although these symptoms might appear more severe or abrupt, they are frequently a part of a longer-term, more comprehensive process. This process is implicit in nature, that is, various underlying emotional and psychological dysfunctions often go unnoticed by the patients as they are unable to recognize their mental deficiency immediately, however, overtime as their condition worsens and begins to affect their daily life, schizophrenic individuals and those around them start noticing their strange behavior, especially during moments of heightened stress or when psychotic episodes occur.

After explaining the nature of ego pathology in schizophrenia one should recognize that it is a process which consists of different experiences that occur in a certain order, at first the ego(as the mediator of self-experience) is disrupted, Schizophrenia patients may suffer from a loss of self-coherence, in which case their identity becomes disjointed. Depersonalization (a separation from oneself) or derealization (a feeling of separation from reality) are two ways this can appear. Next, they begin to suffer from dysfunctional self-monitoring; Scharfetter and other researchers, such as Frith (1992), proposed that schizophrenia impairs self-monitoring, a

process by which people control their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. This dysfunction in self-monitoring leads to **ego pathology**, creating symptoms such as **delusions** (distorted beliefs about oneself) and **hallucinations** (false perceptions of external stimuli). Lastly, they experience **Passivity phenomena**, patients may feel as though they are passive in their own body, they believe that their thoughts or actions are controlled by external forces. These experiences reflect an impaired sense of autonomy and agency, central to the concept of ego pathology.

### **1.6 Dark Triad of Machiavellianism Narcissism and Psychopathy**

Tremendous efforts have been dedicated in the field of psychology to study the hidden agenda of people whom the society considers as a threat to community's harmony and well-being, the reason behind psychologists intellectual endeavor is to understand why these individuals behave the way they do and how they can be helped instead of stigmatized.

In 2002, Canadian psychologists Delroy Paulhus and Kevin Williams coined the term Dark Triad in their influential paper titled *The Dark Triad of Personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy* (2002), in this paper the authors assembled three distinct yet related personality traits – Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy, their purpose was to better understand the darker aspects of human personality, especially traits that tend to be self-serving, manipulative, and harmful to others, Although some psychologists questioned the usefulness of combining the traits and argued that their differences may be more significant than their similarities. The majority of other researchers have persisted in using the concept. Some psychologists even suggested in 2019 that the dark triad be expanded to include sadism; another personality trait, creating a "dark tetrad."

The dark triad concept is based on psychological grounds, particularly personality psychology which is interested in comprehending the structure of human personality and recognizing patterns that affect behaviors, Williams and Paulhus were expanding upon previous psychological theories, especially those about antagonistic and dark personality traits such as narcissism, callousness, and manipulation. These characteristics were thought to be harmful to people and society at large.

The reason behind the significance of the dark triad concept is the fact that it gathers three seemingly distinct traits and assembles them into one singular framework (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy), in contrast to previous studies where these three concepts were

studied individually William and Paulhus argued that they share major commonalities in how they manifest in behavior, mainly in terms of self-centeredness, lack of empathy and exploitative behavior.

They focused on these traits overlap in real-life scenarios, for example, a person with a high level of narcissism may also exhibit psychopathic disregard for other people's feelings and Machiavellian manipulation. Nonetheless, they clarified that these traits can be different in many ways.

First of all, Jackson and Stein (2018) note that grandiosity, fantasies of unending power or importance, and the need for special treatment or admiration are hallmarks of narcissistic personality disorder, narcissists suffer from an inflated sense of self-importance, boastful behavior, a hunger for admiration and superiority, they are characterized by their desire for attention which goes beyond and above, in addition to their fantasies of being superior they suffer from an overwhelming sense of vulnerability, this makes them very sensitive to criticism or defeat although they may not show it, it triggers their feelings of shame, degradation and humiliation, when faced with criticism or defeat, people with the disorder may respond with defiance and contempt, social disengagement, or an outward display of humility that conceals their grandiosity( American Psychological Association, 2022). Despite their apparent differences, researchers have discovered that selfishness, dishonesty, and callousness are characteristics shared by both narcissistic traits (Kwon, 2023).

Furthermore, Machiavellianism which is named after the political philosophy of Niccolò Machiavelli from his work *The Prince* emphasizes deceit manipulation, and pragmatic self-interest. The personality traits of Machiavellianism are typified by deceit, manipulation, a strong sense of self-interest, and a propensity to view others as tools. Known by some psychologists as "high-Machs," people who exhibit particularly high levels of Machiavellianism lack empathy and have a cynical, emotionless perspective on the world. Their main concerns are status and power, and they will stop at nothing to get what they want. (*Machiavellianism*, 2024)

Many people with high Machiavellianism will generally avoid close interpersonal attachments because they see them through a negative, distrustful lens that makes them less satisfying,

even though they are frequently self-assured in social situations and can be charming when necessary.

Lastly, psychopathy; in this context, refers to a lack of empathy, remorseless behavior, and impulsivity, individuals with high levels of psychopathy tend to be callous, and manipulative, and they engage in destructive behavior without regard for the feelings or well-being of others, they are risk takers as their lack of guilt or remorse for harmful actions makes them a threat to those around them.

The combination of these three traits manifests into the concept of the dark triad which ever since its introduction has been used in many areas where it is necessary to analyze people's behaviors. In the social context, people with high levels of the dark triad are adept at controlling people, narcissists may use charm to gain other's respect and take advantage of them, and Machiavellian people will resort to deceit and manipulation to achieve their goals, however, psychopaths might be more direct and employ forceful methods of manipulation. A propensity to take advantage of others for one's own benefit frequently coexists with the Dark Triad traits; Psychopaths may take advantage of others for excitement or self-interest, often destructive ways; Machiavellians may use relationships for power; and narcissists may use others to feed their ego.

The dark triad has also been shown to affect people in the workplace where leadership is necessary, it influences ethical behavior and decision-making. Although narcissistic people may flourish in positions of prestige, their actions may be detrimental to their teams. Machiavellians may thrive in political settings and use deceit to advance their companies. Psychopaths may take risks or act unethically at work without feeling bad about the repercussions.

In addition to that, research has shown that people who suffer from dark triad sabotage their relationships by engaging in destructive and abusive behavior, trying to control people who are close to them and driving them away in the process, their shared traits of manipulation and lack of empathy pushes people away from them resulting in a dysfunctional relationship which – on the long run triggers anti-social behavior when these individuals distance themselves from society harboring feelings of hatred towards the community, this is dangerous as it leads to criminal activity or in extreme cases to suicide.

Men are consistently found to exhibit more dark-triad personality traits than women. Dark-triad traits in men have been attributed by some scholars to cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity, particularly negative sexist stereotypes. (Akre, 2025), such emphasized traits are found in men more than women due to societal expectation which considers these traits as being a sign of high masculinity and power and rewards men for expressing them so overtly.

The current knowledge of the dark triad has significantly improved social and personality psychology by introducing a framework that gathers personality aspects that are distinct yet related. By studying them in a combined manner, society is now able to understand a certain group of people, who live among us and suffer from these mental disorders, not only understand them but recognize their patterns and how they affect social dynamics.

## **2: American psycho and perspectives on Ellis's critique of masculinity and consumerism**

### **2.1 Literature review**

*American psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis (1991) has been considered a defining work in contemporary literature, ever since its publication it has ignited heated debates and controversy over its uncensored depiction of violence and overall polemic content, the novel, which follows the life of Patrick Bateman; a wealthy investment banker during the 1980s is regarded as a thorough exploration of the human psychological condition living in a capitalist society where consumerism has deeply altered individuals mentality and eventually lead to moral decay. The literature surrounding *American Psycho* scrutinizes its portrayal of violence, sexism, and the human psyche, frequently relying on various theoretical approaches such as feminism, postmodernism, and psychoanalysis, this literature review synthesizes key scholarly discussions surrounding the novel, concentrating on Patrick Bateman's psychological condition, his masculine identity, the critique of consumerism and the role of violence within the narrative.

### **Psychological Interpretations of Patrick Bateman**

The psychological human condition is a dominant theme in the novel; various scholars have focused on the novel's satirical depiction of severe psychological distress and mental illness. In *On the Move: A Life* Oliver Sacks discusses how the novel protagonist Bateman's detachment and brutal behavior are deeply unsettling and should not be normalized by the

author's audience, similarly, in *Fictions of Finance at the End of an American Century: Punctuating Capital*, Godden (2011) examines Bateman's personality and how he exhibits the characteristics of a psychopath. He explores in his work how Bateman's psychopathy reflects the larger cultural anxieties of the 1980s. He talks about how Bateman's psychopathy reflects morally depraved and empty society. Godden analyzes how narcissism, violence, and detachment are portrayed in the book, emphasizing Bateman's failure to build genuine human relationships.

However, scholars such as Seltzer (1998) argued that Bateman is not a victim of mental illness and his behavior should not be solely framed as psychological distress, instead, he explained that the protagonist's actions are the direct results of the dehumanizing effect of capitalism, he further insists that Bateman's violent and strange behavior is a critique of the hyper-competitive consumerist community in which he operates.

### **Gender and Masculinity**

Ever since its publication *American Psycho* has been under scrutiny for its clear portrayal of misogyny and sexism, many scholars focused on the novel's depiction of toxic masculinity and hyper-masculine ideals especially those drawing on feminist perspectives, in his book *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam (2011) argues that Bateman and his colleague's behavior is the product of a hyper-masculine environment which rewards male narcissism, dismissive attitude, and detachment alongside aggression, the protagonist violent crimes, especially, against women are the embodiment of the sexist spirit of his period, when male power was glorified and perceived as a sign of dominance and self-confidence. Additionally, Storey (2005) in his *And As things fell Apart: The Crisis of Postmodern Masculinity* in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* and Dennis Cooper's *Freaky Deaky*, explains that Bateman represents a distorted image of masculinity. In his analysis of Bateman's identity construction, Storey looks at how his extreme acts of violence, compulsive product consumption, and detachment from his emotional life all represent the breakdown of traditional masculine ideals in a postmodern, consumer-driven society.

Similarly, St. Louis ((2007 explored how Bateman's psychopathy is intertwined with exaggerated masculinity and explained that Bateman's acts of violence and cruelty against women are a form of performative masculinity which the protagonist feels he needs to do in order to fit into the standards of his current society. His need to establish his dominance and

superiority over others is what motivates his violent encounters, whether they involve sadistic killings or emotional manipulation.

### **Consumerism, Capitalism, and violence**

In his (2006) essay, "The Economics of American Psycho: The Violent Consumerism of Patrick Bateman", Brian R. Price explains that consumerism is not just a backdrop but a driving force in *American Psycho*, Bateman's obsession with wealth, status and owning material brings about his final doom and descent into madness, his superficial values represent the core of consumerism as his entire existence is built upon how much he earns and how much he owns because his sense of value comes from material possessions Price suggests that Bateman's identity is not an internal, emotional one, but rather a constructed persona built on outward appearances and consumer goods.

Price also explored the alienating effect of capitalism, he blames Bateman's inability to form a genuine human connection on his capitalist society where money comes first and human interactions come last, this eventually leads to the protagonist's detachment and numbness fostering a lack of empathy towards others and introducing violent ideas. He argued that Bateman's violent acts are not random and are directly linked to his consumerist values, it is his way of claiming power and agency, his crimes turn into another form of purchasing, as material possessions do not fill his emptiness anymore, this perfectly capture the spirit of consumerism where nothing is ever enough.

Accordingly, Jefferson de Moura Saraiva also argues that consumerism is the reason behind Bateman's downfall, in his article "Painful Lust: Status and Consumerism in *American Psycho*", he analyzes the novel's depiction of the unrelenting quest for material wealth and prestige, which results in a cycle of both temporary satisfaction and deep discontent. According to Saraiva, this consumerist urge ultimately leads to existential emptiness by trapping people in a state of constant lust for goods and for approval from others. He contends that a larger social trend in which the pursuit of material success results in moral decay and personal disillusionment is reflected in the characters' fixation with luxury and status symbols.

## **2.2 Perspectives on Bret Ellis's critique of masculinity and consumerism in American Psycho**

Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* has been widely analyzed through different lenses and approaches by different scholars offering critical perspectives on how themes of masculinity, consumerism, and violence interconnect within the novel while providing insights on how the author satirically denounces the 1980s status anxiety.

Under the conviction that consumerism is the foundation of Bateman's identity, Price (2006) and Spector (2007) contend that Bateman's violent tendencies are closely related to his possession obsession. Material wealth, high-end merchandise, and status symbols are the foundation of Bateman's identity. They interpret his excessive violence as a continuation of the capitalist system, which views people as consumable commodities and eventually results in alienation and disconnection from fundamental human emotions and beliefs.

They suggest that Bret Ellis satirically critiques the 1980s financial communities by portraying his protagonist as self-absorbed rich male who has a taste for the finer things in life plus the bonus of occasionally killing women as a hobby "I like to dissect girls. Did you know I'm utterly insane?" (Ellis, 1991)

Additionally, St. Louis (2007) investigates the relationship between Bateman's hyper-masculinity performance and his psychopathy. Bateman is the standard 1980s man: aggressive, aloof, and competitive. In a culture where dominance and material wealth are used to define success, violence becomes a manifestation of power, status, and control. Bateman's attempts to express his masculinity must be done through dominance and emotional detachment and is linked to his acts of violence. In the end, Bateman resorts to violence as a way to establish his superiority because of this ideal of masculinity that is influenced by consumer culture and societal expectations.

St Louis also uncovered how the novel is not just a character analysis of a psychopath but a general and broader scrutiny of capitalist society, *American Psycho* unveils how materialism and consumerism lead to moral decay and the eventual collapse of an individual's mental health- in the novel context, especially the male category.

Bateman's lack of emotions and deprivation from meaningful relationships reflects the consequences of a society that prioritizes money over genuine humanity and self-interest over real authentic relationships.

While several feminist scholars (e.g., Halberstam, 2005; Johnson, 2008) have examined *American Psycho* through the lens of misogyny and toxic masculinity, there is limited research on how Bateman is a victim of the societal pressure placed upon men to be a certain image, to perform a certain task and to fulfill their macho role, previous studies have treated Bateman's actions as a clear sign of sexism and misogyny which they are yet no one put the effort to understand the reason why he behaves this way and why, unlike the psychopaths he is lumped within one category, he seems to be aware of the dangers of his actions and the emptiness which looms over his existence.

This research will address this gap by offering a psychological analysis to break Bateman's character and decipher his behavior through the use of multiple theories which argues that Bateman is the product of severe mental and societal pressure on him to act a certain way or be a certain someone, controlled by society, his only way to reclaim his agency was his violent crimes and erratic behavior.

Overall Bret Easton's work sparked heated debates amongst the intellectual community for more reasons than one, through its raw depiction of violence and uncensored scenes it has earned a remarkable status in the literature world either negatively or positively, although his novel is highly controversial and criticized, it caught the interest of many scholars who are especially interested in the consequences of contemporary capitalist society, the patriarchal system influence on men and the thickest of questions- what drives men insane?

# Chapter Two

## Chapter Two: Thematic Exploration of hyper-masculinity as a socially constructed ideal

### 2.1 Introduction

The American society has undergone numerous historical episodes, with each era being a defining period in its history, some eras when the community thrived and excelled in multiple fields while others were problematic and scarring to the American collective, starting from the 1910s; a time when The U.S. became involved in World War I and afterward experienced massive societal change; increased immigration, the women's suffrage movement (which culminated in the 19th Amendment in 1920), and the beginnings of the "Jazz Age." Then moving into the roaring twenties with an open chest; a period when America witnessed its first stock market boom, resulting in a time of extravagance, flappers, jazz music, and the rise of mass media (radio, cinema). The decade was characterized by a thriving economy and a break from traditional values. Then by 1929, the great depression hit America due to the crash of the stock market, which led people to focus on survival and recovery. Also, the emergence of Mass entertainment (like movies and radio) helped distract people from the economic struggle. Perhaps the most controversial era was 1940 which witnessed America's entry into WWII after the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941. And atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. This was a period of wartime rationing, the emergence of new technologies (such as the jet engine), and the shift to suburban life after the war. Afterwards, with the start of the 1950s, the US witnessed major suburban growth, television rose as the dominant medium, and rock 'n' roll music emerged. The 1950s are often seen as a decade of conformity, with a focus on family values and consumerism unlike the 1960s when the sexual revolution took over, not only that but civil rights movement emerged under the leadership of Martin Luther King, the 1970s saw a backlash against the idealism of the 1960s, with the rise of conservative movements. It was also a time of experimentation in music, film (e.g., the rise of blockbusters like *Jaws* and *Star Wars*), and social movements, including feminism and LGBTQ+ rights.

However, the main focus here is the **1980s**, a transformative decade in America, a time of economic prosperity and significant social and political change. Under the leadership of President **Ronald Reagan**, the U.S. embraced a wave of conservatism, which was reflected in both the economy and foreign policy. These policies aimed to stimulate economic growth, reduce government intervention, and strengthen national defense.

Particular sectors like real estate, finance, and technology saw massive growth. The stock market surged, and consumerism reached new heights. It was a time when material wealth became a marker of success. People's identities were defined by what they bought such as luxurious homes, designer clothes, and expensive cars. This era is often associated with an unquenchable thirst for status, which resulted in the rise of the **Yuppie** (Young Urban Professional). The Yuppie became a symbol of ambition, wealth, and consumerism, embodying the decade's materialistic values. The phrase “**Greed is good**”, popularized by the 1987 film *Wall Street*, epitomized the era's view of success, where personal wealth and corporate power were seen as ultimate goals.

Cultural-wise, the 1980s were a time of bold self-expression, especially in music and fashion. The explosion of MTV and music videos helped define the era's pop culture. Fashion was equally bold, with neon colors, oversized clothing, and big hair becoming staples of the time. Iconic designers like Gianni Versace and Vivienne Westwood influenced fashion trends, while brands like Nike and Reebok became symbols of athletic and street-wear culture.

Global tensions were emphasized during the 1980s, America maintained its anti-communist sentiment during the ongoing Cold War and the decade witnessed an escalation of the arms race, though it ultimately ended on a more optimistic note with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the beginning of the end for the cold war. Domestically, the country suffered from social issues. Mainly the AIDS crisis which was a devastating epidemic that caused widespread fear and stigma.

Technology was also instrumental in shaping the life of the 1980s, companies like Apple and IBM introduced the personal computer which became more accessible to the public, not to mention the rise of home entertainment systems, including VCRs and cable television, these offered people easier immediate access to media, further encouraging the decade's obsession with consumer technology.

In culmination, the 1980s were a decade of contrasts. It was a time of excessive materialism, technological innovation, and cultural flamboyance, but also one marked by conservative politics, economic disparity, and the looming global threat of nuclear war. The legacy of the 1980s can still be felt today in America's consumerism and the ongoing influence of its culture on people.

## **2.2 America's Yuppie culture**

According to Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) The term yuppie was coined in the early 1980s, it is an acronym for Young Urban a yuppie is a young, educated person who usually owns a business and leads an expensive lifestyle in a city, their choice of life includes spending a lot of money and flaunting status, while this definition covers the general aspects of a yuppie such as education, age, and lifestyle, it overlooks the values and manners of this particular category of people, Harvey 1998 noted that yuppies embody the values of careerism, materialism, and market-driven success that complemented Reagan-era politics. The emphasis on consumerism and individual success was perceived as a rejection of the countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s. He argued that Yuppie culture was symptomatic of the economic and ideological shifts toward neoliberalism and the rise of a new middle class that was economically focused, materially motivated, and politically conservative. Similarly, Wuthnow(1988) linked this shift to a broader cultural transformation in which traditional religious and social values were displaced by a more individualistic, success-driven ethos. He emphasized that yuppie culture is a segment of a broader reorientation of American society that focuses on individualism, career, and consumerism.

The rise of yuppie culture resulted from different historical and political events that took place in the United States and gave birth to and encouraged the movement of consumerism. Ronald Reagan, who served as the 40<sup>th</sup> president of the United States from 1981 to 1989, was a major factor in shaping the economic and cultural milieu of the 1980s. His policies, also referred to as Raeganomics formed the environment in which yuppie culture was created.

Raeganomics created a free market economy, these policies believed in minimal government intervention and accumulation, Reagan implemented major tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans and businesses, this was based on the idea that tax that reducing tax on the well-to-do people would lead to more job opportunities, more investments, and economic growth, this created plutocracy which highly benefited the yuppies who were high earners and worked in the corporate world. Reagan also introduced deregulation in many fields, he significantly reduced regulation in major industries such as banking, telecommunication, and energy, and this allowed for greater risk-taking financial markets and enlarged the financial sector during the 1980s, creating a growth which further enhanced the status of those involved in stock trading and corporate finances. Another factor which helped create the environment of the yuppies was Reagan's firm stance against labor unions, he actively sought to weaken their

power and influence, which participated in the creation of an individualistic and competitive economic environment while also giving rise to corporate and industries.

In addition, President Reagan's influence on young professionals, the 1980s witnessed a huge growth in financial activity and stock trading, which provided lucrative opportunities for young professionals and defined the yuppie culture; the expansion did not occur overnight, instead, it was the result of continuous external process. During the 1980s the United States stock market witnessed its longest Bull market until that point; this led to increasing wealth for those who invested in stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. Alongside the rise of the stock market, technological advancements especially personal computers made it easier for individuals to engage in the market, with the increased accessibility, more people, particularly yuppies in their 20s and 30s became involved in stock trading, becoming known as "day traders " as popular television personalities such as Jim Cramer encouraged stock trading in real-time, and firms like Merrill Lynch and Salomon Brothers became a symbol of the financial industry in the united states, stock trading became a high stakes high reward career which aligned perfectly with the ambitions and lifestyle that yuppies strived for, consequently, Traditional manufacturing jobs started to disappear in favor of careers in finance as the economy grew more financialized in the 1980s. The stock market came to represent achievement and the path to wealth as they believed that the financial services industry was the most lucrative and prestigious.

It is necessary to note the creation of the economic environment in which yuppie culture emerged is the result of other political and historical events took place in the United States; the Vietnam War had divided American society in the 1960s and early 1970s, Generation X (the post-VietnamWar generation) grew up with a sense of disenchantment, as they witnessed the previous generation efforts to create social change all fail and make little to no change at all, and considered activism as a useless self-sacrifice. As a result, many people started focusing on immediate personal success in contrast to the counterculture movements of the 1960s and early 1970s.

Activism and social movement were not the only ones that had lost people's interest, the government had also suffered the loss of its faith after the infamous Watergate scandal in which President Nixon and members of his administration were involved in a cover-up of a break-in at the democratic national committee headquarters, this caused a crisis of trust in the government and political institutions, resulting in the disillusionment of Americans

concerning activism, social justice, and political engagement, this led to the emergence of a new type of mindset based on a more cynical and self-interested approach.

The yuppie culture had become such a trend and huge social phenomenon that it moved from real life to art, it was represented in movies, theatres, and literature; where it was depicted in a negative light as authors and artists heavily criticized the selfish money-hungry extravagant lifestyle of young professionals and sought to change this mindset and warn their audience against its consequences.

Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987) is perhaps the most iconic literary work about the yuppie culture. Set in New York City, the novel tells the story of Sherman McCoy, a successful bond trader who epitomizes the yuppie ethos. McCoy's life is filled with wealth, status, and the constant pursuit of more, but when he gets involved in a hit-and-run incident, his life unravels.

The novel exposes the moral corruption behind Wall Street and the elites while demonstrating how they manipulate their way into power by disregarding repercussions and regulations, Wolfe portrays the world of yuppies as being full of deceit, manipulation, moral decay, and self-destruction, by using his protagonist McCoy's downfall, the author highlights the doom underlying yuppies' senseless pursuit of more. Another novel that deals with yuppie culture is Bret Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero* which offers a darker view of the 1980s generation, particularly the elite, privileged youth of Los Angeles. The novel follows a group of affluent college students who indulge in a hedonistic lifestyle filled with drugs, sex, and apathy. The protagonist, Clay, returns home from college to find his friends living in a world of excess and emotional detachment.

The novel critiques the emptiness of excess and consumerism, portraying the characters as wealthy and privileged people who have it all yet are emotionally numb and detached. Ellis presents a generation of young people who are more focused on status and instant gratification than forming authentic emotional connections or showing interest in the world around them. This nihilistic portrayal critiques the very values that defined yuppie culture—materialism, selfishness, and hollow pursuit of pleasure.

Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984) is another key novel that depicts the rise of yuppie culture, particularly in its representation of New York City. The novel follows an unnamed protagonist (referred to as "You"), a young man working in the editorial department of a prestigious magazine. The story highlights his struggle with the pressures of success, social status, and the superficiality of the city's elite circle.

The protagonist's descent into self-destruction through drugs, alcohol, and a sense of alienation from his own life, is a commentary on the disillusionment and moral decay at the heart of yuppie culture. While the novel focuses on the ridiculous lifestyle of the 1980s elites, it also highlights the emptiness that comes with the pursuit of material success and personal ambition. McInerney's work perfectly depicts the emotional alienation that follows life in a hyper-competitive, status-driven world.

### **2.3 Conspicuous consumption**

Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929) was an American economist and sociologist, best known for his critical analysis of capitalism and his theory of *conspicuous consumption*. He was a member of the so-called *Institutionalist school* of economics, which focused more on social and institutional factors in understanding economic behaviour; he coined the term Conspicuous consumption in his famous book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) where he discussed the behaviour of the wealthy and criticized their ostentatious display of money.

Conspicuous consumption refers to the act of excess purchasing of goods and services not because of their utility but for the sole purpose of showcasing riches and power, it is a public expression of one's social status and it is a favourite activity of individuals who are part of the leisure class, which also refers to a social class which is characterized by its ability to live off the income from wealth or property rather through active work. "The leisure class... is a class that has ceased to be occupied in industrial work and that has taken to devoting its time to conspicuous leisure." (Chapter 1, "The Pecuniary Canons of Taste"). This concept originally emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States and Europe, but its relevance can be seen in the rise of **yuppie culture** in the 1980s, which also highlighted wealth and status.

Individuals who belong to the leisure class do not engage in productive labour, instead, they rely on the wealth gathered by their family or the money accumulated through investments,

their effort is dedicated to activities that showcase their wealth and status, and even if one of these individuals decided to work, they would be placed in a job of higher income than other class and with more benefits and fewer work hours "...and the feature of most striking economic significance in these class differences is the distinction maintained between the employments proper to the several classes. The upper classes are by custom exempt or excluded from industrial occupations, and are reserved for certain employments to which a degree of honour attaches."(Veblen p.2 1899).

Veblen also mentions that members of the leisure class are considered to be models for the rest of society, an ideal standard to be met by those of lower status, they influence arts, fashion, and lifestyle, and they present themselves as perfect beings who have it all, hence gaining the admiration of the rest of society who becomes infatuated with their lifestyle and begins to actively seek it but to no avail, since in this society the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, the leisure class sells empty dreams to those who can never achieve them all the while benefiting from lower classes efforts to imitate their lifestyle which they can never afford.

In chapter 2 of *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, titled Pecuniary Emulation, Veblen argues that the driving force of elites and the capitalist society is pecuniary emulation — which refers to the act of a member of a lower class to meet the consumption standards of a higher class to signal that he belongs to that class (Ishida & Suen, 2023), the author emphasized that this concept is the engine of society because as mentioned earlier the leisure class benefits from these efforts as it further boosts their wealth and keep them high up the social ladder. “[a]mong the motives which lead men to accumulate wealth, the primacy, both in scope and intensity, therefore, continues to belong to this motive of pecuniary emulation” (Veblen, 1899, p. 40)

Veblen emphasizes that the desire for status and emulation fosters social inequality. As individuals try to distinguish themselves from others by showing off their wealth, it creates a system where social distinctions are defined by what one can afford to consume. The upper classes are particularly invested in conspicuous consumption because they have the resources to engage in these displays, and by doing so, they reinforce their position at the top of the social hierarchy. The wealthy class serves as the benchmark for the rest of society in terms of what is desirable and worthy of emulation.

He highlights that social inequality is fostered by the desire for status and imitation. A system where social distinctions are determined by what one can afford to consume is created as people attempt to set themselves apart from others by flaunting their wealth. Due to their possession of the means to participate in these displays and thereby solidify their position at the top of the social hierarchy, through conspicuous consumption the upper class sets the standard for what is desirable and deserving of imitation for the rest of society.

Importantly, this competition is not just a matter of displaying wealth for its own sake, but also of showing that one's wealth is acquired through non-productive means, such as inheritance or investment. The leisure class prides itself on not needing to engage in manual labour, and this is, in itself, a marker of high status. Labour is viewed as something beneath the upper class, and by avoiding it, they demonstrate their superiority.

During the 1980s, Young urban professionals had solidified themselves as part of the leisure class, and conspicuous consumption became a defining characteristic of yuppie culture, it was all about what people consumed and how they displayed it to others, owning a luxury car (e.g., a BMW, Mercedes, or Porsche) and wearing high-end fashion brands (e.g., Armani, Calvin Klein) were symbols of wealth for yuppies, these items were material display of their wealth. Another major symbol of social status during the 80s was real estate, yuppies often invested in high-rise apartments in affluent urban locations; they took into consideration the size, location, and style of these properties to further emphasize the extravagant lifestyle they led additionally, the leisure class placed much importance on fine dining and exclusive clubs, they frequented upscale restaurants and hosted exclusive parties as being part of private clubs gave them a sense of importance and exclusivity, all of these activities were a direct shallow expression of wealth in the face of lower classes, fostering an us versus them mentality and the "*you can't sit with us* " culture.

However, in the aftermath of the 1987 stock market crash and economic downturn, the critique of conspicuous consumption grew stronger. The material excesses of the 1980s were increasingly seen as unsustainable, and the yuppie ethos began to lose its appeal. The rise of **Generation X** in the early 1990s reflected a shift away from the pursuit of wealth and status toward a more **cynical, anti-materialistic** attitude.

Yet, the concept of conspicuous consumption continues to shape modern culture. The rise of social media has created modern and easier ways for people to display their wealth and status with a single picture, often through curated lifestyles and "luxury branding" that is visible to a global audience. The ideas of social standing and status display remain a central part of contemporary consumer culture, whether through luxury goods, exclusive experiences, or digital displays of success.

## **2.4 Males in a hyper-competitive environment**

At first glance the word competition seems simple, positive and self-explanatory- the activity of wanting to gain or win something by conquering or establishing superiority over others, everywhere, there are School competitions, Sports competitions, and Beauty pageants. Sales and quotas...Employee of the Month race, you name it, it seems that humans tend to compete in every situation and every field, struggling to prove themselves over others and racing to take home the 'number one' medal and place it on their display shelf so they can stare at their wobbly reflection on it every time they feel inadequate so that they can be reminded of their times of glory. But what happens when the heavyweight underlying competition begins to take over and burden whoever approaches it, what happens when "friendly" competition not so "friendly" anymore

It is crucial to mention that competition seems to affect men more than women, especially career-wise; where men feel the need to climb the corporal ladder to prove themselves to society, many psychologists have devoted their time to studying male identity crisis when placed in a hyper-competitive environment, Raewyn Connell; an Austrian sociologist known for her work on social theory and gender studies, more specifically on masculinities, have discussed this topic in depth in her book *Masculinities* (1955).

In her book, Connell explains that masculinity is socially constructed through various cultural, social, and institutional mechanisms, she introduces the concept of hegemonic masculinity- "Hegemonic masculinity is the configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is thought to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." (Connell, 1955, p. 105). This concept refers to the dominant deal of masculinity in society, characterized by control, emotional stoicism, and competitiveness. She argues that

these traits are highly rewarded in competitive environment such as workplace sports and military setting where success, power, and achievement are preeminent.

Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity is not centred on individual identity but is also concerned with power and dominance in social structures, it is the one responsible for setting the standards of what is "appropriate male behaviour" such as aggression, dominance, competitiveness, emotional stoicism, and controlling. Men who meet these standards are celebrated and perceived as powerful leaders. She further explains that in competitive environments, such as corporate settings, hegemonic masculinity demands that men exhibit these characteristics, often at the cost of their emotional well-being.

Connell mentions that masculinity is not a monolithic concept, instead, she suggests multiple other forms of masculinities and further explains that these masculinities are in constant competition with each other, while hegemonic masculinity is the dominant one, other forms also exist such as subordinate masculinity which is often seen in men who do not conform to the hegemonic ideal and marginalized masculinity which refers to those who are socially excluded and oppressed. Connell illustrates that in competitive spaces such as the workplace, these various forms of masculinities are involved in competition for dominance, status, and recognition.

The author explains that while competition encouraged by hegemonic masculinity is celebrated by society, it has dire consequences on male mental health, she discusses the emotional toll that it can have on men, particularly in hyper-competitive environments, where males are conditioned to suppress their emotional vulnerability which later on can lead to anxiety, depression and substance abuse, especially when they fail to live up to these societal standards or meet the expectations placed upon them, the extreme pressure to conform to competitive ideals in all fields results in destructive behaviour such as aggression and emotional withdrawal, it is crucial to note that while these traits are considered to be "masculine" they are highly damaging, as they often lead to males experience of conflict between their identity and the societal expectations that demand they perform a certain way while overlooking their mental health and personal relationships.

Connell does not overlook the role of socialization in creating these harmful standards, she demonstrates how boys, from an early age, are socialized into competitive roles that emphasized dominance, power, and winning, these traits are imposed through family

structures, schools, and media, she also highlights how socialization places pressure onto men to prove themselves, this said pressure leads to stress, burnout, and unhealthy coping mechanisms.

“In Guyland, the game is always on: the competition never ends. The pressure to prove oneself is a constant and the need to dominate to be a man is inescapable.” A quote by Michael S. Kimmel in his book, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (2008); a book which examines how men develop their identities in a society that strongly promotes traditional masculine ideals. Based on in-depth interviews with young men, Kimmel explores how they deal with social pressures, especially in light of peer pressure, media representations of masculinity, and fiercely competitive environments.

According to Kimmel's research, young men and boys are indoctrinated to internalize competitive norms early on. The idea that masculinity is about dominating, winning, and displaying no vulnerability is promoted by media representations and peer pressure. In high-stakes settings like college life, where men are urged to exhibit "toughness" in the face of competition, this socialization peaks in the late teens and early twenties. He suggests that boys learn from an early age that competition- whether academic, athletic, or even social, is the key to proving one's own masculinity and being perceived as a "real man", boys being taught that excelling and outperforming others is a necessary task to be accomplished is the reason behind their adulthood anxiety of performance and depression.

Kimmel's book focuses on the culture of hyper-competitiveness found mainly in college, where young men are expected to prove themselves in many ways, especially academically or being the best athlete, alongside proving social status through sexual conquests and dominance in social groups by being the "leader" of their friend group, he mentions how college fraternities reinforce this concept through their strict codes of masculinity which demands from members to exhibit courage, strength, and emotional detachment. “The hyper-competitive nature of Guyland forces young men into a position where they must always strive to be the ‘top dog,’ measuring their success by their ability to beat others, whether in sports, academics, or social conquests.” (Kimmel, 2008). According to him these competitive settings foster a poisonous cycle in which men feel pressured to continuously "one-up" one another, even at the price of their genuine self-expression and emotional health.

He also outlines different aspects that are key elements in male competition; he insists that emotional detachment is a necessary criterion; expressing emotion –except for anger- is considered to be a sign of weakness, men should possess a high level of stoicism so they can remain dominant, unemotional and above any form of vulnerability, this detachment must be enacted to remain at the top of social hierarchy. The issue with this detachment is that it hinders the process of creating meaningful emotional connections; it does not allow men to seek help when they need it resulting in their feelings of loneliness and depression because there is no support system to offer them relief.

Another key element besides emotional detachment is sexual conquest, young men are taught that sexual success is a direct proof of their masculinity and it is often equated with dominance and power, this leads to an obvious competition between men to win women over; dehumanizing them in the process as they begin to view women as trophies to be collected rather than equal partners. This view perpetuates unhealthy ideas about relationships, consent, and intimacy, the competitiveness for sexual success leads to objectification and emotional damage to both men, and women involved in these dynamics.

Kimmel also talks about the long-term effects of these hyper-masculine, competitive ideals. Following these conventions may give young men fleeting feelings of success and power, but there may be serious emotional and psychological consequences. After graduating or leaving these intensely competitive settings, many men experience feelings of inadequacy, depression, and loneliness because they can't sustain the same degree of success and dominance in the "real world."

To deal with the consequences of extreme masculine competitive environment, Glen A. B. Schiraldi, a renowned psychologist, and author outlined different strategies and coping mechanisms which help maintain a healthy mindset when functioning in a hyper-competitive setting , in his book *The Self-Esteem Workbook* (2008); Schiraldi explains that this type of environment can create unhealthy comparisons, stress and negative self-perception which all can be avoided if dealt with in a steady healthy manner.

He encourages men to view competition not as a way to prove their worth by outshining others but as an opportunity for personal growth, he advocates development and learning instead of focusing solely on winning, this shift in how a person views competition allows people to engage in it without the pressure of having to "beat" others.

He also emphasizes the significance of self-compassion, Schiraldi makes it clear that one should treat himself with kindness and patience rather than being critical; this can be achieved through acknowledging mistakes and errors and working on fixing them, all the while avoiding negative self-talk, he suggests replacing this with positive affirmations and constructive self-talk. Instead of saying "I'm not good enough," individuals can reframe thoughts to "I did my best, and I'll learn from this experience."

To keep a steady and balanced attitude in competitive settings, men should avoid unhealthy comparisons that lead to feelings of inferiority and anxiety, to challenge these negative comparisons they should focus on their own unique strengths and achievements rather than measuring success against others performance, alongside setting personal instead of external goals, outlining intrinsic goals which align with one's own values and growth provide a healthier foundation for self-esteem.

Schiraldi concentrates mainly on recognizing effort rather than focusing on outcomes and that one's own value should not be tied to the results, he encourages individuals to celebrate their effort regardless of the outcomes. It is a crucial step to detach from the result and understand that they do not define your identity or self-worth and that even when faced with a sense of loss, one should consider it a valuable insight that can be applied to future personal development, this help people remain resilient and continue to improve without losing confidence.

## **2.5 Male peer pressure through the satirical lens of American psycho**

'New card' I try to act casual about it but I'm smiling proudly 'What do you think?'

'Whoa', McDermott says, lifting it up, fingering the card genuinely, impressed 'Very nice. Take a look' he hands it to Van Patten.

'Picked them up from the printers yesterday' I mention.

'Cool coloring' Van Patten says, studying the card closely.

'That's bone,' I point out 'and the lettering is something called Silian Rail.'

'SilianRail?' McDermott asks.

‘Yeah. Not bad, huh?’

‘It is very cool, Bateman,’ Van Patten says guardedly, the jealous bastard, ‘but that’s nothin...’ he pulls out his wallet and slaps a card next to an ashtray. ‘Look at this.’

We all lean over and inspect David’s card and Price quietly says ‘That’s*really* nice’. A brief spasm of jealousy courses through me when I notice the elegance of the color and the classy type. I clench my fist as Van Patten says, smugly ‘eggshell with Romanian type...’ he turns to me. ‘what do you think’

‘Nice’ I croak but manage to nod, as the busboy brings four fresh Bellinis.

‘Jesus’ Price says, holding the card up to the light, ignoring the new drinks this. ‘This is really super, how a nitwit like you get so tasteful?’

I’m looking at Van Patten’s card and then at mine and cannot believe that Price actually like Van Patten’s better. Dizzy, I sip my drink then take a deep breath.

‘But wait’ Price says. ‘You ain’t seen nothing yet.....’ he pulls his out of an inside coat pocket and slowly dramatically turns it over for our inspection and says, ‘Mine’

Even I have to admit it’s magnificent.

Suddenly the restaurant seems far away, hushed, the noise distant, a meaningless hum, compared to this card, and we all hear Price’s words ‘raised lettering pale nimbus white....’

‘Holy shit,’ Van Patten exclaims. ‘I’ve never seen....’

‘Nice, very nice,’ I have to admit ‘but wait let’s see Montgomery’s’

Price pulls it out and though he’s acting nonchalant, I don’t see how he can ignore its subtle off-white coloring, psycho and its tasteful thickness, I am unexpectedly depressed that I started this. (Ellis, 1991, pp. 47-48)

This dialogue from *American Psycho* is a genuine conversation between the characters of the book, to an outsider it seems ridiculous and even hilarious that this group of men is subtly competing for the best business card, while really, all of their cards are similar and the average individual would not even notice the difference between them, the protagonist

Bateman is on the verge of tears because he feels as though they have outshined him, this is one of the consequences of actively functioning in a hyper-competitive environment where you lose complete insight, vision blurred by the intense need to be the best that a simple business card can drive you crazy.

According to Ellis, Bateman and the other characters in *American Psycho* serve as a reflection of the demands made on men, especially in settings that are highly competitive and elite. Peer pressure shapes these characters to represent an idealized masculinity, which is associated with violence, dominance, and power, all of which are made worse by their social environment.

He discussed how his characters are caught in a vicious cycle of male competition; he explained that Bateman's aggressive behaviour and obsession with violence and appearances are all an expression of his anxiety and insecurity about his place in the world and how to fit in with people around him. He is the epitome of succumbing to peer pressure for the sole purpose of fitting in; everything he does is for the sake of presenting himself in an image that his society agrees upon.

In the novel, all male characters are depicted as trapped in an endless game of one-upmanship, where they feel compelled to perform their masculinity in increasingly extreme ways, including violence and cruelty as they are deeply influenced by their surroundings. Ellis sees this dynamic as a reflection of the broader pressures on men to conform to a particular, hyper-masculine ideal.

Ellis has admitted that the novel is meant to be an exaggeration of the 1980s community, the character's obsession with absurdities is a satire of young professionals' insane perfectionist mindset, and he purposefully intensified Bateman's behaviour to depict the disconnection and emptiness at the heart of such a lifestyle.

'The novel is about how people are trying to create an identity for themselves through consumption. But all they're doing is copying others. There's this ridiculous pressure on men, especially in these circles, to live up to an ideal, to prove they are 'better' than others through violence, through what they buy, through who they know.' (Ellis, 2013). Through his words, Ellis explains that the main goal of his novel is to satirize the extreme pressure of male identity and how ironic it is that when men, in their journey to excel and distinguish

themselves they all wind up being exact carbon copies of each other, so much so that in the novel the characters are always mistaking each other for other people.

Another major element that is satirized in the novel is appearances and obsession over people's perception which is depicted through Bateman's manic morning routine; from applying excessive amount of products, extreme exercise, and obsessing over his wardrobe, and brand names, alongside the constant comparison between characters whether it's about who has the best restaurant reservation, most expensive designer suit or something as simple as who has the best gym membership, all of these absurdities highlights the intense and ridiculous pressure created within masculine environments which ultimately results in self-loathing, hollowness, and emotional emptiness.

The friendships in *American Psycho* are depicted as vacuous, where men engage in constant competition and performative gestures to assert dominance. Bateman's friends—like Paul Owen, Tim Price, and others, are equally preoccupied with appearances and brand names that they fail to form real emotional connection; their relationships are rooted in competition, status, and the need to outdo each other, this failure to form genuine relationships is not just concerned with men only, they do not have an ounce of authentic emotions towards the women they are partnered up with, instead, they perceive them as objects and a lesser being.

In essence, *American Psycho* satirizes male peer pressure by exaggerating how societal and peer expectations around wealth, appearance, and power can dehumanize men, strip them away from emotional intellect, and ultimately alienate them from society and themselves. It highlights the shallowness of male identity defined by external validation and materialistic possession, which can breed violence, competition, and emotional isolation.

# Chapter Three

## Chapter three: A Psychological Dissection of *American Psycho*

### 3.1 Introduction

Human nature prompts each and every person to search for meaning in everything, the urge to explain their behavior is so intense that they dedicated a whole field study solely for the purpose of unveiling their own truth, psychology is not merely concerned with studying personalities, it is a complex study of human behavior throughout different time periods places and contexts in order to uncover patterns, analyze them and finally deduct an explanation and reasoning behind people's actions, this obsession of finding meaning behind actions is not only concerned with real life people, it has moved to the field of literature where intellectuals attempt to analyze fictional characters and relate them to real life personalities while also understanding their motivations, fears and internal conflicts, psychoanalysts explain why certain stories resonate with readers, how they trigger subconscious desires, anxieties or unresolved conflicts such as horror genres which trigger deep seated fears, additionally, the projection theory explains that different readers interpret the same text in starkly different ways, therefore the literature work becomes a space where personal experiences and anxieties are projected while also, be worked through. The reader and character are not the only focus of literature psychoanalysis, Freud himself examined writings as an expression of the author's subconscious, he argued that the author's repressed emotions, desires or early experiences resurface in recurring themes or character archetypes, this theory perceives the process of creating art as an act of sublimation – transforming inner turmoil into art- and it is also heavily interested in the underlying meanings of symbols and metaphors which can be considered implicit expression of the author's inner state.

*American psychoboy* Bret Easton Ellis is considered a fertile ground for psychoanalytic exploration, its dark themes investigate heavy subjects such as the insane, the consequences of repressed sexuality, schizophrenia and what humans are capable of when suffering from death of their moral compass, it reveals the mental drawbacks of inner conflict when a person is stuck in a dilemma –whether to follow his inner instincts or remain in control yet miserable, alongside the external conflict between a man and his society that would not accept him unless he blends in with the rest and follows his peers. All can happen in real life and are scenarios that most people have been through, the protagonist, Patrick Bateman embodies human's inner turmoil, representing an intense conflict of repressed impulses, through his

exaggerated persona he serves as a caricature for those who share his suffering while also functioning as a warning of the mental descent that can occur when left unchecked.

This chapter analyses Patrick Bateman double personality and the contrast between his inner self and the persona he presents to society through applying the mask of sanity, it will also delve into the protagonist's inner conflict between his id and ego; the mental dispute between his repressed violent desires and the need for a polished and refined public image, another subject for discussion in this chapter is how the dark triad – narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy- are manifested in Patrick Bateman and the instances when they are on full display, lastly, it will discuss the protagonist clear exhibition of schizophrenic hallucination by the end of the novel which undermines Bateman's credibility and discredit his recount of events.

### **3.2 Patrick Bateman's perfect mask of sanity**

..there is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: I simply am not there.(Ellis,1991, p .391)

This monologue of Patrick Bateman perfectly captures his detachment from reality and those around him, he dresses similar to everyone else, behaves the way they do, likes and dislikes the same things as them and leads a lifestyle mirrors theirs, he can entertain his surroundings with a nice conversation, share laughter and interests with them, shake their hand goodbye and promise to meet again, he would probably leave them with a nice impression of him; portraying himself as the boy next door whom you can trust and even befriend, who is rich, kind and cares about his people, who simply is perfect, yet, the protagonist himself admits that all of this is a make believe, an illusion created by him so he can fit in with the rest of society and function as a normal individual when he is actually the furthest from being normal, Patrick Bateman had placed himself behind the perfect mask of sanity.

As previously mentioned, *Mask of Sanity* is a book by Robert Hare which focuses on the study of psychopathy; published in 1953 the book introduced significant ideas and concepts which shaped how psychopathy is understood today, Hare emphasizes that psychopathy is not merely a set of criminal behaviors or violent tendencies but a personality disorder

characterized by specific interpersonal, affective, and behavioral traits, all of which seem to be perfectly depicted in Bateman and are put into action as his story unravels.

More often than not, the typical psychopath will seem particularly agreeable and make a distinctly positive impression when he is first encountered. Alert and friendly in his attitude, he is easy to talk with and seems to have many genuine interests. There is nothing at all odd or queer about him, and in every respect, he tends to embody the concept of a well-adjusted, happy person. Nor does he, on the other hand, seem to be artificially exerting himself like one who is covering up or who wants to sell you a bill of goods. He would seldom be confused with the professional backslapper or someone trying to ingratiate himself for a concealed purpose. Signs of affectation or excessive affability are not characteristic. He looks like the real thing

Here, Hare explains one of the main traits of the psychopath that is concealing one's self and hiding behind a mask which is designed perfectly according to society's standards, he argues that psychopaths are masters of disguise; to outsiders they present as people with good reasoning and a great sense of logic, that they may even be mistaken for having higher intellectual abilities (Psychometric tests also very frequently show them of superior intelligence). Their lack of awkwardness and social emotional impediments makes it easier for them to alter their image depending on the social group they are surrounded with.

In *American psych'*, the protagonist ability to appear innocent is deeply highlighted throughout the story; Patrick Bateman embodied the mask of sanity to such a large extent that the people around him considered him almost naive, he is often referred to as the boy next door by his fiancée Evelyn and a loser-dork by Paul Owen. This goes to show just how faultlessly he painted himself as a decent guy without any sign of his unhinged behavior. In the first chapter of the book titled "April fools", Bateman and his friend Timothy Price are taking a cab through New York City, Price is whining about how much he despises his job and enumerating the horrible events that have been covered in the paper that day, such as AIDS, Nazis, mafia violence, and traffic jams. For the majority of the ride, Bateman remains mute and lets his friend go on and on. He sees Luis Carruthers, another Wall Street colleague, staring out the window. He sees Carruthers wave at Price in the passing car, but he ignores him. Price has a pessimistic view of the world. As a wealthy man who considers himself above the crime, illness, and poverty that he associated with the poor, he expresses disdain for the horrible events in the world not because they hurt other people but rather because

they annoy him. He even ignores Carruthers, another rich Wall Street banker, as a sign of his contempt. For Bateman, Price's remarks are neither novel nor intriguing. This initial portrayal of Patrick, who is stoic in contrast to his friend's raging pessimism, makes him appear calm, collected, and possibly upbeat than Price. This external persona will eventually be exposed as one of Bateman's strategies for deceit and concealing his own identity.

Another occurrence where the readers witness Batemans mask on full display is when he is sitting at the dinner table at his fiancée's apartment, Evelyn had invited Bateman, Price, Courtney and two of her friends (Stash and Vanden) to dinner, Due to the stark differences between Stash and Vanden and Bateman and his Wall Street crew, Price (as well as Bateman) despises them and views them as less human. While they are conversing about war crimes, Bateman goes on a rant about world global issues,

Well, we have to end apartheid for one. And slow down the nuclear arms race, stop terrorism and world hunger. Ensure a strong national defence, prevent the spread of communism in Central America, work for a Middle East peace settlement, and prevent U.S. military involvement overseas. We have to ensure that America is a respected world power. Now that's not to belittle our domestic problems, which are equally important, if not more. Better and more affordable long-term care for the elderly, control and find a cure for the AIDS epidemic, clean up environmental damage from toxic waste and pollution...The table stares at me uncomfortably, even Stash, but I'm on a roll. (Ellis,1991, p.16)

In his critique of the US economy, he calls for a solution that will reduce inflation, interest rates, and the national deficit while simultaneously encouraging business and economic expansion. He goes on to talk about welfare, abortion, illegal immigration, and other topics. Unsure of what to do, Evelyn offers sorbet for dessert to everyone when he eventually finishes.

During his long rant, the reader sees a new side of Bateman; so far, he has been calm and collected while price was the one enraged and criticizing, but once he spoke up, Batemans views on the world had been expressed, his intelligence and speaking skills are displayed, his manner of critiquing is organized and well thought out unlike the tantrums thrown by Price, however, his speech does not seem to be improvised, it lacks genuineness and feels planned, which it is, Bateman speech doe not stem from real worry and care for global issues, it is

merely a display of dominance, he does not care about the improvement and betterment of the world, his only purpose is to be perceived as caring, intelligent and cultured.

Bateman continually assumes the persona of a prosperous, friendly, and polite businessman, concealing his actual identity by portraying himself as the ideal capitalist and consumer. His attention to detail, from his fitted suits to his complex skincare regimen, is but a glimpse of his effort to disguise his true self.

In the second chapter titled "Morning", while Patrick is out with his friends, they begin scanning the room, trying to find out who else is there. They quarrel over one man's identification, criticize the other patrons' attire, and finally identify Paul Owen, another banker, who is "managing the Fisher account." This makes all the males jealous. At Owen's expense, Preston begins to make anti-Semitic comments, but Bateman silences him, asserting that he is "the voice of reason" among the men. Bateman is still very careful to keep up his façade of respectability even when he is among his "closest" friends. However, as was the case at Evelyn's dinner, Bateman's rebuke is probably more an act of dominance and camouflage than of his own principles, and his "friends" demonstrate their own authority by making fun of him completely ignorant of his actual insanity.

Hare argues that the psychopath rarely exhibits anything that, given the essential details, could be mistaken for object love even by uneducated onlookers. His complete disregard for the material, social, emotional, physical suffering he causes to people he claims to love validates the assessment of his actual mindset established during psychiatric research, he claims that while psychopaths are capable of casual fondness, of having likes and dislikes which makes some people important to him, yet these emotive responses are always limited to a certain degree and also differ in terms of durability, it is true that shallow surface level emotions can be observed in the psychopath, but he is inherently incapable of object love, this fact does not eliminate his capability of faking love, psychopaths can occasionally be quite good at seeming as though they love women, as previously said, they are charming, good actors and very well spoken which makes it impossible for the laymen to actually notice their false behaviour.

The psychopath inability to object love is highlighted in Bateman's relationship with women, he is engaged to Evelyn yet he feels no romantic affection towards her, he even knows of her affair with his friend Price, yet remains silent, because he, in return, is having an affair with

her friend Courtney, the connection between Bateman and Evelyn is devoid of affection; in fact, it appears that they are somewhat hostile to one another. Bateman's fiancée does not excite him sexually as much as the other women he sees and the affairs he is having. He views women as objects to be enjoyed, to him, they are instruments to be exploited however he likes. These women must therefore be "designers" just like the goods that he and his friends purchase; they must be attractive and of a particular shape and form, he seems to especially prefer blondes.

As the novel progresses, Bateman inability to feel love for women is intensified as they turn from objects he gawks at to victims of his twisted mental deviations, to him, women are so dehumanized to the point where he physically tortures them without feeling an ounce of remorse or guilt, he goes into graphic details describing what he does to them so nonchalantly as if it is a normal occurrence in his daily life. After engaging in sexual activity with the women, he would torture and kill them even eat them at some point. The distinction between sex and violence becomes obscure as Bateman spirals farther into insanity, marking a clear progression from sex to violence. towards the book's end, Bateman appears to derive sexual gratification directly from killing while also practicing necrophilia, it is so intense and terrifying that the line between sex and murder is so blurred that they reach a point where the two activities become one and the same, indicating just how insane Bateman is:

Beneath his outwardly gracious manner toward women and his general suavity and social charms, the male psychopath (or part psychopath) nearly always shows an underlying predilection for obscenity, an astonishingly ambivalent attitude in which the amorous and excretory functions seem to be confused. He sometimes gives the impression that an impulse to smear his partner symbolically, and even to wallow in sordidness himself, is more fundamental than a directly erotic aim, itself hardly more to him than a sort of concomitant and slightly glorified back-scratching.(p.364)

Hare relates this behaviour not only to the psychopath's lack of object love but also to their tendency to feel bizarre sexual deviations.

In addition to the prior traits motioned above, Hare also explains that:

Despite his excellent rational powers, the psychopath continues to show the most execrable judgment about attaining what one might presume to be his ends. He throws away excellent opportunities to make money, to achieve a rapprochement with his wife, to

be dismissed from the hospital, or to gain other ends that he has sometimes spent considerable effort toward gaining." (p.345)

He emphasizes the psychopath's lack of judgment in crucial situations or while they are committing a crime, because they fail to understand the long-term consequences of their actions, this is not because they lack intelligence, but because their emotional and moral compass is severely impaired. They fail to grasp how deep the emotional damage of their actions can affect people, which can lead them to make impulsive, reckless, or harmful decisions without truly understanding or caring about the consequences for others or themselves.

Patrick's poor judgment is featured in the chapter titled "Killing child at the Zoo", just as the title suggests, the protagonist does murder a child at Central Park, as he is walking through the park he identifies a five-year-old child and his mother. The boy's mother tells him to dispose of a wrapper in a trash can next to Bateman. Bateman gives the child a cookie as he approaches, then grabs and stabs him in the throat. Bateman steps aside and observes the woman finding her child's lifeless body after initially believing he is simply playing on the ground. Bateman rushes back over and cover the boy's wound while pretending to be a doctor. They are surrounded by a crowd, and the mother is screaming. A police officer pulls Bateman aside while approaching the child; he tears off his clothes, and carries him onto the cement but he eventually dies. With his hands still coated in blood, Bateman exits the park and stops to buy a Dove bar, which he eats joyfully.

This entire incident proves Hare point that psychopaths indeed possess poor sense of judgment; Bateman's selection of a defenceless victim is ruthless and his indifference to being discovered is even more bizarre. He not only remains at the scene after killing the child, but he also jumps in to pretend to be rescuing him. This is a pretty brave move for a man who has just killed a little boy in broad daylight. Even though Bateman has become more audacious and careless in his killings, he remains unmoved by his behaviour and goes to buy an ice-cream; eating it with bloody hands. However, Bateman's manner of describing how this incident unfolds in this chapter carries a weight of unreliability.

Apropos of unreliability, Hare makes sure to note in his book that it is a crucial trait often observed in psychopaths, " Though the psychopath is likely to give an early impression of being a thoroughly reliable person, it will soon be found that on many occasions he shows no

sense of responsibility whatsoever." (p.340) .They fail to assume responsibility for any matter regardless of how urgent or important it is. While the theme of unreliable perception or unreliability in a psychopath's behaviour is not directly related to an unreliable narrator in Robert Hare book, the idea of a psychopath's distorted reality is still prevalent in Hare's discussion of psychopathy. Because it delves deeply into how psychopaths view the world differently, this parallels the concept of an unreliable narrator.

The readers cannot trust Bateman's account of this incident because of the insanity of situation he had just described, throughout the novel the protagonist's grip on reality continues to worsen as his mental health deteriorates, there is no absolute truth in his words, one cannot determine if the violent deeds and ruthless killings he regularly depicts are real or merely his fantasy. He even occasionally doubts the reality of his activities, which makes it challenging to tell what is true. Because if he cannot be trusted with the characters he is also not to be trusted once he offers his account of events to the readers.

Bateman's stories are inconsistent and full of contradictions, he may confess that he had killed someone yet they end up being shown alive in the next chapter, which makes him lose all credibility, he describes a murder in gory details yet the following paragraph he is focused on something trivial such as a designer brand, this inconsistency forces the reader to doubt Bateman's words and question the reality of his actions, is Patrick Bateman a murderer or is he a helpless mentally ill, or perhaps both?

Overall, the protagonist of *American Psycho* seems to check most if not all the points in Robert Hare's scale of the different traits he had noted in his patients throughout his long career, this makes room for a deeper analysis of Patrick's personality and a thorough assessment of his mental state relying on a professional's opinion, while some traits are diluted in the book, most of them are intensified for fictional purposes, it is crucial to note that Patrick Bateman remains a fictional character that is not a one hundred percent accurate depiction of the real psychopath.

### **3.3 The inner struggle between Bateman's Id and Ego**

As the aforesaid definition in the first chapter, Freud identifies the id, ego, and superego as the three components of the psyche. The id is the primal, unconscious aspect of the self that is motivated by the pleasure principle and seeks out instant satisfaction for primal urges and

impulses regardless of reality. The later-developing ego uses the reality principle to make logical decisions to postpone fulfillment by weighing the needs of the id against the limitations of the outside world. Between the impetuous id and the moral and social demands of the superego, which internalizes social rules, it serves as a mediator. According to Freud, human conduct and mental health are shaped by the tension between these forces, with the ego attempting to preserve harmony while balancing the opposing demands of the id and superego.

In his book *The Ego and the Id*, Freud mentions that the struggle between the id, ego, and superego explains a large portion of human behavior. He presents the idea of psychic energy, or the energy required to power mental functions. He argues that the conflict between these three components can obstruct this energy, which causes psychological stress or neurosis. This energy is continuously channeled to various portions of the psyche. According to Freud, mental illnesses develop when the ego fails to properly mediate between the id and superego or when unconscious material upsets the equilibrium.

The mental consequences of the ego's failure to control the impulses of the id are illustrated almost in every chapter of *American Psycho*, Bateman's daily life is but a continuous struggle between his id and ego, a simple activity such as having a normal conversation with his friends requires a rigorous amount of energy from him, because he is always meditating between what he wants to do and what he actually does when he is around people of his same social standing, this is mainly presented in his internal monologues, as Patrick is having conversations with others his words and actions are refined, calculated and well spoken, in contrast to his internal monologues where he is expressing all the vile things he rather be doing.

Through the novel, the readers are always present inside Bateman's mind, therefore the readers are always witnessing Patrick's id in full action, with all its nonsensical desires and needs, for instance, when his fiancée Evelyn is terrified because her neighbor was murdered, he pretends to comfort her while that is the furthest thing from the truth.

"Well," I say, "you couldn't have come over anyway."

"Honey, why not?" she whines, and then addresses someone who just entered her suite. "Oh, wheel it over there near the window ... no, that window ... and can you tell me where that damn masseuse is?"

"Because your neighbor's head was in my freezer." I yawn, stretching. "Listen. Dinner? Where? Can you hear me?"(Ellis,1991, p.125)

The reality is that Patrick was the one who murdered her neighbor, he almost lets it slip that he is the one who committed the horrific crime, of course Evelyn is unaware of this because in front of her Bateman's ego polishes his image and keeps him under control, yet in this passage, he seems to gain some sort of a thrill out of confessing to committing such crime so randomly.

Visitors to the Caribbean don't need a passport—just proof of U.S. citizenship—and even better, Taylor, is that language is no barrier. English is spoken everywhere, even on those islands where the local language is French or Spanish. Most of the islands are former British ...My life is a living hell," I mention off the cuff, while casually moving leeks around on my plate, which by the way is a porcelain triangle. "And there are many more people I, uh, want to ... want to, well, I guess murder ..." I say this emphasizing the last word, staring straight into Armstrong's face. (Ellis,1991,p.146)

In this passage, Patrick is the midst of having a normal conversation with his friends; he ends up blurting it out what he actually felt in that moment, he confesses how miserable he feels and how trapped he is in his life that he consider " hell', he also mentions so casually that he has the unstoppable urge to murder many people, Patrick seems to be facing a crucial existential crisis due to the intense conflict between his id and ego, through his words the reader can clearly realize that his id is starting to get frustrated and is becoming more violent and out of control as the novel unravels, The hesitation ("uh," "want to ... want to") signals the influence of the *ego*, which is attempting to censor these violent thoughts, but cannot fully suppress the rawness of the id,the ego's mission appears to be failing as the id's desires seem to slip into casual conversations although Patrick's friends are often too busy focusing on their shallow subjects to focus on his random outbursts or they brush it off as a personality quirk or a joke. However, the part where Bateman mentions that he stares straight into Armstrong's face illustrates his intense unconscious desire to reveal who he truly is albeit consequences.

The act of staring into Armstrong's face while saying the word "murder" emphasizes a confrontation between the *id* (the urge to kill) and the outside world (represented by Armstrong). The emphasis on the last word suggests a sense of satisfaction or release, as though Patrick is fully embracing the desire that the *egotypically* tries to suppress.

While on a date with Evelyn, Patrick seems to yet again escape the conversation through daydreaming, it is worth noting that the protagonist spends more time in his head than actual reality, during their casual conversation about their mutual friend Tim, Bateman id seems to be enjoying a twisted sexual fantasy involving Evelyn, it starts with imagining the situation and quickly changing into a violent graphic fantasy.

Probably not, the odds don't look good. But what if I forced her at gunpoint? Threatened to cut them both up, maybe, if they didn't comply? The thought doesn't seem unappealing, and I can imagine the whole scenario quite clearly. I start counting the banquettes that encircle the room, then I start counting the people sitting in the banquettes.

She's asking me about Tim. "Where do you think that rascal has been? Rumor is he's at Sachs," she says ominously.

Rumor is," I say, "he's in rehab. This champagne isn't cold enough.

(Ellis, 1991, p.126)

This part of Bateman's fantasy is a direct expression of the *id*. The desire for power and control, alongside sadistic impulses, is all-consuming. His mind immediately shifts from a mundane social interaction to imagining a violent and graphic scenario where he dominates and brutalizes others. Bateman's fantasy, where he imagines himself forcing Evelyn and others into submission, is a pure manifestation of the *id* at work, focusing on the satisfaction of his base impulses and desires, yet this time, the *ego* actually does its job by distracting Bateman from these ideas by counting the banquettes, and this behavior represents the *ego* attempting to regain some control. The *id* has taken Bateman into a world of violent fantasy, but the *ego* steps in with an attempt to bring structure to the situation. Counting objects around him is an act of imposing order on the chaos of his mind. It is attempting to mediate between uncontrollable desires and the need to function in the external world. Bateman's counting is a form of distraction, a way for his *ego* to reassert control over his behavior and

thoughts by focusing on something seemingly neutral and mundane. It is a futile effort to suppress the urge to act on his darker impulses.

Another interaction where Bateman describes the horrific things he wants to do to someone without actually acting on them is when he is at the video rental store.

I don't think I know who you mean," she says in a tone that suggests I'm harassing her, but hey, she works in a video rental store and since it's such a demanding high-powered profession her b\*\*tchy behavior is completely reasonable, right? The things I could do to this girl's body with a hammer, the words I could carve into her with an ice pick.(Ellis,1991,p.119)

This whole interaction highlights the anger and hatred Patrick harbors towards others, his anger is so intense that something as simple as a conversation not flowing the way he wants, can set him on edge and trigger the violent tendencies he desperately tries to hide.

While being with Courtney, the woman he is having an affair with, Patrick suddenly starts theorizing about what would happen if he murdered her fiancé:

Would Courtney like me less if Luis was dead? This is the question I have to face, with no clear answer burning back across my mind, as I make my way slowly through the dining room, waving to someone who looks like Vincent Morrison, someone else who I'm fairly sure is someone who looks like Tom Newman. Would Courtney spend more time with me—the time she now spends with Luis—if he was out of the picture, no longer an alternative, if he was perhaps, dead? If Luis were killed would Courtney be upset? Could I genuinely be a comfort without laughing in her face, my own spite doubling back at me, giving everything away? Is the fact that she dates me behind his back what excites her...would I ruin things by strangling Luis? (Ellis,1991. p.164)

The conflict between Bateman's id and ego is demonstrated in his monologue. His violent and demanding fantasies about Courtney, where he imagines removing Luis from the picture to get her attention, are clear manifestations of his id. His urgent need for authority and approval fuels his unchecked impulses. Bateman's ego, meanwhile, appears to be trying an effort to accept the truth of his circumstances and keep him under control through reality checks. He wonders if he could "genuinely be a comfort" to Courtney, but in the end, his self-loathing and resentment keep him from expressing any true emotions. Although his ego is aware of

social dynamics and the importance of preserving an appearance of love or concern, it is a permanent conflict with his id's more primitive, destructive impulses.

The readers finally get to witness what it is like when Bateman loses control of his id, through the murder of Paul Owen, a character who seems to fuel Patrick's spite and jealousy beyond control. Throughout the novel Patrick feels second to Owen, his insecurity and inferiority complex are all triggered by seemingly mundane things, such as Owen's tanning bed or his business card or even the account he is handling, as the events unfold, it is very apparent that Bateman is completely obsessed with Owen and fixated on him, and when he cannot compete with him, his irritation leads him to what he does best, murder.

At dinner, Patrick is already annoyed with Owen, who keeps mistaking him for another colleague "Halberstam", he gets Owen drunk on purpose and starts freely confessing, blurting out sentences such as "I'm utterly insane" and " I like to dissect girls", in one of the novels climaxes Patrick's id wins over his façade and he ends up murdering Paul Owen in his apartment, he describes the gruesome murder and how Owens skull is hit with the axe as though it is something normal, the prepared axe and raincoat demonstrate that Bateman specifically and meticulously planned this murder. This is the most significant kill to date; Bateman's planning and his prior behavior toward Owen demonstrate how much he has been anticipating and working toward this moment, which is why his murder of Owen is both gory and joyful.

Bateman's inability to fully reconcile his two mental forces; the chaotic, violent desires of the **id** and the need for normalcy imposed by the **ego**, is a key aspect of his psychological fragmentation. His social interactions are hollow, empty of any genuine emotion, and his internal world is consumed by dark impulses which escape him at the most random times both willingly and unwillingly. The constant battle between these forces and his tendency to escape reality through daydreaming and fantasy demonstrates a deep internal conflict and alienation from both himself and the world around him. Not to mention the clear psychological split which is evident in Bateman's self-awareness and emotional struggles, although he knows that his rage and spite go against the need for true acceptance and normalcy, his id compels him to use extreme methods to dominate the situation and act violently.

### **3.4 The manifestation of the dark triad in Patrick Bateman**

Three psychological concepts—Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—combine to form the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These three domains collectively represent individual variances in narcissism (feelings of entitlement and superiority), psychopathy (callousness and lack of empathy), and Machiavellianism (manipulation and strategic thinking). Because of their shared themes of dubious morality, the propensity for aggressiveness, and other interpersonally dysfunctional traits, these three conceptions are referred to as "dark." Psychiatrists and clinical psychologists have historically examined such gloomy phenomena. According to psychiatric classification systems (such as the American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013), psychopathy and narcissism (but not Machiavellianism) are Personality Disorders, and they have a long history of clinical research (Bjorn, 2019)

It is evident that Patrick Bateman is a textbook of the Dark Triad, *The American Psycho's* protagonist possesses a complex and layered character which encompasses all three traits of the dark triad, starting from his narcissistic personality and superiority complex and moving to his use of manipulation tactics to lure in his victims, especially women who are deluded by his superficial charm and lastly, the most evident of all and written on the title of the novel is, obviously, psychopathy; Bateman's insanity and criminal tendency to hurt those around him, through the use of violence.

Bateman's narcissism is reflected in the way he is preoccupied with how he looks and what other people think of him. He goes into great detail about his gym routine, tailored suits that are from luxury brands, and extensive skincare routine, all of which he feels are essential to maintaining a perfect, envied appearance. He feels superior to others because of his riches and physical attributes, and he frequently compares himself to them. For example, he links his self-worth to his designer clothing, which he recounts in great detail throughout the book.

Bateman's need for attention is not solely linked to his physical appearance but also to his personality, he wants to sound more cultured, educated, and morally superior to others, this is highlighted in various scenes from the book, for instance, his long rants about the environment and being politically right and the way he goes into lengthy details describing his favorite artist's albums and the meaning behind their music, this is all a part of his scheme to appear as a good person and also his way of trying to be relatable and to- as he repeatedly states in the novel- "fit in".

Back at my place, I stand over Bethany's body..."Perhaps one of the most tragic and terrifying acts of narcissism and self-proclaimed superiority of Bateman is the scene where he towers over one of his victim's body" there was so much of Bethany's blood pooled on the floor that I could make out my reflection in it while I reached for one of my cordless phones, and I watched myself make a haircut appointment ...(Ellis, p.259)

The act of staring at his reflection on her blood, an act so vile and grotesque that perfectly describes Bateman's feelings of authority over his victims and how he considers them of less value than him, Patrick uses his reflection in her blood to casually check his hair is a clear sign of his desensitization towards his crimes, and lack of empathy.

Patrick's Machiavellianism is especially highlighted in his interactions with his victims, it has been established many times that Patrick is charming, charismatic, and great at portraying himself as a good company, He uses his wealth to impress and create an aura of desirability around him. Almost as if preparing lamb for slaughter; at first he tricks his victim through flattery and smooth talk, also flaunting money to lure them in while also maintaining his "gentleman" facade, for instance, he pretends to help the homeless only minutes away from stabbing them relentlessly and also luring in "Christie" a prostitute by offering her a large amount of money only to torture and murder her later, alongside the use money, drugs and alcohol are also crucial instruments used by him to cloud his victims' judgments and be easily controlled and vulnerable. The scenes where Patrick manipulates others through money, drugs, and charm are repeated so often in the novel that it almost becomes a routine, his own personal ritual.

One of the major manipulation tactics Bateman employs to lure his victims and which eventually saves him from being caught so many times is identity theft, through the novel Bateman pretends to be different people, Marcus...Owen..Davis..etc, for example, in the chapter "Christmas Party" and during his scheme to murder Paul Owen he pretends to be Halberstam and tries to distract his fiancée Evelyn from revealing his true identity to Paul, "That's a Christmas elf. Patrick, what did you tell him?" ...at the mention of my name I immediately start blabbering, hoping that Owen didn't notice." (Ellis, p.193), not only that but he manages to also pretend to be Paul Owen later on in the chapter in order to get into a limousine.

Patrick's tactics of manipulation are also employed while being interrogated by the detective, Bateman diverts from his questions and starts mentioning irrelevant stuff about Owen; trying

to manipulate the detective and portraying Paul as someone unstable, during their dialogue Bateman states " Well, I think, for one, that he was a closet homosexual... who did a lot of cocaine..." this direct slander of Owen is a clear attempt from Patrick to paint him as an unreliable person to the detective, a person who could disappear out of his own will, therefore clearing his name of any accusations.

It is worth noting that Bateman turns lousy in the middle of the novel, his manipulation tactics begin to fall short, and he goes from choosing his victims wisely people who would not be missed or searched for into murdering people from his own social circle, he even starts to do so publicly without fear of consequences, his Freudian slips start to repeat more often and he seems to have an outburst of confessions randomly, these are all indications for the reader to realize that the protagonist has lost his mind and is on the verge of his downfall.

Concerning the element of psychopathy, it is observed from the start of the novel until the end, the intensive morning routine of the protagonist his obsessive behavior over his looks and how people perceive him and, his desperate need to be admired or envied alongside his internal monologues where he describes his criminal fantasies in detail, are all signs that Patrick Bateman suffers from mental illness which later manifests into gruesome crimes. His lack of empathy and emotions is the biggest sign of his psychopathy; it is remarkable how he casually tells the reader about the most disgustingly detailed murder and then speaks about the most mundane things in the same paragraph, which is chilling and terrifying because it shows the reader his total lack of regret or sorrow for his victims. He does not care whether he kills people at random or intentionally harms them; he sees them as nothing more than objects to gratify his desires. He lacks a genuine sense of guilt or accountability, even when confronted with the gravity of his misconduct. His capacity to injure people without experiencing any emotional repercussions exposes the depth of his moral emptiness and his total detachment from the agony he causes, and it is this lack of conscience that distinguishes him as a psychopath. His lack of remorse further emphasizes that his aggression is a purposeful manifestation of his inner emptiness and craving for control, in addition to being the product of his psychopathy.

### 3.5 Schizophrenia and Patrick Bateman's final descent into madness

One of the most intriguing questions concerned with the novel *American Psycho* is whether Patrick Bateman committed all of those horrific crimes or whether it was his mere imagination. This unanswered question stems from different instances of the novel where Patrick's description of the events seems unreal and exaggerated.

The term schizoid refers to an individual the totality of whose experience is split in two main ways: in the first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself. Such a person is not able to experience himself 'together with' others or 'at home in' the world, but, on the contrary, he experiences himself in despairing aloneness and isolation; moreover, he does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as 'split' in various ways. (Laing, 1960, p.19)

This definition by the British psychiatrist RD Laing perfectly describes Patrick Bateman state of mind throughout the novel, the protagonist suffers from a dysfunctional relationship with the world around him, he seems to harbor two conflicting emotions towards his external environment, on one hand he feels hatred towards the world and the people in it, while on the other he has a deep desire to fit in, to be normal just like everybody else; to relate to their experiences and belong to their crowd, however, he seems to fail in doing so, and perhaps his constant failure at fitting in is what further fuels his hatred towards the world and violent fantasies; Bateman spend most of his life inside his head, it does not matter where and when, he is constantly in his head fantasizing about murdering people, it is almost as if that his way of avenging himself, he is passive in real life yet inside his head he is the one in control, taking revenge from the world who – if it becomes aware of his true identity- would cast him aside and consider him an anomaly.

Bateman does not only suffer from the world around him but also from himself, his relationship with his own self is fragmented, he seems to operate from two different perspectives, most of the time he is violent, dominant, and hateful, yet we get to see a glimpse of his more humane side only when he is with his secretary, Jean; In one the book's melancholic scenes which provokes a sense of pity towards Patrick, he seems to feel genuine feelings towards her yet he is unaware of these emotions and cannot process them because, to

him, they are foreign, "I imagine running around central park on a cool spring afternoon with Jean, laughing, holding hands. We buy balloons, we let them go." (Ellis,1991, p.273)

Although he has his moments of self-awareness, he is still detached and violent, his condition worsens with each passing day and his descriptions of events become blurry and entangled, and the reader can no longer trust his recount of happenings, Patrick's descent to madness is also triggered by his own isolation, he breaks up with Evelyn as his final act of self-seclusion, "To Evelyn our relationship is yellow and blue, but to me it's a gray place, most of it blacked out bombed, footage from the film in my head is endless shots of stone and any language heard is utterly foreign." (Ellis,p.355). Laing emphasized that the existential experience of isolation is a major aspect of the human condition. He explores how people suffering from schizophrenia may perceive themselves as being profoundly alone in their world, unable to relate to or communicate with others. This alienation may be seen as an attempt to make sense of a world that feels hostile or incomprehensible.

As Bateman's vision of the events turns foggier by the day, he describes to the reader that he has become a cannibal and that his walls are sprayed with blood which his maid cleans, he has lost self-control and his hallucinations worsen, he mentions how he murdered a kid in the park and how killed a man's dog in front of him, all of these recounts further encourages the reader not to believe everything Bateman says, as his unreliability increases the audience starts questioning all of the novels events.

The famous chase scene from the book is perhaps the most delusional one yet, in the chapter titled Chase, Manhattan, the ellipses at the start and finish of each paragraph in this chapter are fading in and out of one another ("...") emphasizing Bateman's foggy state of mind. The protagonist meets up with his regular group for dinner first, and even though he tells them that his life is a living hell they all ignore him and continue talking about their usual shallow subjects. In another monologue of his, he informs the reader that a dad who set his daughter on fire during childbirth was the subject of his favorite morning show.

As Bateman walks down the streets of New York by himself, he sees a man in a doorway playing the saxophone. He walks up to him, removes his firearm from its holster, and fastens a silencer. When the man notices the pistol, he stops, but Bateman urges him to keep playing and shoots him in the face as he does. But soon he discovers a police cruiser on the street. Following the shooting, Bateman is being chased by the police car around the streets while he dodges and runs in and out of alleys in an attempt to escape.

Bateman angrily waves his gun at the frightened driver as he hops into a taxi. He tries to drive away after shooting the driver and pushing his body out of the car. Bateman drives the vehicle into a Korean deli while shivering and fidgeting like a crazy person. Then for the first time in the novel, Bateman starts speaking of himself in the third person, and he exits. He describes to the reader how "Patrick" hits and then shoots a policeman who is coming toward him. When "Patrick" tries to flee, a second squad car pulls up, and "Patrick" and the police officers engage in gunfire. The police car bursts into flames after one of his rounds strikes the petrol tank.

"Patrick" begins to run while searching for a car, but after that, he just keeps running as quickly as he can. He walks over to his office building and attempts to enter but soon realizes that he has entered the incorrect building. A doorman stops him as he tries to enter the lift, referring to him as "Mr. Smith," and informs him that he has forgotten to sign in. After shooting the man, "Patrick" flees across the street to his correct office building.

"Patrick" gives his own doorman a nod before making his way to his office. He snatches the phone as soon as he enters his office and falls down on the floor. He calls Harold Carnes, his lawyer, and confesses to all of his crimes while shaking. In the meantime, SWAT squads, police cars, and helicopters have surrounded the structure. As the sun rises above Manhattan, "Patrick," who is crying, keeps talking on the phone, telling his lawyer that he might come over for drinks later.

This whole roller coaster of a scene seems heavily exaggerated and nonsensical, Patrick's description is unrealistic, from the public murder to his police chase, it all appears to be a figment of his imagination and it further proves that Bateman's hallucinations are out of control and that he cannot be trusted, the most interesting part of this scene is when he starts to reference to himself in third person, Laing explains that "There is a persistent scission between the self and the body. What the individual regards as his true self is experienced as more or less disembodied, and bodily experience and actions are in turn felt to be part of the false-self system" (p.79).

According to him, there is a continuous division between the body and the self, the person in this situation feels disembodiment, which is the perception that their actual self is distinct from their physical body. This division shows up as the body is perceived as a component of a "false-self system," which is not in line with the individual's actual self-concept.

Laing explains that this dissociation can occur during tough situations. For instance, as a coping mechanism for an intolerable reality, persons in horrific situations may dissociate and retreat from their bodies. In these situations, even though the person's body is still functioning normally, they may feel as though their sensations are remote, dreamlike, or surreal.

This separation, though, is more than a transient reaction to stress in the schizoid condition. It becomes a basic way of living for the person- which is the case of Patrick- where they believe they are essentially disconnected from their body and unable to properly engage with the world around them. According to Laing, for these people, this constant detachment is a way of being rather than merely a response to particular circumstances. As a result, they take on the role of mental observers, detached from the events occurring and observing their own bodies and behaviors.

What further proves that Patrick hallucinated the whole incident is the fact that the next day, he suffers no consequences of the previous ordeal, he continues to live normally as if nothing happened, yet the confession he blurted out during his mental breakdown on the phone call with his lawyer is still on his mind.

They say criminals always return to the crime scene, and just as in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866), where Raskolnikov returns to the scene of his crime while in a dissociative state of mind and fuels suspicion by asking people questions about the murder, Patrick also returns to Paul Owen apartment where there multiple rotten bodies that he murdered, however to his surprise, he finds no sign of the bodies or the murders in Owen's apartment, instead he is met with woman – a realtor- who asks him if he is her eleven o'clock appointment, he tells her that he is not and continue to walk around the apartment while watching the couple who are scanning it, the realtor asks if she can help him and he asks her if Paul Owen lives there, she denies it before asking if he had seen her ad in the Times he says yes only for her to tell him there was no add before asking him to leave, 'I think you should go,' she says...."I think I want to know what happened" I feel sick, my chest and back covered in sweat..."don't make any trouble" she says ...this is not a game...I want to shout."(Ellis,p.384). This is clearly a shock to Patrick as he is sure that he did commit all of those crimes and that those bodies were hidden in Owen's apartment, perhaps the realtor has cleared the apartment in order to sell it or maybe he has lost his mind and none of it actually happened, his grip on reality continues to slip away from him and the reader as well as Bateman can no longer distinguish reality from hallucination.

To make his situation even worse, Patrick meets up with his lawyer, wanting to discuss the confession he made while he had the previous mental breakdown, in the chapter "New Club", Harold Carnes, Bateman's lawyer had seemingly mistook him for someone else and believes that the voicemails of the confessions were some sort of a prank, emphasizing that there is no way Bateman would commit such murders because he is a loser who would never dare to do so, Patrick taken aback by this and he keeps insisting that he did commit all those murders and it was him confessing in the voicemails, "feeling weird even though I haven't done any drugs." What are you talking about Patrick is a what..." oh good god, man, why else would Evelyn Richard dump him you know he could barely pick up an escort girl...let alone... What was it you said he did her...Oh yes, chop her head..." Harold starts laughing." This entire interaction completely shatters Bateman's perception of the events, cause wasn't he the one who broke up with Evelyn wasn't he picking up escort girls as his nightly routine, he is frustrated and on the verge of losing it." Wait stop...I shout...you don't seem to understand you're not comprehending any of this, I killed him, I did it mi chopped Owen's fu\*\*\*\*\* head, I tortured dozens of girls, that whole message I left on your machine is true." (Ellis, p.403)

This second confession of his did not seem to bring him any relief in fact it made matters worse as Patrick was about to hear something that would completely blind his vision of how the events actually broke down, "but that's simply impossible... because I had dinner with Paul Owen... twice in London... just ten days ago."(Ellis, p.405.)

If Paul Owen is alive and in London then who did Patrick murder or did he kill anyone at all? Could all of this be a manifestation of his twisted jealousy and insecurity? Could he have hallucinated the whole ordeal? Patrick does not know himself anymore, in the next chapter after this interaction, Bateman does not seem to enjoy the things he used to do anymore, his life is plain and repetitive and he has given up on feeling any sort of emotion.

In the final chapter "At Harry's", Patrick is having dinner with his friends, talking about their usual subjects; cars, girls, drugs, and fashion, this is very similar to the first chapter of the book, the similarity between the first and last chapter is intentional, to showcase Patrick's desensitization towards the events of his life, it is all so redundant, the dinner with his friends who fight over reservations, his dissociation whiles speaking and his fantasies about murdering women, Bateman life will never change as long as he does not seek help, as long as he is surrounded by the toxic materialistic, self-absorbed lifestyle, he will continue to split, to

suffer from self-fragmentation and lose the ability of distinguishing what is real and what is not.

There are no more barriers to cross. All I have in common with the uncontrollable and the insane, the vicious and the evil, all the mayhem I have caused and my utter indifference toward it I have now surpassed. My pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope for a better world for anyone, in fact, I want my pain to be inflicted on others. I want no one to escape, but even after admitting this there is no catharsis, my punishment continues to elude me and I gain no deeper knowledge of myself; no new knowledge can be extracted from my telling. This confession has meant nothing. (Ellis, p.391)

This nihilistic monologue perfectly captures Bateman's internal state of mind, the curse of self-awareness brings him sharp pain that he knows he shares with the insane and mentally ill, he admits that he is sick, an evil man who is indifferent towards those around and even wishes they suffer the same way as he does, he does not know himself and is sure that he will never be able to, for him, there is no escape, this leads him to believe that his actions, words and confessions mean absolutely nothing.

By the last words of the novel, as Patrick is leaving the restaurant with his friend, while asking himself a simple yet complicated question " why" he continues his monologue then it pops again "why" 'before he leaves he notices a sign that says "This is not an exit", referencing to Jean Paul Sartre's play *No Exit*. In Sartre's play, three characters are trapped in a room for eternity, facing the consequences of their actions and the realization that they are stuck with one another forever. The famous line from the play, "Hell is other people," suggests that the characters' torment comes not from physical torture but from their constant confrontation with their own choices and the others' judgment. This mirrors the American Psycho protagonist situation and captures his feelings of entrapment inside his own life, suffering from an existential crisis and his curse of both self-awareness and hunger for violence, as he said there is no catharsis for him, he is a prisoner in a hell of his own making and there is *no exit*.

## **General conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to outline the mental consequences of hyper-masculine environments in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*; this study has been carried out to investigate how the pressures of a hyper-competitive, materialistic setting shape the identity and psyche of the protagonist, Patrick Bateman. Drawing on psychology and masculinity theory, the study engages in a close reading and critical textual analysis of the novel to explore how Bateman's presentation and behavior reflect the severe drawbacks of exiting in an environment similar to his.

The analysis argues that Patrick Bateman is depicted as both a product and a victim of his environment, emphasizing intentional and deliberate contradictions in his character. Ellis's narrative shows Bateman's fixation on status, brands, and appearances not only as a performance of exaggerated masculinity but also an act of self-masking, for instance, Bateman's obsessive attention to grooming, attire, and luxury goods is considered as symptomatic of how his identity is linked to societal perception, throughout the novel, the protagonist's sole focus is the public viewpoint of him, it is the core basis of his identity and ultimately the catalyst of his descent into madness.

Simultaneously, the thesis heavily emphasizes the psychological dimension of the novel. By analyzing the social setting of the protagonist it is concluded that the protagonist's violence tendencies are a result of his lifelong suppressed rage due to his incompetency compared to his colleagues, Ellis's Wall Street is a rigid, male dominant sexist milieu that further fueled the protagonist's hatred towards women and jealousy of other men, Bateman's misogyny partnered with his inferiority complex became the driving force behind his violent crimes and mental downfall, turning him into a ticking bomb that can be triggered by the slightest ego bruise, for instance, scenes from the novel such as the business card incident or women simply rejecting him result in violent crimes.

As the research dives deeper into Bateman's psyche by drawing on psychological framework, it is evident that the protagonist is mentally incompetent, starting from his double identity and the contradictions between his outer and inner self and moving into the gruesome sadist crimes which he commits unprovoked, by analyzing his manner of describing his crime in gory details, it is obvious that he suffers from a high level of detachment from others around him, his lack of empathy dehumanizes his victims and allows him to feel no remorse after violating them, Bateman's recount of his murders is not only a proof of his sadism, but also an

evidence of his unreliability, his stories are often contradictory, surreal and extremely exaggerated that the reader is caught in a dilemma between believing him or not, this is highlighted by the end of the novel where even Bateman himself can no longer differentiate between what is real and what is not.

These findings have broader social and literary implications. Viewing Bateman as a product of his culture highlights how late capitalist values can destroy the human psyche, Bateman's racist, misogyny and classist murders are allegories for the hierarchal society of his time, the protagonist himself is the presentation of Reagan-era in America where wealth, detachment, and hunger for status reigned supreme. In this manner the thesis emphasizes that *American Psycho* is not meek entertainment but a direct critique of society and how it can cause irreparable damage to those who call it "home".

This thesis highlights the connection between a person and his society, it investigates this interaction and how it can either make or break a person, by examining Patrick Bateman as a product of 1980s yuppie culture, the research shows how cultural values centered on status, masculinity and competitiveness can breed violent emotionally detached individuals who lack genuine humane connection and feel little to no remorse stepping on those rounds them in their way up the corporate ladder.

The study contribute to contemporary discussions around masculine identity crisis and the psychological consequences of capitalism, these issues remain highly relevant today, it also open doors for future researches that could explore the current phenomenon of people (especially the male audience) infatuation with the character of Patrick Bateman and adopting his personality in social media, by highlighting the relatable aspects of *American Psychoprotagonist* and how Bret succeeded in targeting male of a certain age category through his satire comical portrayal of the male spirit.

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