# The Many Faces of Power: The Portrayal of Hegemony in *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk and *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis

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Tutkimus käsittelee hegemoniaa Chuck Palahniukin romaanissa *Fight Club* (1996) ja Bret Easton Ellisin romaanissa *American Psycho* (1991). Teoksien tapahtumat sijoittuvat 1980- ja 1990-luvun Yhdysvaltoihin ja kapitalismin vaikutus on molemmissa vahvasti läsnä. Ensimmäinen tutkimuksen tavoitteista on selvittää tapoja, joilla yritykset käyttävät kapitalismia hyödykseen ohjaillakseen ihmisten ostokäyttäytymistä. Toinen tavoite on selvittää, kuinka ihmiset kapinoivat yrityksiä ja kapitalismia vastaan, ja viimeinen tavoite keskittyy niihin vallankäytön muotoihin, joilla ihmiset ohjailevat toisiaan yhteiskunnan sisällä.

Tutkimusaineistona on käytetty kahta edellä mainittua teosta. Teoriakäsitteet, joita on sovellettu romaanien analyysiin, ovat kulttuurihegemonia ja kapitalistinen hegemonia, hegemoninen maskuliinisuus ja vastahegemonia.

Analyysin lopputulos on, että yritykset luovat kuluttajille tarpeita, joita heidän tuotteensa sitten tyydyttävät, ja saavat näin kuluttajat kuluttamaan entistä enemmän. Mainosten avulla he myös saavat kuluttajat uskomaan, että vain kuluttamalla voi olla onnellinen, ja vain tavaroiden avulla ihminen voi näyttää oman arvonsa yhteiskunnan silmissä.

*American Psychon* päähenkilö, Patrick Bateman, ei yhdistä omia ongelmiaan ja kapitalismia toisiinsa, mutta *Fight Clubin* päähenkilö sen sijaan ryhtyy kapinoimaan kapitalismia ja kulutusyhteiskuntaa vastaan perustamansa organisaation avulla. Lopulta hän kuitenkin joutuu taas pettymään, eikä kumpikaan ääripää, kapitalismi tai sen täydellinen hylkääminen, tuota hänelle tyydytystä.

Molemmilla päähenkilöillä on vaikeuksia solmia pysyviä ihmissuhteita, sillä hyödykkeet ovat syrjäyttäneet ihmiskontaktit heidän elämässään. Bateman noudattaa hegemonisen maskuliinisuuden periaatteita ja pyrkii alistamaan ihmisiä, joita hän ei koe vertaisinaan, kuten naisia tai kodittomia. *Fight Clubin* päähenkilön hegemoninen maskuliinisuus taas ilmenee väkivaltaisessa käytöksessä muita miehiä kohtaan. Hän kuitenkin löytää itselleen toimivan ihmissuhteen romaanin lopussa, kun taas Bateman on kykenemätön muuttamaan tapojaan. Kapitalistisella hegemonialla on selvästi negatiivinen vaikutus molempien päähenkilöiden elämään.


Avainsanat: hegemonia, kapitalismi, hegemoninen maskuliinisuus, vastahegemonia

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## 1. Introduction

In this thesis, I will be analyzing the different ways hegemonic power is depicted in the societies of Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996) and Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (1991). The three different levels of power I am focusing on are the methods capitalist corporations use to control and influence people's consumer behavior for their benefit, how some people use power to rebel against the control of the corporations and lastly, how people use power inside the society to gain control over other people. I have to note that when I used the term 'power', I refer to hegemonic power specifically. The means of control used by the main characters range from violence and humiliation to terrorist acts, while the way corporations control people is done through cultural hegemony, the cultural domination of one group over another. I am going to study what differences and similarities there are in the portrayal of the chosen themes and how the setting in the books, an American capitalist consumer society, affects the actions and behaviour of the main characters.

Both *Fight Club* and *American Psycho* were published in the 1990s, so they are relatively recent novels, and new studies on these novels still keep coming out in the 21st century. Both novels have an urban setting: a consumer-oriented capitalist society where wealth and looks define more people than their inner qualities such as personality or skills. This setting is familiar to most because the concepts of consumerism and capitalism and the possible problems they bring are nowadays widely discussed in Western societies. My aim is to shed more light on the previous studies done on this topic and show that the themes in *Fight Club* and *American Psycho* were not relevant only in the 1990s, but the hegemonies dictating people's actions are still very much alive in the 21st century. Hegemony is not a thing of the past, but people and companies alike continue to use it to their own advantage.

In *Fight Club*, the narrator is an ordinary office worker who feels he is a faceless and nameless drone programmed only to work and consume with no will of his own. After

becoming dissatisfied with his current life, he develops a split personality: his other self, Durden, convinces him to start a fight club for men, which he later uses as a way to promote and spread an anti-consumerist ideology. The narrator finally feels empowered and is seemingly in control of his own life, not submitting to the norms of the capitalist society anymore. As the fight club grows, it also evolves and becomes Project Mayhem, whose purpose is to bring down Western civilization and capitalist corporations. However, the narrator is starting to become increasingly uneasy about the project and gets rid of his alter ego, but even then, he cannot stop Project Mayhem or halt their plans. The future of Project Mayhem is beyond his control and once again he feels powerless against a system bigger than him.

Patrick Bateman, the protagonist of *American Psycho*, is likewise a product of a consumer-oriented capitalist society, but unlike the narrator in *Fight Club*, he embraces that culture. He is a rich, successful, immaculately groomed yuppie who appears endlessly self-confident. His days are spent socializing, partying and eating at five star restaurants with other like-minded people. In reality, he feels insecure and needs constant validation to feel good about himself. He gains this empowerment by controlling and dominating others. He murders and tortures people that he deems are beneath him, like women, children and the homeless, and if one of his peers is threatening his fragile self-esteem, he gets rid of them. Through these actions he thinks he can gain control of his own life and feel superior. Everybody around him looks and acts exactly like him, but he wants to be different. He tries telling others about his crimes to show this, but nobody believes him; after all, from the outside he acts and looks the same as everybody else. In the end, he is forced to face the fact that there is nothing special about him and the idea of power is simply an illusion. He is not as self-confident, unique and in control as he would like to think, but he still refuses to change his way despite his current lifetime not bringing any joy in his life.

Previous studies on the two novels have often focused on studying violence and masculinity in particular, like T. Lee's article "Virtual Violence in Fight Club: This Is What Transformation of Masculine Ego Feels Like" (2002) and Mark Storey's "And as Things Fell Apart: The Crisis of Postmodern Masculinity in Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho and Dennis Cooper's Frisk" (2005). In contrast, my own study will focus more on hegemony and the way the characters interact with other people and with corporations inside the society. Masculinity and violence are central themes in both books, so I will have to discuss them to some degree, but they are not the main focus. The aim of my thesis is to discuss the capitalist societies in the novels and how they have molded the characters and are dictating their actions and how the characters become dissatisfied with their current lives. Exaggerated masculinity and violent behavior are only symptoms, but I will also study the causes of this behavior and possible solutions.

My thesis will consist of the introduction, theory section, two analysis sections and the conclusion. In the theory part, I will explain and define the concepts of hegemony, cultural hegemony, capitalism and consumer society in America, counter-hegemony and hegemonic masculinity, and how I am going to use these concepts and theories in my study. There is some overlapping between the hegemonies since, for example cultural hegemony consists of capitalist hegemony, but I will explain the use of these terms later on. Even though there are many concepts to discuss, they all link together and fall under the umbrella term of hegemony. The first analysis section focuses on the relationship between corporations and societies and the people living in those societies and will discuss themes such as how capitalism is affecting the main characters and controlling their actions and how the characters react to this control. In the next analysis section, I will go in more detail over the relationships the main characters have with other people in society, what they want from those relationships, and how capitalism has affected their social life. Lastly, there is a summary where I gather my

findings on what similarities and differences there are between the ways capitalism influences people in both novels.

## 2. Hegemony

In this section, I will discuss the different kinds of hegemonies that will later be used to analyze the novels in question. The concepts of cultural hegemony, especially in the American capitalist society, counter-hegemony and hegemonic masculinity will all be discussed further down this section. First, however, a few words about hegemony in general. It is the act of "convincing, cajoling and coercing [others] that they should want what you want" (Agnew 2004, 2). It can occur between countries or within one country between social groups, for example. Hegemony does not always mean simply mental domination, but it can also involve physical force, like a country's military taking over another country. However, nowadays more often than not hegemony does not involve any physical force, but relies on influencing people and presenting them with a situation that is more favourable than resisting them, which is called cultural hegemony. In my thesis, I will use hegemony and cultural hegemony interchangeably, so when I refer to hegemony I mean cultural hegemony specifically.

2.1. Cultural Hegemony

One cannot discuss hegemony without referring to the Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci. He first discussed cultural hegemony in "Notes on the Southern Question" (Mouffe 1979, 178):

> The Turin communists posed concretely the question the 'hegemony of the proletariat': i.e. of the social basis of the proletarian dictatorship and the workers' State. The proletariat can become the leading (dirigente) and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of alliances which allows it to mobilise the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State.

The working class, the one being oppressed under the capitalist rule, must work together in order to gain freedom. One could claim that nowadays, the proletariat Gramsci wrote about does not only refer to working-class people, but has expanded to mean all the classes that work under big corporations and their cultural hegemony, since even people in white collar

jobs cannot escape the effect of capitalism. They need to be aware of the power big corporations have over them through consumerism in order to make their own choice without the influence of capitalism. However, usually the majority of the working class do not realize the power capitalism has over them, which makes it impossible for them to form a uniform group against it. Gramsci (1977, 17) wrote in the *Prison Notebooks* that things stay the same not because a few people want it that way, but because the majority lets it happen. The indifference and passivity of the masses is the main reason why hegemonies can have such a great hold on people in his opinion.

Gramsci greatly developed and expanded the theory of cultural hegemony in his *Prison Notebooks*. Mouffe (1979, 181) states that in the *Prison Notebooks* "[hegemony] is no longer a question of simple political alliance but of a complete fusion of economic, political intellectual and moral objectives which will be brought about by one fundamental group or groups allied to it through the intermediary of ideology when an ideology manages to spread throughout the whole of society determining not only united economic and political objectives but also intellectual and moral unity". Thus, the agenda of hegemony is not necessarily only political; it can be used to change and affect moral guidelines in society. It makes people believe that the agenda of the ruling class is also beneficial to themselves. The interests of both need to match in order for hegemony to work. The ideas of the hegemonic class need to be at least superficially aligned with the class it wants to rule over for it to seem that they are not ruling by force. Giving people the idea that happiness can be bought and linking self-worth and success with commodities would be an example of this.

Gramsci states that "hegemony is not simply a process of indoctrination", but "rather [it] appears as a consensual culture and politics that meet the minimal needs of the majority while simultaneously advancing the interests of the dominant groups" (Artz and Murphy 2000, 20). Cultural hegemony does not necessarily oppress the weaker party; it can be beneficial for

both, but significantly more beneficial for the dominant group. As was mentioned before, this explains why social classes do not always oppose hegemonic power. They either do not notice it at all, or they do notice but receive tangible goods from the arrangements that would prevent them from protesting. This combined with the indifference of the classes makes a 'revolution' a difficult thing to achieve. Furthermore, overthrowing the ruling hegemony does not guarantee that the situation afterwards is any better than the current one, and it might be even worse. The conditions of the oppressed class would have to be severe enough to push them to revolt, and the ruling class is not going to allow that happen easily.

In cultural hegemony, the domination does not rely on brute force but it uses the beliefs and values in the society to control people. It gives people those cultural and ideological values that they live by while at the same time benefitting the ruling class. Artz and Murphy (2000, 2-3) discuss cultural hegemony in their book *Cultural Hegemony in the United States:*

> We are surrounded by power: corporate power, media power, power of boss over worker, power of teacher over student. Whatever the relationship, power does not arise naturally. Power must be established through behavior. Power often relies on physical force, economic constraint, legal guidelines, or other coercive techniques. But coercion is expensive and dangerous. Subordinates can organize, revolt, and find other allies. Power is best secured if subordinates buy into the arrangement, agree to the terms, and make the relationship theirs. Hegemony is the system of power that has the support of the subordinate.

The genius in cultural hegemony lies in the fact that the people subjected to do not necessarily realize they are being controlled or aware of that, but think of the hegemony as necessary for the society to function smoothly. They take the values of the dominant group as their own and the majority of them never question those values. It is challenging to fight back against something that the person does not even know is there and often the power dynamics in society seem so natural that people do not realize there is an option or a reason to fight back. In *Fight Club*, the main character is unhappy with his life as a common consumer and

does not realize it is because of the power the capitalist society has over him until his alter ego opens his eyes.

Even within the concept of cultural hegemony, there are different definitions for that term but I am going to use the one in Marxist philosophy. It is undoubtedly one of the most famous definitions of cultural hegemony and the Marxist idea of the ruling class controlling the masses in a capitalist society supports well my later analysis. At the end of 19th century, "he [Karl Marx] explained that capitalist hegemony over society would continue until representatives of the working class raised demands that challenged existing social relationships" (Artz and Murphy 2000, 6). Even though hegemony in itself is not inherently good or evil, and sometimes it is even desirable, in Marxist theory, it is only used as a means for the bourgeoisie to rule over the working class, and it is a not a preferable state of being. I will analyze cultural hegemony in the context of capitalist corporations controlling the society through consumerism. In the novels, hegemony is made to be an evil influence and not a neutral or positive use of power.

There are some conditions that need to be met in order for hegemony to exist according to Artz and Murphy (2000, 24). The class that is ruled over needs to receive material benefits from the arrangement. Artz and Murphy argued before that "hegemony exists only when dominant social forces represent and incorporate some very real material interests of subordinate groups into their social relationships" (2000, 3). A capitalist country with a good economy will feed its citizens and give them jobs, and thus, keep them content and happy. Even though the majority will not get as much as the big corporate owners, they get enough to lead a comfortable life. For example, in the United States, people are free to pursue the American dream, and with hard work they can move up the social ladder towards becoming part of the ruling class, too. However, this also means that if an economic depression strikes and people start losing their jobs, it will shake the foundations of hegemony. In the worst, or

best, case scenario, it will cease the reign that the ruling class has over the subordinate class. If hegemony is not beneficial to them anymore, they are not going to succumb to its power.

Good leadership is also needed in order for hegemony to stay in place: "rewards and punishments, laws and privileges, courts, police, prisons, and so forth must be organized according to a political plan that represents (or secures) the interests of the majority" (Artz and Murphy 2000, 25). This means that the leaders cannot ignore the wishes of the majority, but have to build a safer society for all. Material benefits as well as political security are needed to keep people happy. Labour unions is another example that does not benefit hegemonic leadership in any way but is needed in order to keep people content and also give them the sense that they have some control. It is a balancing act to keep the status quo of giving people power but not too much to overthrow the ruling class. The main character of *Fight Club* belonged to this group of content people at the beginning of the novel. He was not necessarily happy with his life, but he was living according to the rules of the society, was relatively well-off and had a nice apartment, so he had no reasons to oppose. Fighting against ruling hegemony was only going to make his life harder, since it is easier to maintain the status quo than to break it.

Lastly, hegemonic power bestows culture to the people it is ruling over. The idea of hegemony is given as an ideology that people consume. For example, people are taught through popular culture what they should want and desire and then the ruling class gives it to them; "The mass media, including movies, television, magazines, and books, tend to use accepted representations and standard professional practices drawn from cultural values, stereotypes, and social rituals that predominate in the United States today" (Artz & Murphy 2000, 29). This condition is the most difficult one to fulfill because the ruling class has to influence people's whole lifestyles: how people live their lives, what dreams they have and what makes them happy. One of the most obvious ways to affect people is through dictating

their consumption habits which is also one the major themes in my thesis. People need material benefits as was mentioned before, but giving them the idea that they need even more mostly unnecessarily material goods, is only making the hegemonic power over them stronger.

2.2 Capitalism and Consumer Culture in America

*Fight Club* and *American Psycho* were written during late capitalism and the rise of the hedonistic consumer culture in the 1990s. According to Wyatt Wells (2003, 164, 174), the United States was enjoying a boom of economic growth between the 1991 and 2000 and even worker productivity was rising after two decades of not growing at all. This added with mass production and machines replacing humans enabled the emergency of consumer society. However, everything has its downsides and economic prosperity does not always equal happiness. The American culture in the 1980s and 1990s was about materialism and appearance. People's true self was hidden under wealth and possession, and they were used as a mask to give a certain, desirable image to others. This explains why the main character in *Fight Club* was so willing to reject American mainstream culture. He felt that he was only part of a faceless mass hungry to consume more, and wanted to change that. Capitalism and consumer culture play a big part in shaping the characters in *Fight Club* and *American Psycho*, even though both view them from different angles.

It is difficult to talk about capitalism without mentioning Karl Marx. His works dedicated to analyzing and criticizing the capitalist mode of production have been valuable. McGuigan (2009, 11) writes about this subject in his book *Cool Capitalism*:

> Marx's technical analysis of the production and circulation of value shows that an ostensibly equitable set of arrangements – 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work' – conceals a systematically unequal relation between capital and labour. The worker is, in effect, only partially remunerated, sufficient at best to sustain subsistence, for the labour power expended in doing the job. The unremunerated portion is the source of surplus value and, ultimately, of profits that are either

distributed as dividends to shareholders or ploughed back into capital accumulation. This is an endless and dynamic process in which the extraction of surplus value depends upon the rate of exploitation, such that the capitalist is motivated constantly to increase it by whatever means possible: lengthening working time, replacing labour with machines, and so on.

Marx was impressed by capitalism and its ability to endlessly increase profits. This all happened at the expense of the employees but they were still given enough to survive. In the previous subchapter, I discussed cultural hegemony and the material benefits it needs to grant to the subservient class in order for them to stay content, and here we can see that in effect. Workers are given just enough that the majority of them see no reason to protest but still less than would be equitable so that the profit margin would not suffer. Not giving the workers anything for their work, or not giving them enough to get by, would certainly cause uproar and would not be a sustainable way to run a society.

McGuigan (2009, 116) continues to write about Marx's views on capitalism and this time from the perspective of commodity and its value to consumers. Marx noted the curious phenomenon where the price of a commodity is higher than its value of use. A kind of symbolic value is added to the commodity which makes people willing to pay more than what the actual value might be: "That the price of a commodity should be more significant than its use was strange; that its symbolic value should become yet more important than even its price is peculiar indeed" (McGuigan 2009, 116). It is another way for capitalism to make profits: by underpaying the workers that produce the commodity and then overpricing it, capitalist corporations are able to skim off the excess for themselves. In the novels I am analyzing, this is the most prominent way capitalist corporations are able to control people and make money. They are offering people luxury items and while the items might be expensive to make, they are not as expensive as the price corporations are charging for them, but because the commodities hold symbolic value, they become status symbols that makes them highly valuable. However, nowadays the concept of commodity can be extended to also

refer to services and other intangible goods. This will lead us to the next topic which is consumer culture.

According to McGuigan (2009, 113-114), it is wrong to say that consumers are being exploited by capitalism. Exploitation is too harsh a word to use for this and not entirely correct; he thinks it would better to talk about seduction instead. Capitalist corporations do not use force to make people consume. Instead, as I stated before, through the culture of the society they make commodities desirable and excessive consumption a way of life: "After all, capitalism has many attractions, especially insofar as it promises to realise all people's desires in consumption, though offers rather less realisation in production" (2009, 113-114). Whether capitalism actually fulfils all those desires and fantasies is another matter. It sells American dreams and that is exactly what people are seduced into thinking they need. They are given the idea that you can buy happiness and use money and tangible goods to fulfill intangible dreams, such as desire to be respected and admired in society.

Next, I will discuss the origins of the 1990s' consumer culture in America and what events molded and shaped it to the state it was in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club*. Rami Gabriel (2013, 60) writes in his book *Why I Buy* about the history of consumer culture and how after the 1980s, the business sector continued to unify and department stores grew into huge retail centers offering a vast variety of different good with relatively cheap prices. All this was made possible by cheap foreign and domestic labor. Under President Reagan in the 1980's, regulations concerning trade and antitrust laws were weakened which enabled powerful conglomerates to form (Klein, quoted in Gabriel 2013, 60). According to Klein, those huge corporations had questionable quasi-immunity against laws and their power only grew during the 1990s. They continued to push goods and services to people monopolizing the markets. The prices were cheaper than before, but people's need to consume only grew larger and the problem of living beyond one's means that Cross talked about before was

becoming imminent. More goods only meant more profit for the corporations, and the more corporations were pushing new and desirable commodities towards consumers, the bigger the need for consumption became.

After the Vietnam War, America was living in a more peaceful era not plagued by the horrors of war, and people had time to spend time and money on themselves once again. Malkmes (2011, 81) comments on how consumer items became more readily available, such as cable television and compact disc, which in return revolutionized the music and entertainment industry and made popular culture into a consumer item. The 1980s also saw the rise of the yuppies, young urban professionals, who Malkmes (2011, 84) describes in these words:

> These young professionals were mostly working in executive positions in large corporations of the financial sector which mostly invested in stock. They were concerned with business takeovers and the return on investment, ROI, became their ideologies, Donald Trump their idealized role model; to display their success they spent their money on upscale consumer products like Ray-Ban sunglasses, Polo apparel, and Mercedes and BMW automobiles. Because of their hedonistic lifestyle, urban health and fitness industry experienced an explosion as many yuppies pursued regular fitness routines.

There was no shame in being materialistic and conspicuous consumption was promoted by everybody from companies trying to make a profit to celebrities showing hedonistic lifestyle in music videos and television shows. Everything became available if the person was rich enough, and modest lifestyle was not something people were aiming towards: the more money a person had, the more they had to spend. However, the era had its downsides; technological revolution lead into deindustrialization which resulted in increasing unemployment rates (Malkmes 2011, 84). Not all of the middle-class and working-class people could become part of the hedonistic consumer culture even if they wanted to for the lack of jobs. It was the era of the yuppies which left no room for the poor who struggled while the rich became even wealthier.

Gabriel (2013, 60) discusses further how after the 1980s "consumption became a means for fulfilling personal fantasy; affluence tipped the balance away from discipline and toward hedonism". Earlier, there was usually an element of necessity in spending, but now it was done purely out of enjoyment and people wanted to live their fantasies through material goods. Almost anyone could try to achieve the American dream if they had the newest car and the most expensive clothing. Wealth and possession were the indicators that showed how successful a person was and how good of a life they were living. Gabriel (2013, 60) cites American cultural historian Gary Cross, according to whom the biggest problem about consumption during that period was people's unwillingness to avoid gratification and reluctance to keep their desires within "the boundaries of the home and the family, and one's own means". It was not enough that the person's closest circles could see how they spend but they wanted everybody to see the extent of their wealth. A crucial element to fulfilling the fantasy was other people's admiration. As was mentioned before, consumption evolved from simply fulfilling physical, tangible needs to fulfilling the intangible ones, as well. A car was not simply a means of transportation but a way to obtain people's admiration and gain status.

Also Mike Featherstone (1991, 13) describes consumer culture and what consuming means to people in his book. He claims "there is more strictly sociological view, that the satisfaction derived from goods relates to their socially structured access in zero sum game in which satisfaction and status depend upon displaying and sustaining differences within conditions of inflation". Consuming is not simply about buying goods because they are necessary, but it is a way to show others a person's social status through those commodities. McGuigan (2009, 89) writes about the same subject: "Consumption must be conspicuous – that is, explicit – for its social magic to work, to signal to others, in effect, the consumer's worth. Consumerism in that sense has been associated historically not only with status but also with class". The satisfaction of consuming comes from flaunting the things a person

owns and showing others their high status. Possession means less to a person if there is nobody to see it. A person has to continue to buy the same clothes and furniture as other people to keep that high social status, since if the consumption stops, others who also value consumer good over everything else do not regard the person so highly anymore.

Another interesting notion that Gabriel (2013, 61) makes is how the rise of the consumer culture resulted in people constantly having to shift between reality and fantasy. Advertising and entertainment provided people with images of a better life achieved through consuming. Even working-class and middle-class people could get a taste of this life by simply buying the same things as the happy, successful and good-looking people on television and magazines. This caused a detachment from reality because fantasy and reality became so intertwined. Gabriel (2013, 61) continues to note that "it is fair to say people became separated from their communities as consumer goods fulfilled their social needs more conveniently". Being social in the traditional sense was no longer as important because people could show their status and place in society through goods and appearance instead of socializing and genuinely interacting with others. This self-isolation could even lead to a society of people who looked fine on the outside but in reality led an empty life, like the main characters in both *American Psycho* and *Fight Club*.

Gabriel (2013, 60) also writes about the changes in the society that occurred as a result of the growing consumer culture. He writes that in 2001 the service sector made up 75 percent of total employment in America. These jobs were perpetually transient, lacked social mobility, had disposable workforce and lacked labor organizations that could oppose the orders of the management. On the other end, there were yuppies whose culture was characterized by radical individualism mixed with the desire to acquire luxury goods (Leiss et all, quoted in Gabriel 2013, 61). The main character of *American Psycho* could be said to belong to the latter group. He is rich and successful but in a perpetual race to consume more

than his peers. He wants to show his individualism through his clothing, appearance and small things like business cards. Everything he owns or does needs to be more expensive and grandiose than anybody else's. Conversely, the main character of *Fight Club* is in the first group: he has a job and a passion for consumption, but nevertheless feels that consumer culture is working against him, and not for him, and big corporations are only taking advantage of him. His place in society is fixed just like everybody else's in the service sector and breaking free is close to impossible.

In the introduction, I mentioned how big corporations have a huge influence over the society. Gabriel (2013, 61) quotes Klein on the same topic, and writes how "private corporations have become more than just purveyors of goods, even though they are not held to the same accountability controls as public institutions, they are now the most powerful economic, and many claim political, forces in the nation". The power corporations have over the country and its people is strong, but overlooked by many consumers. People consuming and corporations taking the profit is mutually beneficial. Most are not aware of the control corporations have or simply do not care about it. The ideology is based on money and keeping the economy in a strong growth pattern, not as much on the well-being of the people. However, they give something back to the people, namely commodities. They themselves created the need for consumption and now they are also the one fulfilling it.


2.3. Counter-hegemony and Counterculture

Alan Hunt (1990, 312) discusses counter-hegemony in his article and explains it using Gramsci's concept of counter-hegemony as "the process by which subordinate classes challenge the dominant hegemony and seek to supplant it by articulating an alternative hegemony". In the case of my thesis, that dominant hegemony would be the capitalist hegemony. I do not necessarily agree that it needs to be replaced by a different hegemony or,

at least, that is not always the aim of the class challenging the dominant hegemony, but looking at the world it seems that societies inevitably revert back to hegemony in the end. Anarchy without anybody taking control seems to exist only in dystopian fiction and it is not a long-time arrangement: there is always one group that becomes the dominant one exerting their hegemony over others. Hunt continues that usually a movement is started with an immediate circle of people with same interests, for example trade unions, and it needs to be a group whose interests are not met by the hegemony. For example, Patrick Bateman had no reason to protest against hegemon because his materialistic needs were fulfilled, while the characters in *Fight Club* and Project Mayhem were unsatisfied with the current state of things.

Hunt argues (1990, 313) that the subordinate class must first become hegemonic so that that the majority will start to follow it. Nobody would follow a class, for example the working class, if they and their aims did not have a certain allure that other people could identify with. By incorporating the interests of other people in their agenda, it is easier to get the majority on the side the counter-hegemony, since people would rather choose the hegemony which has a goal that suits everybody's interests the best. The class would need to promise something better than the current hegemonic power is offering in order to activate people and gain their vote.

Although Hunt writes that in order to overthrow the existing hegemony the majority's consent is needed first, there are other ways to go about it. In *Fight Club*, the main character and his group of terrorists are using force to attain their goal. The main character is able to attract other like-minded people to his cause, but their aim is not to replace the existing hegemony with their own but to destroy it completely and start anew. They want to make the society a better place, or a better place for themselves, but the majority do not agree with their methods since they do not share the interests of the counter-movement. Nevertheless, in their mind they are working for the good of the whole society but are the only ones to take

action to improve the situation. They want to start again at a cave man level without any hegemony. However, like Hunt argues, another hegemony will always take the place of the displaced one. Eventually, the society that the main character dreams about will build another system to control people, be it capitalism or something else entirely.

F.X. Shea (1973, 110) is against revolution as a means for social change and writes in his article that it is "the least valid of the phenomenon associated with the Counter-Culture". Changing the current order of things by force might be effective but it is not long lasting. As was mentioned before, cultural hegemony is powerful because it does not use violence but balances the interests of both the ruling class and the subordinate one. Of course, the same result could be attained by force, at least temporarily, but at some point, people would revolt and overthrow the hegemonic power, the same way revolutions work in general. There needs to be the consent of the majority in order to replace the old hegemony. The main character of *Fight Club* has to face the same problem. He wants to start a revolution through violence and focuses less on getting the majority on his side first. Though his agenda for revolting is extremely specific and only applies to same-minded white men, so even if he is trying to campaign and get more people on his side, he excludes quite many other groups, such as women.

Even though there have been and still are counter-movements, it does not mean that hegemony and capitalism are easily overthrown. Peter Taylor (1994, 364) gives a rather bleak outlook on those 'anti-systemic movements' in his article "Hegemony and Social Change" and gives the U.S.S.R. as an example. For a short period of time, the Soviet Union represented an alternative to a capitalist state, and showed what happened when a capitalist hegemony was challenged. However, it all came to an end, and eventually Russia became a republic. The point of hegemony is to keep everybody at least moderately happy and even then it is hard to maintain. Even if hegemony could be successfully challenged, the possibility

of finding something better to replace is low. Either those alternative ideologies do not have the need to keep everybody content or they are not able to do that regardless. The whole plot of *Fight Club* revolves around destroying the modern society, capitalism and consumer culture and everything they represent, but in the end the main character's efforts turn out to be futile. Perhaps he does not try hard enough or he should have tried another method, but the message is still clear: hegemony is not easily replaced.

It could be that there is not even any need to fight capitalism or its hegemony, or so thinks McGuigan (2009, 217) in his book:

> Still, it is comforting for critics to learn that the enemy's options are limited and may eventually run out. Marxists believe that there are indeed limits to capitalism. It is well known that capitalism is prone to crisis, that every now and again it looks as though it might fall apart and collapse. It looked that way in 1929, and in 1973 some observers thought the same. But the capitalist system has demonstrated extraordinary resilience, an impressive capacity to solve the periodic problems that inevitably crop up, and to come out of a crisis apparently stronger than ever.

It could be that because hegemonic power is not maintained by force but by balancing the needs of the ruling class and the submissive one, it cannot be overthrown by force either. It needs to run its course and crumble from the inside or until a better order appears. It does not mean that countercultures are pointless and ineffective. They are needed to pave the way for possible alternative worlds. After all, passivity is the biggest promoter of hegemony and informed and active people its biggest enemy.

As was said before, hegemony needs the majority to comply with it but there is always a small minority of resistance. Ever since consumer culture has existed, there have been people criticizing it, but the most well-known protest against it in American history is the Counterculture Movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. The idea of the movement was for people to gain back their individuality and define themselves through something else than consumption. Gabriel (2013, 62) writes in *Why I Buy* that "[counterculture] reflects a culture where self-realization - doing away with social masks so as to allow the authentic self its

autonomy and ultimately manifest one's individuality - is viewed as the highest aim of human existence and experience itself is prized over its goal". People living by the consumer culture ideals have to partly abandon their own individuality. Status is everything and other people's opinions have an impact on how a person should act and behave. Even the main character in *Fight Club* is commenting on how his life is centered on impressing people he does not even like, instead of living his life like he would want to, and even though he cannot overthrow capitalism, he is made aware of its influence and can make a choice to break free from that influence and gain his individuality back.

Counterculture is against impersonality and wants to give people their freedom from what they see is the constraint of the dominant culture, which in the case of my thesis is capitalist hegemony and the consumer culture it creates and feeds. Therefore, to a degree, counterculture is against corporations that provide society with consumer culture, but according to Shea (1973, 103), it is not corporations that diminish humanity but bureaucratic organizations. He writes that "clear delimitation of responsibility and power, such as bureaucratic structures as presently organized demand, necessarily dwindles the capacity of human beings". I believe that it is both, since even though bureaucratic organizations provide corporations an environment to operate in; in the end, it is still corporations that give people products to consume. In order to be as efficient as possible, a society needs to be structured and organized; there is not much room for individuality. In a capitalist society, everybody has their place like the gears in a clock, and if too many gears stop working together, the system is no longer efficient. The goal of capitalism is to make people consume, and in order to do that, people need to work to gain money, and the capitalist money is providing them with both: jobs and commodities on what to spend their wages. In *American Psycho*, Patrick Bateman is working for the system and keeping it going because he sees nothing wrong with dressing and behaving exactly the same as his peers. The main character of *Fight Club*, on the

other hand, does not agree with the depersonalizing corporations and bureaucracy that is forcing him to behave in a certain way to fit in.

McGuigan (2009, 205-206) writes about counterculture in his book and how, especially at the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium, movements for anti-capitalism and anti-corporations started to gain followers, and are still gaining followers to this day. The ethical side of business is still widely discussed and the problems that were brought up in the 1960s and 1970s have not been forgotten and swept under the rug. There were different reasons to stand behind these counter-culture movements. Some wanted to save the planet and the environment, some were protesting against the unethical treatment of workers, and others did not like the ideologies behind capitalism and consumer culture and wanted to stop them on principle. Especially in America anti-corporatism was gaining momentum. It is not necessarily against capitalism but more against big businesses that had the monopoly and were running the scene (McGuigan 2009, 206). People were starting to become tired of others dictating their life without them having close to any say in the matter.

2.4 Hegemonic Masculinity

In the previous subchapters, I have discussed the concepts of hegemony, cultural hegemony and counter-hegemony, and in this final part I will introduce a related concept: hegemonic masculinity. Masculinity is an important aspect of power and domination in general, and masculinity also plays a central role in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club*.  In both books, the main characters are white males and upholding masculinity is extremely important to them and a central motivation to most of their actions. I will start by first defining the concept of hegemonic masculinity, and how it relates to power and domination, violence and sexuality. In cultural hegemony, power is not obtained through force, but with hegemonic masculinity

physical force plays a big part and explains the violent acts carried out by the protagonists in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club*.

Hegemonic masculinity is a concept that explains the power structure between classes, races and gender, focusing on the dominant group, as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 832) argue. Therefore, it does not only refer to the relationship between men and women but also between men. "[Hegemonic masculinity] embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it" (Connell 2005, 832). Even men can become part of the submissive subordinate groups, if they do not enact hegemonic masculinity and are deemed feminine because of it. I am mainly going to focus on gender and class issues, because in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club* hegemonic masculinity is mostly seen between or among genders and social classes, and to a lesser degree, among races.

Hegemonic masculinity "was understood as the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832). It does not condone or promote men's dominance but tries to give reasons for its existence and also to criticize it. In the traditional and more or less archaic sense, men are assumed to behave in a certain way, and that way is the one where men are not seen as equal to women. However, it does not mean that all men enact hegemonic masculinity, but it is still something normative (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832). The level of hegemonic masculinity, how strongly men should embody it to be seen masculine, and how a man should act to embody it, varies from country to country and from culture to culture, and even from person to person. Some men do not enact it as strongly as others and some do not enact it at all. In the case of Patrick Bateman, for example, aggressive and overly sexual behaviour is one of the traits he presents to be seen and act more masculine. This is especially clear when he is interacting with people who he deems as lesser,

like women, homosexuals and people on a lower economic ladder. In some cases, he does not even have to assert his dominance at all; he automatically assumes his dominant position in relation without objection from the person. For example, in the novel, the homeless never fight back against his verbal and physical abuse.

Domination is an integral part of male masculinity and hegemonic masculinity according to Aboim (2010, 52). That domination can be seen in institutional forms, social representations and values as well as cultural norms. It is not only acted by individual people but it is supported by the whole structure of the society. There are certain expectations set on both men and women on how to act and behave that puts men in a different position. This sometimes subtle domination is not always seen clearly, because it is based on norms so old that people do not always even question them. Why should women stay at home and take care of the children? Why should women not earn as much as men? Of course, Western society has come a long way with gender equality, but the male dominant way of thinking still remains. It has been so embedded in culture that is hard to eradicate it completely. Not all men even notice that they are enacting hegemonic masculinity. Men have been taught to follow certain norms and values and as those mostly work for their favour, men have very little desire to change their behaviour. It is the same with cultural hegemony; it works because nobody notices it is there and if they do, there is not enough incentive to protest.

Similar to hegemony, also hegemonic masculinity needs to be maintained in some way. It cannot stand alone but needs the majority to support it. Aboim (2010, 42) explains her view on the matter, citing Connell:

> […] control is maintained not just through violence or coercion, but mainly ideologically, through a hegemonic culture in which the values of the ruling class became the common values of all. Any class that wishes to dominate in modern conditions has to move beyond its own narrow 'economic and corporate' interests, to exert intellectual and moral leadership and make alliances and compromises with a variety of forces, thus constituting a 'historic bloc'. In Connell's view, complicit masculinities are therefore the central allies of those holding power, which makes them a strong pillar of the patriarchal gender order.

Why are then people in the subordinate positions not protesting? I mentioned in the previous paragraph that some are not even aware of the power hegemonic masculinity holds over them, and even if they are, hegemonic masculinity still works for their favour, even if they are not in the dominant group. Of course, there is always the minority, the counterculture that objects to the prevalent hegemony, but that small minority is not influential enough because hegemonic masculinity still exists.

The men who are not in the dominant position but are still enacting hegemonic masculinity, like non-white men or homosexuals, are still part of the hegemonic system and support it even though they are not at the top. They still benefit from it even if they are not seen as equal to the dominant men. Aboim (2010, 44) cites Connell again and claims that "the subordination of homosexual men is at the centre of the gender order supporting the power of heterosexual men". As long as the conditions of the lesser groups are adequate enough, there is no reason to revolt. The same is true with women. There are women who benefit from the patriarchal system because they have taken its values as their own or the values have been imposed on them from birth. Either way the values and goals of both men and women are aligned, benefitting both of them in some way, though men more than women.

"Heterosexuality and homophobia are the bedrocks of hegemonic masculinity and any understanding of its nature and meaning is predicated on the feminist insight that in general the relationship of men to women is oppressive" argues Mike Donaldson (1993, 645). White heterosexual man is the norm, at least, in the case of the books I am analyzing, and people who do not belong to that group are in a subordinate position, like homosexuals and women. As Aboim (2010, 44) observes, "Subordinate masculinities, of which the paradigmatic example is homosexuality, may still uphold hegemonic masculinity but are deemed inferior, even antithetical to the dominant heteronormative definition of sexuality". It was mentioned before that hegemonic masculinity exists even among men if for some reason a man cannot

or refuses to follow the norm. Homosexuals are seen as outcasts because they lack one important part of masculinity: sexual relation with women.

Donaldson (1993, 645) discusses further the position of women in hegemonic masculinity: "A fundamental element of hegemonic masculinity, then, is that women exist as potential sexual objects for men while men are negated as sexual object for men. Women provide heterosexual men with sexual validation, and men compete with each other for this". Heterosexuality is an essential part of hegemonic masculinity, therefore a man cannot truly be masculine without women. Through the interactions with women, they affirm and maintain their position. However, even some women might see hegemonic masculinity and the treatment of women as sexual objects as something normal and non-oppressive, because it is presented that way in society. From the perspective of hegemonic masculinity, it could also be said that women cannot be truly feminine without men. Being a mother and doting wife are positons that are only achieve through men, and through heterosexuality. Even though it is only men who are enacting hegemonic masculinity, it does not mean that the oppressed groups necessarily object to this hegemony.

According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 833), the concept of hegemony is also used in the field of criminology: "all data reflect that men and boys perpetrate more of the conventional crimes—and the more serious of these crimes—than do women and girls. Moreover, men hold a virtual monopoly on the commission of syndicated and white-collar forms of crime". This does not mean that all men commit crimes, but statistically they do it more often than women and hegemonic masculinity can help to theorize the reasons for these crimes. Criminal action can stem from the belief that the person thinks they are above law and no rules apply to them. The crimes can be violent or non-violent, but the common aim is to advance the position of the man or assert his own dominance among men and women alike. Hegemonic masculinity is the ideology that men are above everybody else and they need to

display certain behavior to keep their dominant position. Sometimes that behavior leads to or is the reason for criminal activities. Of course, not every crime committed by men can be explained with hegemonic masculinity, but the concept can be useful for that purpose. Bateman certainly did not shy away from assault, rape and murder. He regarded women, gays, homeless people and children as inferior and he could treat them however he wanted. This could even be seen among his own peers if he thought they were threatening his position.

From sex and violence let us move to the combination of the two: male sexual violence, which is also an increasingly common theme in the 21$^{st}$ century (Aboim 2010, 140). Aboim also claims that "rape and aggression are words that very often appear in the headlines of newspapers, magazines and television newsreels, to catch the eye of the public. In many cases, the violence occurs within the home, thus revealing the dark side of family life. Once again, men are the main aggressors and women and children their main victims". Like was stated before, hegemonic masculinity is based on heterosexuality and mainly on sexual relation with women. Mostly the relation is consensual, but there can be elements of violence, too. Either the man is unable to have a sexual relationship with a woman willingly and therefore has to resort to violence or he does not even want a consenting partner. To some men in absolute domination there is no room for the other party's opinion; these men want to dominate the woman completely and that is achieved through sexual violence. The serial killer Ian Brady (2001, 35) discussed this subject in his book where he tries to explain the actions of serial killers: "Man socially advances himself invariably at the expense of others, for the pleasure of feeling superior to others". The feeling of having total power over somebody is more important than the act of sex itself. This creates a complex and paradoxical view of male sexuality (Aboim 2010, 140). Men either appear to be hypersexual and violent, but if they do not present those traits, they are seen as failures.

However, "hegemony does not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion" (Connell and Messerscmidt 2005, 832). It can be presented through violence by individual men, but mostly it is done through cultural norms and institutions. In *American Psycho*, violence and sexual violence are a big part of how hegemonic masculinity is enacted but there are other ways of showing it too, for example, the way Bateman talks to women and homeless people. By taunting, humiliating and undermining them with his words, he is able to achieve the same as with violence. Because of the ascendant position some men assume, they do not even have to use force to assert their dominance. It is assumed that men should have the control so the ones in the submissive position do not necessarily even see any reason or a way to complain. In the same vein, the men who use hegemonic masculinity assume as a default that they are the dominant group and above 'lesser' groups. Also *Fight Club* has its fair share of violence, but other ways of showing masculinity, as well. For example, the main character also embodies masculinity through acts such as refusing to follow the norms of the society and the surrounding culture. According to him, mainstream consumer culture is feminizing men and the only way to fight it is to turn his back on it. Some of his ways to do it are violent, but some are softer, like abstaining from consumption.

**3. "This Is Not an Exit": Society and Corporations in *Fight Club* and *American Psycho***

This is the first of the two analysis sections that will discuss the relationship between capitalist hegemony, which in this case means corporations, and the people living in the societies of *Fight Club* and *American Psycho* focusing on the main characters. First, I will discuss how corporations utilize capitalist hegemony to their benefit to gain profit, how the aforementioned shows in the life of the ordinary citizens and especially the main characters and what are some of the consequences of capitalism to the society. Later in the section, the ways in which people protest against hegemony are analyzed. In the theory section, I already discussed how in many Western societies hegemony and capitalism are intertwined, since capitalism is one way to use hegemonic power, utilizing people's existing materialistic needs and creating new ones. Those two are intertwined also in *Fight Club* and *American Psycho,* where the role of capitalism and consumer culture in people's lives is not so subtly criticized and the effects of capitalism on people's lives are brought into light in an almost exaggerated manner. Therefore, whenever I discuss the cultural hegemony aspect of capitalism, I will simply be using the term 'capitalism' for it since that aspect is the main focus of this thesis.

Before I go any further into the analysis, I would also like to explain what is meant by corporations in the context of the two novels. Jeffrey Clements (2014, 64) describes corporation as "a government-defined legal structure for doing business, with legal privileges that can only be provided by government. Corporations are defined by state legislatures to advance what the state deems to be in the public interest". He also states (2014, 71) that corporations are highly effective as economic tools, but that is also what can make them dangerous if their activities go unsupervised. Some of the cases of abuse Clements lists are aggregation of power, corruption of government, driving down wages, trashing public resources and squeezing out competitors. Thus, when I discuss corporations in the analysis, I refer to the companies as described by Clements, both the ones abusing the system and the

ones that are not. Regardless of whether the corporation is working for the public interest or not, the main focus of the corporations I am discussing is creating materialistic needs and trends and thus making consumers spend money on the good and services provided by the corporation. Consumerism in itself is not a negative thing but anything in excess can become harmful, as shown in the novels, because while the novels do not directly address corporations, consumer culture and the problems corporations have created are prominent.

*American Psycho* is set in the late 1980s New York, where between 1983 and 1989 'bubbles', 'manias', 'liquidity innovations', and 'fantasies ruled' (Richard Godden 2011, 854). The reader is immediately drawn into the world of a young Wall Street executive, Patrick Bateman, and from the first chapters it is obvious that Bateman is wealthy and wants that to be seen. His peers follow the same pattern where they flaunt their money to each other and to people outside and beneath their social group. In the theory section about capitalism and consumer culture in America, I cited McGuigan (2009, 89), who argues that consumption must be noticeable to show others the consumer's worth, and this is visible in *American Psycho*. Status and class mean everything to the main character and there is a strict unspoken pecking order determined by a person's wealth. It could be said that the main character is near the top of the social ladder, but that does not mean that capitalism would have no effect on him, quite the opposite. Capitalism and its consumer ideology have a huge impact on his life, for if he wants to stay at the top, he needs to play by the rules set by capitalist corporations whose goal is to make people consume. Possession and appearance are two of the most important ways of showing a person's status in the circles Bateman associates with and they cannot be obtained without wealth. Luxury commodities and services have become status symbols above all personal merits, such as an individual's skills at work or intellectual achievements in other areas of life.

Consumerism is everywhere in *American Psycho* and it is shown in the many pages dedicated to talking about brands, fashion trends, food, popular music and television shows. The topics seem hollow, but they are there to highlight how shallow Bateman's life actually is and how much popular culture and consumer culture and the corporations providing them have an influence on his life. Johannes Malkmes (2011, 99) argues that "the text's blank style serves as a way to caricature and satirize a yuppie's consumer society" and "the various topics show different attributes of life in 1980s society". Bateman is the product of the 1980s consumer culture and it has become so integrated in his daily life that he finds it difficult to function properly without it. While it might seem exaggerated in the novel, nevertheless, the behavior Bateman partakes in, such as watching talk shows with sometimes highly trivial topics or indulging himself with luxury commodities, are pleasures that most people in the West enjoy and therefore can relate to at least some degree. According to Michael P. Clark (2011, 19), taste is "the principal source of [Bateman's] identity and self-respect" which he furiously defends and "takes any criticism of his own taste as a personal attack that demands retribution". I agree with Clark that Bateman's worth, and the worth of everybody else, as well, is judged by appearance and possession only, which leads to him being jealous of people who are better off than him and contempt towards people who are poor or not good-looking. The whole novel revolves around Bateman's fragile ego and the fatal consequence that are caused by bruising it.

As was mentioned before, while Ellis does not directly name any corporations, they are made visible through the copious mentions of brand names and scenes describing consumption of both goods and services. Next, I will discuss in more detail in what way that consumer culture is shown in the novel and how much it effects and shapes Bateman's view of other people and himself. One the most noticeable signs of consumer culture is clothes, and Bateman's descriptions of them are especially thorough; with every person he meets he

notes the style and the brand of the clothes he or she is wearing and judges the person based on them. In this scene from the novel, Bateman mocks his peer because of his clothes: "Luis Carruthers sits five tables away from this one, dressed as if he'd had some kind of frog attack this morning – he's wearing an unidentifiable suit from so French tailor; and if I'm not mistaken the bowler hat on the floor beneath his chair also belongs to him – it has Luis written all over him. He smiles but I pretend not to have noticed" (Ellis 1991, 150). Poor taste implies that the person cannot afford to wear Armani or does not have any dress sense; either way they are not up to his standards and therefore not as good as him, and since trends are constantly changing, it is a never-ending and expensive competition to stay fashionable. The corporations behind such brands such as Mario Valentino, Ralph Lauren and Armani are eager to provide new products to fuel this competition and keep people consuming.

Bateman's obsession over the clothes people are wearing is almost fanatic, but it only shows how much attention and value he gives to material goods and person's exterior when judging them. Clothes reflect on people's life style and can tell more about a person than words ever could: "Brands in the 1980s might be read as the fetishist's fetish, in that as their letters move from the label inside to the external insignia, so the purchaser's perception cramps around a promissory 'life style' or 'attitude' available through possession of the brand become logo" (Godden 2011, 856). Clothes are a quick and easy way to show social status and this is why Bateman favours the expensive brands; he wants other people to judge him based on his clothes; the more expensive brands they are the better. In his mind, how much money a person has put on their looks tells everything there is to know about the person, namely that they are as wealthy as he is. He wants everybody to know what social circle he belongs to and through clothes he can also recognize if somebody else belongs to be same circle.

For Bateman, appearance and looks in general, including tan, hair, skin and physique in addition to clothes, are important factors when judging people because that is how he can discern a person's status at a glance without having to even talk to them. As he wants only the best when it comes to material goods, the same applies to looks, as well. A person who does not look after themselves is likely to be a person he does not want to be associated with. Malkmes (2011, 103) bring up an interesting notion of "the loss of identity through emulation". According to him, "Bateman, the psychopathically unreliable narrator, cannot distinguish between consumer items and people, not to mention character traits. Consumer items are put on the same level as characters, and through Bateman's perspective people, most of all his peers, only exist in the form of surface. People, human life after all, become commodities, consumer items". Therefore, it is not that Bateman does not want to see people as nothing more than objects, but he is unable to see beneath the surface and realize that people are more than their appearance, or he simply does not care if there is any personality there because it matters so little to him.

Because of the emphasis put on clothes and appearance and the rigid standards of beauty, Bateman and his peers are left looking almost identical. There are numerous instances in the novel of Bateman being mistaken for other people and him letting it pass without making an effort to correct the person. They are all copies of each other, all as young and beautiful and Bateman knows that: "Owen has mistaken me for Marcus Halberstam (even though Marcus is dating Cecilia Wagnner) but for some reason that really doesn't matter and it seems a logical faux pas since Marcus works at P & P also, in fact does the exact same thing I do, and he also has a penchant for Valentino suits and clear prescription glasses and we share the same barber at the same place, the Pierre Hotel, so it seems understandable; it doesn't irk me" (Ellis 1991, 86). Still, this lack of diversity does not stop him from trying to look better than others, but he also acknowledges that, fundamentally, they all look the same.

His circle of acquaintances all have the same mould to fit into, set by the society's ideals of beauty and what a successful man should look like.

Clubs and restaurants are used as a way to show wealth, as well, but also that the person belongs to the exclusive inner circles of the society, or that is how Bateman and his peers see it. To Bateman's disappointment, not even money could buy him into the reservation list of some of the trendiest restaurants in New York, but he needs to have connections and know the right people, too. His struggle with choosing the right restaurant and trying to secure a reservation is a recurring theme in *American Psycho*. It is not enough that the restaurant is expensive, but it has to be "in" at the moment. He is constantly trying to stay ahead of people with his knowledge of the trendiest clubs and restaurants, though not always succeeding, because choosing an out of fashion place would be an embarrassment, and even more embarrassing is not being able to get a reservation. Restaurants and clubs are eager to cater to the changing tastes of the rich because they know their clientele are more than willing to expend money if they think a place is prestigious enough, and the more expensive and exclusive the place is, the more popular it becomes among the likes of Bateman. As with clothes and appearance, also with trendy restaurants the reason why Bateman values them so highly is simply because of other people's judgement. He wants people to look up to and admire him based on his taste.

The luxury clothing stores, restaurants, gyms, hairdressers, and the bigger corporations behind them cater to the needs of Bateman and his peers, but they also help to create more needs by offering new products and services proclaimed to be even more prestigious than the previous ones. Through advertising they bring these new ideas to the customers who adopt these ideas and then forward it to other consumers, and often trends spread quickest among people as opposed to through television or magazines. In the novel, Bateman would often hear about the newest and trendiest restaurants from his peers, and his fixation on the clothes

and commodities other people possesses provides him with the opportunity to assess if he is behind with the newest trends. For example, he becomes jealous when Van Patten reveals that he has his own tanning bed at his home while Bateman goes to a salon, and immediately starts thinking of getting one himself. Bateman and his peers feed each other's need to consume as much as corporations do through advertisements. Even though commercials are never directly mentioned in the novel, Bateman's elaborate, but lifeless, descriptions of products could not have come from anywhere else other than advertisements. In one chapter, he lists all the products in the present month including such descriptions as "A new TV monitor with a twenty-seven-inch screen, the CX-2788 from Toshiba, has a built-in MTS decoder, a CCD comb filter, programmable channel scan, a super-VHS connection, seven watts per channel of power, with an additional ten watts dedicated to drive a subwoofer for extra low-frequency oomph, and a Carver Sonic Holographing sound system that produces a unique stereo 3-D sound effect" (Ellis 1991, 295). His information of commodities does not come out of nowhere, but are provided by the corporations intending to sell them to him.

Apart from his peers, there are other people that Bateman copies his need for commodities and luxury from, and one of the most notable ones is Donald Trump, a highly successful and influential businessman, the kind of person Bateman would like to become. I mentioned in the theory section how Trump was one of the celebrities of the 1980s era that idolized wealth. Trump definitely would have no struggle getting reservations at the trendiest restaurants or buying the most luxurious commodities. He is mentioned multiple times in the novel, usually by Bateman himself who is slightly obsessed with meeting him in person. In one chapter in the novel, Bateman admires Trump Tower that proudly gleams in the late afternoon sunlight, and which in Trump's own website is described as "one of New York's most visited attractions since its completion in 1983": it contains residential condominiums considered to be "one of the world's elite luxury residences, catering to public figures,

athletes, celebrities and other affluent sophisticates". Trump Tower is the pinnacle of capitalism and Trump is a good example of the benefits of capitalism and how its capabilities of making people wealthy. If Bateman sees him as his role model, it is not a surprise he is obsessed with success and material goods.

In the theory section, I listed conditions that needed to be met in order for hegemony to exist. According to Artz and Murphy (2000, 29), one of the conditions was that hegemony needs to gives people an ideology or culture to follow, one that is desirable for the ruling class, but also benefits the masses. In *American Psycho*, one culture that capitalism has given to the society is popular culture, which happens to promote consumer culture, as well. It is difficult not to notice Bateman's fixation on popular music, when whole chapters in the novel are dedicated to his detailed descriptions of music of famous bands and singers, such as Whitney Houston. They read more as music reviews one could see in a newspaper than a man passionately talking about his interest, which only shows the extent of the effect of consumer culture: he talks about everything in the same monotonous voice he describes clothes, listing only facts without any real feeling behind his words. To him consuming music is the same as consuming any other commodity, having the satisfaction to own it and know all details about it, whereas to some other music enthusiasts music is about the feeling it evokes, and not so much about reciting music reviews.

Films are another form of popular culture, which Bateman is also a mass consumer of; in the novel he often rents videotapes, either regular ones or porn, and is more interested in their fictitious world than real human interaction. Just like advertisements are giving him ideals he is desperately trying to fulfill, also popular culture is filling him with sometimes unrealistic and skewed views of the world. Shows such as *The Patty Winters Show* present him with barrage of topic ranging from highly superficial, such as an episode about a boy who fell in love with a box of soap, to profound topics such as concentration camp survivors,

leaving him unable to discern between the two and know what matters are actually important or touching and what are trivial. James R. Giles (2006, 166) points out that it is no wonder that a person "who is so obsessed with torturing and murdering others" enjoys shows such as *The Jerry Springer Show* and *The Patty Winters Show* that "exploit people who are willing to debase and humiliate themselves for the enjoyment of others". The shows normalize demeaning and humiliating behaviour towards others and are simply another product of the dehumanizing consumer and popular culture where people are reduced to objects and consumer commodities.

Glorification of materialism can also be seen in *Fight Club* which follows, at first, the seemingly average life of a middle-class office worker. At the beginning of the novel the main character's consumerism is mainly shown through his obsession with IKEA furniture and decorating his apartment to perfection, as can be seen in this scene: "And I wasn't the only slave to my nesting instinct. The people I know who used to sit in the bathroom with pornography, now they sit in the bathroom with their IKEA furniture catalogue.... Then you're trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you" (Palahniuk 2006, 43-44). His life outside his apartment is rather miserable since he has no close relationships, no hobbies and a job he dislikes; therefore with commodities he is trying to build a safe haven for himself inside his home with replaces the need for any other source of happiness. He is living through his furniture while alienating himself from other people. Similar to Bateman, he is following the trends of consumer culture as is everybody else around him; if everybody else is buying IKEA furniture, he wants to do so, too, but he does not care about people's admiration. The main character's goal is to fulfill his role in the society which in this case is consuming, a goal which he blindly pursues at first before realizing that it is leaving him unsatisfied.

Compared to *Fight Club*, *American Psycho* gives a more glamorous view of materialism with designer clothes and five star restaurants. In *Fight Club*, consumer culture is more openly mocked as, for example, the main character works as a product recall specialist for a car company and his job is to evaluate whether a faulty product should be recalled or not based on what is most cost effective for the company. If a recall costs more than paying compensations for damages caused by the defective car, it is not done: a person's life means less than the company's profit margin. This only adds to the bleak outlook the main character has on consumerism: everything corporations do is for profit and not for the happiness of the people. Justin Garrison (2012, 84) has the same idea that the main character experiences the world as "unjust, disappointing, and lonely" and that he feels resentment towards his company because "he feels forced to participate in its wickedness". In general, he sees consumerism as a way for companies to exploit people. Eventually, these feelings boil over and the main character cannot stay passive and ignore the "wrong-doings" anymore.

As was mentioned in the theory section, the aim of hegemony is to peacefully rule and benefit from people, but the main character of *Fight Club* sees the capitalist hegemony as malicious, based on his own unhappy life as a consumer. Bateman, on the other hand, works as a specialist in mergers and acquisitions at an investment firm so he is almost completely alienated from the hardships of common people as his work hardly touches people beneath his social class. In the novel, the clients and his coworkers all appear relatively well-to-do, and the only thing clients can lose in his field of work is their money, not their lives. Therefore, his idea of how society works is completely different from the main characters of *Fight Club*, because he is at the top, and in his work he only sees the benefits capitalism is bringing without the drawbacks.

There are other instances of the sleazier side of consumer culture in *Fight Club*. The main character starts to produce soap made from the fat he stole from the dumpster of a

liposuction clinic with a clientele consisting mostly of rich ladies. Afterwards, he sells the soap back to the rich ladies, which creates a juxtaposition between the luxurious life of the upper-class people and that of a lower-class person who dumpster dives fat. Consumerism is shown to be absurd and laughable, and commodities in the society are made more valuable than they actually are by corporations and people themselves. In the theory section, I cited McGuigan (2009, 116) who was wondering on the phenomenon of 'symbolic value' and how, when added to a commodity, would become greater than the price of the product. The fat that the main character acquires for free is now a symbol of wealth and a luxurious lifestyle for the rich ladies, and as long as they do not know where the main ingredient of the soap comes from, they are satisfied. Instead of merely producing commodities, corporations are producing status symbols whose status is only enforced when people buy them, trying to achieve that same status themselves. Soap would only be soap if the main character and his alter ego were not selling it as 'luxury soap', and thus creating its symbolic value. Also, Durden notes how dildos and Barbies are both made from the same pink plastic, and he imagines a company somewhere in Taiwan where both these products come down the same assembly line. There is nothing magical about consumerism and that is made clear.

Even though consumerism is displayed in a slightly different light in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club*, its consequences and effect on the main characters are equally negative: they both become unhappy under the pressure of the society. Bateman feels insecure about himself because of the constant competition against everybody else: he needs to look as good and be more successful than his peers to stay content. He appears and acts cocky, but there are several instances where his insecurities shine through, for example when he is out eating with his girlfriend, Evelyn, who compares him to another good-looking man in a nearby table (Ellis 1991, 319-320):

> "He's handsome," I admit. "Stupid-looking but handsome."

> "Don't be nasty. He's very handsome," she says and then suggests, "Why don't you get your hair style that way?"
> Before this comment I was an automaton, only vaguely paying attention to Evelyn, but now I'm panicked, and I ask, "What's wrong with my hair?" In a matter of seconds my rage quadruples. "What the hell is wrong with my hair?" I touch it lightly.
> "Nothing," she says, noticing how upset I've gotten. "Just a suggestion," and then, really noticing how flushed I've become, "Your hair looks really… really great."

Even a tiny negative comment against his hair can throw Bateman into self-doubt because his whole identity has been built around appearance and what everybody can see on the surface. He needs constant validation from other people to boost his self-confidence, but still cannot connect with them, because he does not value human company as much as he values commodities, a topic which I will discuss in more detail in the next analysis section.

The society in *Fight Club* links the pursuit of happiness with commodities; the more a person consumes, the happier he or she allegedly becomes. All the problems can be wiped away with the right sofa and the right set of clothes. In her article about masculine violence and the crisis of capitalism, Lynn M. Ta (2006, 273) cites Susan Faludi according to who:

> Post-World War II manhood held the promise of new frontiers for their sons to conquer and a culture in which traditional internal qualities of masculinity could be exercised. But in their rush to embrace the good life after the torments of a Great Depression and World Wars, these fathers bequeathed to their sons not a utilitarian world, but a commercial-ruled, image-based culture that has essentially reduced masculinity to a mere accessory that can increase a man's manliness as long as he literally buys into that market.

The more old-fashioned masculinity with men doing manual labour and women staying at home, is no longer; masculinity is now shown through consuming and appearance rather than physical prowess. However, even though from the outside the main character might look content, his lifestyle is leaving him feeling emasculated and empty inside. Ta (2006, 273) argues that *Fight Club* is a tirade against ornamental culture that glorifies material goods at the expense of everything else. The main character feels he cannot be his true self because he needs to be what the society wants him to be, and he is afraid of being the outsider or not

really knowing what other options there could be than the one offered by mainstream culture and prevailing capitalist hegemony. Also Bateman embraces consumer culture and from the outside looks like the epitome of the American dream: rich, successful, masculine and belonging to the top tier of the society. Still, this is all surface and in reality he is as unhappy as the protagonist of *Fight Club.*

However, Bateman does not make the connection between materialism and his own unhappiness and lack of self-confidence. This might be because he is moulded by consumer culture, and does not see a way out of it or cannot even imagine a different kind of lifestyle. He does nothing to actually improve his situation, but instead, his behavior becomes erratic and disruptive and he starts torturing and killing people as a coping mechanism. Bateman feels insecure because of the constant competition for status with his peers, but against his helpless victims, he is the one in charge and in control of the situation. I will examine the relationship between Bateman and his victims in more detail in the second analysis section about the effects of capitalism on social life. On the other hand, the main character in *Fight Club* eventually identifies capitalism as the source of his problems and tries to find a way out of his situation. Even though his comments about his own consumerism are all self-deprecating, he initially does nothing to change his lifestyle. It is only later with the help of his alter-ego, Tyler Durden, that he understands what his problem is and how to fight it. "'Only after disaster can we be resurrected. It's only after you've lost everything,' Tyler says, 'that you're free to do anything'" (Palahniuk 2006, 70). They take consumer culture and the corporations that run consumer culture as their targets and aim to bring capitalism down.

Durden starts by blowing up the main character's apartment and destroying all his possessions which forces him to move in with Durden in a decrepit old house, a total opposite of the 'nest of consumerism' the main character was previously living in. Durden starts the process of freeing the protagonist from the hegemony of capitalism, but there are still many

people in the society who he thinks are slaves to it and need to be freed, as well. Their mission for the destruction of civilization, and also the destruction of the hegemonies controlling society, truly begins when they form the first Fight Club and then Project Mayhem and start recruiting other men to their cause who also feel emasculated and disappointed in the capitalist society. I mentioned in the theory section that hegemony supported by the majority is not easily overthrown, and the same applies to the hegemony in the society of *Fight Club*. Consumer culture is often beneficial to the consumer, and even the main character is seduced by consumerism. He has to have all his belongings destroyed before he can let go of the idea that possession is needed to be able to fit in and be happy. The main character's fight against consumer culture is not going to be peaceful, because the majority of the people do not want to change the status quo when they are content with it.

The main character, or mostly his alter-ego Durden, chooses terrorist attacks and guerrilla tactics as a way to try to steer people away from consumerism because with the banking system and the biggest capitalist corporations destroyed, there will be no consumer culture to follow. However, at first, their tactics are fairly harmless, such as throwing strawberry gelatin at the models in a fashion show at a shopping centre, but soon they take a sinister turn and in the end Durden wants to blow up the buildings containing the records of credit card companies to wipe out people's debts. Robert Schultz (2011, 593) states in his article that

> [The goal of Project Mayhem] is not merely to engage in random acts of terror, but to carry out an organized assault on corporate capitalism and the institutional history of the American society that produced the conspicuous consumers, the immoral auto company, and the meaningless lives of the blue-collar and white-collar workers who join the fight clubs and become involved in Project Mayhem, the nationwide and secret paramilitary organization under the sole command of the protagonist. Palahniuk's protagonist is like a Nazi leader whose consciousness has been raised and who then shapes the consciousness of other alienated white guys as they follow his orders without question like mindless drones.

In the theory section, I quoted Alan Hunt (1991, 313), according to whom the subordinate class must first become hegemonic before it can overthrow the current hegemony. However, Durden knows he could never be able to replace consumerism with a hegemony of his own, so the best course of action would be to destroy the existing one completely and be without hegemony altogether. Durden has a plan of his own: "When Tyler invented Project Mayhem, Tyler said the goal of Project Mayhem had nothing to do with other people. Tyler didn't care if other people got hurt or not. The goal was to teach each man in the project that he had the power to control history. We, each of us, can take control of the world" (Palahniuk 2006, 122). He wants to bring the society back to the stone age and start anew: "It's Project Mayhem that's going to save the world. A cultural ice age. A prematurely induced dark age. Project Mayhem will force humanity to go dormant or into remission long enough for the Earth to recover" (Palahniuk 2006, 125). People usually aim towards mutually beneficial agreements, since they are more stable and there is less chance of the other party revolting. The main character knows this and therefore chooses the more violent way of overthrowing the hegemony, because in his mind violence is the only solution to ending the reign of consumer culture.

However, the endings for both books are similar: there is no exit. In *Fight Club*, the main character realizes in the end that destruction is not the right way to bring down hegemony; however, Project Mayhem already has a mind of its own and is ready to continue the plan even without the main character. He manages to get rid of his alter ego, but Project Mayhem can no longer be stopped. Once again he is caught up in something larger than himself and is unable to get out. The novel implies that as an individual it is useless fighting against organizations and bigger entities: there will always be hegemony to step in in case the original one is destroyed. The main character has to either join the cause of Project Mayhem

or go back to the materialistic way he was living before. Whichever he chooses, he will once again feel like an outsider.

Neither can Bateman escape the capitalist society. Even the last words of the novel say that "this is not an exit" (Ellis 1991, 384). Bateman vaguely realizes that there is something wrong in his way of living where everybody looks the same and when the closest he can come to enjoying life is when he is taking Xanax or killing and torturing people. The capitalist hegemony has a tight grip on him because there is no other way to go than the path he is currently following. If he were to abandon it, he fears it would mean he would be forced to become like the people he despises: poor people and people without status. Malkmes (2011, 120) has come to the same conclusion: the society of *American Psycho* is a dead end, where he will continue prioritizing consuming over everything else, and despite Bateman's cry for help, his life will continue the same; it will "keep rotating in any revolving door at any store". There is nothing else in his life except for his looks and possession and all the other things he can acquire with money. All the intangible goods like friendship and love are beyond his comprehension so he cannot rely on them or value them nor does he see the need to. The current society has taught him to only value commodities and he is unable to abandon its ideals.

**4. Search for Control: Relationships in *Fight Club* and *American Psycho***

In this second analysis section, I will take a closer look at the relationships between different characters in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club*. In the previous section, I already discussed some of the consequences capitalism has on the lives of the main characters, but now I will go deeper into the problems it causes in their relationships. The focus will be on the main characters' relationships with their friends and peers, women and other people in their lives, what they wish to gain from their relationships and whether they succeed in that. Once again the capitalist society works as a backdrop, because it has an influence on how the characters behave and interact with each other. The problematic relationship the characters have with materialism and all the difficulties that relationship brings can also be seen in their relationships with others. Both characters have immense problems connecting with others, which can be traced back to capitalism.

At the beginning of *Fight Club*, the protagonist is not shown to have anybody in his life: no girlfriend, no friends, or any other meaningful relationships. He only has his work that he does not particularly care about and his IKEA furniture. Terry Lee (2002, 418) states that the main character "substitutes a desire for consumer objects – IKEA home furnishings – for sexual desire and for emotional connection to human beings" and all this because "the free enterprise, consumer-materialist culture they live in benefits from their desiring things".  The main character meticulously decorates his apartment based on the current consumer trends that everybody else in the society is following, too, but still he feels isolated from other people. Omar Lizardo (2007, 229) also argues in his article "Fight Club, or the Cultural Contradictions of Late Capitalism" that

> [The main character] seems not to garner any enjoyment from the consumption act; it is as if some other unseen force is pulling the strings, and he is just following along. Thus in contrast to the commonplace neo-Marxist observation that in the post-industrial society subjectivity becomes the hand-maiden of consumption, I suggest that the contemporary dynamic is precisely one based on the failure of the consumerist society to produce the "subject-effect". This

breakdown, however, instead of producing restlessness and discontent, in fact produces paralysis and numbness.

The main character does what the society wants and expects him to do, but at the same time he is unhappy with his life. He lacks agency and feels that somebody else is controlling his life, while he is simply going through the motion day after day without being able to break free. His work mirrors the same feeling because, as was mentioned before, he works as a product recall specialist and profit is more important than human life to his company. The main character does his job well, but it is making him a cynic who views the whole world the same way his company views product recalls: everyone's there for the profit. He describes his life as flying from one place to another for work, wishing for the plane to crash because life insurance pays off triple if the person dies on a business trip, and all the relationship he forms are "single-serving" friendships, because he meets the people only briefly during his travels and never sees them again. The protagonists states laconically that this is his life, and "it's ending one minute at a time" (Palahniuk 2006, 29), which indicates that he is aware of the emptiness of his life and how he is wasting it away.

The protagonist's only source of companionship at the beginning of the novel comes from a support group for testicular cancer that he originally started attending to try to treat his insomnia. Crying with cancer patients finally gives him the moment of escape he wants; he does not have to think about his life, but he can finally let go. He can pretend he is dying with the other cancer patients and he feels free: "This was freedom. Losing all hope was freedom" (Palahniuk 2006, 22). However, his connection with the people there is transient, since he is an imposter among the actual victims, and the group does not actually solve his problem but only alleviates the symptoms. If he can only feel content among people who are dying, he is not truly content with his life. Another imposter, Marla Singer, starts attending the meetings, which leaves the main character unable to escape reality. Eventually, he stops going there, and he has to find an alternative way to deal with the numbness in his life.

The alternative way comes in the form of fight club. Similarly to Bateman who also uses violence to boost his self-confidence, the main character does the same in his underground fighting club. He might not kill anybody like Bateman, but the sensation of power he receives from the fights with other men gives him the feeling that he is an active agent in the situation and in control of his own actions instead of passively leading his life. After a good fight at fight club the narrator notes that "you aren't alive anywhere like you're alive at fight club" (Palahniuk 2006, 51). The main character can finally feel free of constraints of the society and regress into an animalist level of being a man without the interference or control of any hegemony. The fact that fight clubs become popular almost instantly and spread all over the country indicates that the main character is not alone with his problems.

Melissa Iocco (2007, 47) also discusses this unifying effect of fight club among men in her article:

> Bruised eyes, cut lips and broken noses produce modes of recognition, a group identity, and a sense of belonging between the men when they are outside of Fight Club. In daylight hours, fellow members nod and wink to one another in recognition and in shared acknowledgement of shared belonging and secrecy. *Fight Club* demonstrates the ways in which the afflicted body is directly involved in struggles of power and claims of 'authenticity' and identity in a social field.

The narrator can feel companionship with the hundreds and thousands of other like-minded men who feel out of place in the current society and are longing for something different. They now have their own secret club where they do not feel emasculated anymore, and with the bruises on their body they are able to show themselves, each other and the rest of the society that they are not as mellow as the society and consumer culture would like men to be. The 'nesting instinct' that the main character has at the beginning of the novel is the direct consequence of consumer culture and can be seen as feminine behaviour. All the members of fight club want a way out of that way of living, but it is only when the main character's alter-ego, Tyler Durden, appears and takes control that they are given a direction and a solution.

Keeping their new-found masculinity inside fight club is not an option anymore, but they want to take action and bring the society back to stone age, "blast the world free of history" until there is a world where, according to Durden, "you'll hunt elk through the damp canyon forests around the ruins of Rockefeller Center, and dig clams next to the skeleton of the Space Needle leaning at a forty-five degree angle" (Palahniuk 2006, 124).

The next step for Tyler Durden and fight club is forming Project Mayhem, a paramilitary organization that is aiming for the destruction of the modern civilization. It is joined by men who want to take control of their lives, but at the same time they are all under the control of Durden, including the protagonist. Alex Tuss (2004, 97) argues that "the brutal immediacy of destruction, like the brutal immediacy of the individual combat in Fight Club, liberates the narrator and makes him an icon for all the other alienated and angry white men who flock to be members of Fight Club and Project Mayhem". I concur with him that by following the main character all the other men have finally found a goal to strive towards together, which in this case is destroying the society they feel has treated them badly. Fight Club and Project Mayhem are giving them a purpose they were previously lacking and they are taught to blindly obey orders and carry out terrorist acts. Durden leads Project Mayhem as a tyrant and decides the fates of the Project Mayhem members, as well as the rest of the people in the society.

However, despite Durden's claims to create a better society, he does not necessarily have people's best interest in mind, but he has his own agenda: "When Tyler invented Project Mayhem, Tyler said the goal of Project Mayhem had nothing to do with other people. Tyler didn't care if other people got hurt or not. The goal was to teach each man in the project that he had the power to control history. We, each of us, can take control of the world" (Palahniuk 2006, 122). The members might have escaped consumer culture, but they are now under Durden's control and they will continue along that path until they die or the whole society is

destroyed. They certainly are affecting the society with their terrorist acts, but are doing so under the leadership of Tyler Durden, who is the only person who controls the future of Project Mayhem. Hegemonic masculinity deals with the hierarchies in society, and in hierarchies there is always somebody at the top: in Fight Club, that person is Durden. Project Mayhem is not only affecting its members but also all the other people, as well. Durden is pushing counter-hegemony and the destruction of capitalist hegemony, because of the huge impact it will have on society. In Durden's mind, without capitalism the society will have no civilization and will revert back to the Stone Age. When people establish a hegemony, they do not ask permission to do so and similarly Durden is not asking anybody's opinion before taking action. He might think he is making people free, but he is only putting everybody under his own rule.

Undoubtedly, the person the main character has the most complex relationship with is his own alter-ego, Durden. Without him, the main character would have never been strong enough to reject consumer culture and to form Fight Club and Project Mayhem; it is Durden who reveals to him the source of his unhappiness and also the solution. Durden possesses all the qualities the main character would like to have; he is confident, determined and masculine, whereas the main character lacks self-confidence and feels powerless against the society. With Durden, the main character is finally able to take control of his own life and with Durden, to embark on a path to destroy the hegemony of capitalism and start anew. Slowly, however, the protagonist comes to the realization that Project Mayhem and the plan of destruction are not actually his own thoughts at all. In the same manner as consumer culture was dictating his actions before, Durden is planting thoughts into his head that are not his own. Iocco (2007, 54) proposes the idea that in the same way the protagonist was part of the capitalist system, he is now part of Durden's "men's movement", a system where he does not feel comfortable either. The main character's life is a constant battle to find his own identity

and he cannot achieve that, if he is once again being controlled by somebody else's system. Latham Hunter (2011, 81) suggests that the main character has "stagnated in boyhood" which is indicated by him still having an 'imaginary friend', and he is "unable to attain a truer, more developed masculinity". By relying on Durden to direct his life, he is hindering his growth as a person and only when he gets rid of his alter ego at the end of the novel, he is able to take back the control.

On the contrary, at first glance Bateman seems to have no problem connecting with people; he has a fiancée, friends, colleagues and an active social life. However, once the novel reveals more about his relationships, the reader sees how shallow and cold they actually are. Bateman does not care about his peers or fiancée on an emotional level and only associates himself with them for status and validation for his own greatness, and he sees no benefit in interacting with people beneath his social class. His friends are all as good-looking and successful as he is and are constantly competing against each other on looks and possession. As I mentioned in the previous section, because consumer culture has been so ingrained in his daily life, it is also a major part of his social life. I quoted Malkmes (2011, 103) who argues that Bateman cannot see beneath people's surface: he only sees superficial things such as appearance, and has reduced even himself to an object. Brian Baker (2006, 73) extends the idea when he claims that not only does Bateman see himself as an object, but he also fetishizes his own body as he does to an attractive woman's body. He cannot connect with anybody on a deeper level, because he does not care about personality, neither his own or others; bodies are the only thing that matter to him.

Usually consuming is considered to be a feminine act, as is seen in *Fight Club*, but in *American Psycho* it is a way to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity: whoever consumes the most and shows it the most, is the most masculine. In the theory section, I cited Aboim, according to whom domination is an essential part of hegemonic masculinity, and it can vary

depending on the country and society. In the world of *American Psycho,* domination is done through wealth, and by showing his wealth to others Bateman is trying to assert his dominant position in the society. He does not gain satisfaction from human interaction but from other people's admiration that validate his masculinity. A good example can be seen in a scene in the novel where he is showing off his new business card: "I pull [the card] out of my gazelleskin wallet (Barney's, $850) and slap it on the table, waiting for reactions. 'Is that a gram?' Price says, not apathetically. 'New card.' I try to act casual about it but I'm smiling proudly. 'What do you think?'" (Ellis 1991, 42). Even though he acts self-assuredly, his peers' approval means everything to him and lack of it can sour his mood as happens when other people show their business cards which are more elegant than his. He does not act so self-confidently anymore and consequently his masculinity also diminishes. Bateman compares himself only to men, thus the scene is about male pride more than merely about displaying and comparing wealth; he notices women's appearance and the clothes, as well, but never feels jealous.

There is a darker side to this competition, since Bateman's self-worth and ego are connected to his appearance and possessions and somebody surpassing him in those matters would cause a direct blow to his masculinity and self-confidence. One of his peers, Paul Owen, falls victim to Bateman's jealousy and bad self-esteem. Owen is handling the elusive and prestigious Fisher account at the same company Bateman works for, which causes envy among all the colleagues. Everybody wants to know more about the account and everybody would want to be the one handling it as can be seen in this scene: "Owen stands at the bar wearing a double-breasted wool suit. 'He's handling the Fisher account,' someone says. 'Lucky bastard,' someone else murmurs" (Ellis 1991, 35). Eventually Bateman cannot cope with the jealousy any longer and brutally murders Owen with an ax. This is quite unusual, since this is the first and only time he kills one his peers instead of "weaker" people such as

women or the homeless, but it only shows he does not really have compassion towards the people he socializes with almost daily. As I mentioned before, in hegemonic masculinity, hierarchies and domination are everything, and Bateman's peers are all fighting for the top position in that hierarchy. If he regards somebody as a threat, Bateman has no trouble getting rid of them as a way to elevate his own status.

There are other examples of the callous behavior Bateman shows to people in his closest circle when he is trying to assert dominance over them, for instance, he regularly sleeps with the girlfriend of Luis Carruthers, one of his peers. However, he also suspects one of his other peers is sleeping with his fiancée which indicates that it is a widespread phenomenon in their group. They see people as objects, and thus having an affair with somebody else' girlfriend is like taking their favourite toy; it is only a game for them and a way to strengthen their masculinity. Bateman and his peers compete with clothes and possession, so why not with girls? It is a form of power play and shows the dynamics inside the group; for example, Carruthers is homosexual, or, at least, not completely heterosexual, and does not try to steal anybody's girl, which automatically makes him weaker than all his other male peers in Bateman's eyes. Everybody would like to be on the top in any given situation whether it is about picking up girls, looking good or securing a reservation at the trendiest restaurant. Bateman is not alone with his need for self-validation, but all his peers need each other for confirmation of their own greatness. The conversations they have with each other are highly superficial, as well; only about clothes, possessions, restaurants and food. Bateman does not know any of them on a more personal level, for example when is asked about Paul Owen by a detective, the only thing he can tell about Owen is that he "did a lot of cocaine" and "ate a balanced diet" (Ellis 1991, 262-261). Both are highly superficial facts and tell nothing about Owen as a person.

The relationships Bateman has with different women in the novel are the most intriguing part, because it is impossible to talk about hegemonic masculinity without talking about women, who in Bateman's eyes, are considered inferior next to masculine men in the society of *American Psycho*. Whether they are Bateman's fiancée, secretary or prostitutes, women play a major role in his life and how it is shaped.  First, I will discuss the relationship he has with his fiancée, Evelyn. Even though Bateman is able to maintain a somewhat romantic relationship with her, there is no deeper connection between the two, at least not from his side, and he views Evelyn more as an annoyance than life partner. Evelyn is only there as a trophy; pretty, well-dressed and not too smart. She is there to satisfy his sexual needs, compliment him and to show others that he is able to attract a good looking-woman. Moreover, since it is important for him to feel in control of himself and others, he also wants to exert power over Evelyn in order to feel more masculine and dominant. He enjoys torturing and demeaning Evelyn mentally, for example he gives her a urinal cake dipped in chocolate as a gift and takes great pleasure in seeing her eat it. At one point, he tries to live a normal life with Evelyn as a couple in love and they take a vacation together at a beach house, skinny dipping and cooking together, but even that does not last long:

> Everything failed to subdue me. Soon everything seemed dull: another sunrise, the lives of heroes, falling in love, war, the discoveries people made about each other. […]  There wasn't a clear, identifiable emotion within me, except for greed and, possibly, total disgust. I had all the characteristics of a human being – flesh, blood skin, hair – but my depersonalization was so intense, had gone so deep, that the normal ability to feel compassion had been eradicated, the victim of a slow, purposeful erasure. (Ellis 1991, 271)

It is not only Bateman who cannot stand the carefree lifestyle they have there, but also Evely falls back to her old habits of only talking about manicures and cosmetic surgery. Bateman knows that there is something wrong with him and his inability to feel certain emotions, but whatever it is, it is affecting Evelyn as well and everybody else in their friend group: they are all as shallow and empty inside. Eventually, he breaks up with her, when the amusement he

derives from demeaning her is not enough to counterbalance the irritation he feels towards her.

Bateman sees women as inferior and mere objects whether they are rich or poor, pretty or ugly. If he cannot gain any satisfaction from them, he ignores them, or if they annoy him, he disposes of them. One example of his treatment of women can be seen in scene where he meets his old girlfriend from university. He ends up killing her simply because she is doing well for herself and is dating a guy who works as a chef at the restaurant where Bateman is desperately trying to secure a reservation at. The girl chose the chef over him, and while any sane person would swallow the disappointment, Bateman kills her as revenge, as if she started dating somebody else simply to spite him. Sexual satisfaction is another reason he associates himself with women. He often comments on girls' appearances, calling them 'hardbodies' if they look attractive to him, which indicates that women have nothing else to offer him apart from their bodies. He can receive that satisfaction from Evelyn or from other women in his peer group, but those people are part of his perfectly manicured public persona and he cannot reveal the true extent of his sadistic nature to them. That is why prostitutes and random models he has picked up at clubs are also an important part of his sex life, and many pages of the novel are devoted to Bateman's violent sex acts with those women. He does not have sex only for his own pleasure, but also to hurt others, because almost all his sex partners end up severely injured or dead. Baker (2006, 73) states that the woman "becomes the object of (and a reflection of) a violent, pathological male desire". Women generally have no agency in *American Psycho*, and they are seen through Bateman's point of view, which reduces them to objects of his violent tendencies. There is no room for romance in Bateman's life, because he lacks the capacity to feel anything towards any person or thing except for contempt or selfish, all-consuming desire.

Bateman has the need to be in control, and sex and violence are one way to have that control. The prostitutes he invites to his apartment have to do exactly what he is telling them to do because he is paying them. He does not have that control over his peers, apart from killing them, because there is nothing he has over them to force them to act as he would like them to act. He has power over the prostitutes even when he starts acting violent towards them and they try to resist him; whether it is with money or by force, the women are completely at his mercy. Bateman enjoys hurting people and does not feel any remorse for his acts, and from his actions can be seen that violence, and especially sexual violence towards women, makes him feel more masculine. In the theory section, I discussed how heterosexuality and sexual conduct with women are important part of hegemonic masculinity, and how sometimes violence is added to the relationship, because to some men, domination means absolute domination where the opinions of the partner are not hear. For Bateman, it is not enough that the woman willingly obey him, but he wants the satisfaction of making them follow his will by force.

However, Bateman's idea of what it is to be a masculine man does not come out of nowhere. The same society that has provided him with consumer ideology also dictates his views on masculinity and relationship with women and sex. One culprit is porn which seems to be extremely important to him; Bateman is constantly renting porn films and watching them over and over again. The scenes of sexual conduct on screen resonate with his own personal sexual fantasies that he has the power to dictate and where the pleasure or the opinions of his partners do not matter. Similarly, porn is mainly aimed at men and often shows the male as the aggressive and dominant partner and female as the submissive one who are there to obey men. In my opinion, his infatuation with porn and the unhealthy image of women and sex it gives could be the reason why he cannot form any meaningful relationships with women, and instead the relationships ultimate lead to violence. Bateman even admits it

himself when in one scene with Jean he thinks "I'm beginning to think that pornography is so much less complicated than actual sex, and because of this lack of complication, so much more pleasurable" (Ellis 1991, 254). As seen with Evelyn, Bateman cannot take other people into consideration for long or deal with all the obligations having a normal relationship takes: he only wants sex without any of the commitment and responsibilities.

Marco Abel (2001, 142) makes an interesting notion in his article when he claims that "the novel's violence, in all of this, functions merely as a metaphor for capitalism's cannibalistic cruelty". 'Cannibalistic' is a fitting term to describe capitalism in *American Psycho*, since it feeds on people that uphold it, the people who keep consuming to keep capitalism running. In the same way as Bateman devours consumer goods he devours people, quite literally, since he often resorts to cannibalism after killing his female victims, an act which seems to bring him much pleasure. Since he does not differentiate between people and objects, he cannot enjoy relationships only on spiritual level, but like with objects, he needs to be physical as well, and be able to touch and even taste his partner in order to become satisfied. The murders he commits link back to the consumer culture surrounding him. Another example of the metaphor between murders and the carnality of financial world comes from Godden (2011, 862), who notes that in one scene Bateman pronounces 'mergers and acquisitions' as 'murders and executions':

> Mergers may be understood as the rentier's revenge on the worker; in which, most typically during the 1980s, stock holders, empowered by raiders, broke up conglomerates, sold subsidiaries and recentred restructured activities in the core business – thereby violating 'trust', 'implicit contract', prior labour patterns – that which constituted the socius of the workplace. Money made from merger, in that it dismembers 'human capital', necessarily bleeds.

Similarly to *Fight Club* where the main character's job is to calculate the value of human life, stock holders are treating people as mere source of capital. To Bateman people are simply an extension of commodities; they are there for him to do whatever he likes with them, with no consideration to their well-being.

Giles (2006, 163) argues that Bateman is attempting "to take control of death in order to manipulate it for his own ends" and in the same way "the affluent social class to which he belongs lives off the blood of the economically oppressed". In other words, he is also quite literally living off the blood of the people in lower social classes. Oppressing and controlling others both physically and mentally gives him the feeling of being invincible. Mark Storey (2005, 64) adds that one of the reasons' Bateman is taking his anger out on the people he considers beneath him is because in a postmodern society, what Bateman sees as the 'other' are brought more into the center; women and black people are seen as equal to white males and that threatens Bateman's central position as hegemonic male. He wants to all the other classes to be kept marginalized, so he can continue feeding off them and feel superior to them. Similarly, the main character in *Fight Club* feels finally in control, when he starts fight club and regresses into an aggressive man, who receives satisfaction from hurting others and being hurt. However, with Bateman killing somebody is the end goal, whereas the main character of *Fight Club* feels a boundary has been crossed when a person dies during a Project Mayhem operation. To him fighting is about freedom and to Bateman it is about taking somebody else's freedom away.

There is only one woman who makes Bateman doubt whether all people are only objects or as superficial as he thinks they are. Jean, his secretary, has an obvious crush on him, but he turns down her advances and often talks about her in less than complementary ways. After all, she is not as good-looking, rich or well-dressed as the yuppie girls in Bateman's peer group so there is nothing special about her. At one point, Bateman invites her for dinner and afterwards Jean invites him to her apartment, but for a reason Bateman cannot explain, he turns the offer down: "Do you want to come up for a drink? She asks too casually, and even though I'm critical of her approach it doesn't necessarily mean that I don't want to go up – but something stops me, something quells the bloodlust: the doorman? The way the lobby is

lit? her lipstick?" (Ellis 1991, 254). Before, Bateman would have been more than willing to take the offer and have sex with Jean and possibly kill her, the same way he has done with several other girls, but something stops him. During dinner he asks Jean about her dreams and ambitions and learns that she is actually a nice person with more to her person than the surface; completely different from his yuppie peers. All her compliments to Bateman have been sincere and she genuinely enjoys his company and finds something interesting in him beyond his looks and money. Her behaviour is new to Bateman who cannot fathom there could be anything under the façade people put up for the others. Jean makes him question his lack of feelings, as well, and whether the damage done to him by the current consumer culture is actually irreversible. Clark (2011, 31) states in his article that only Jean "seems capable of eliciting a response from Bateman that goes any further than the incantatory recitation of nonsense that characterizes his usual conversation, and he is repelled by his sporadic responsiveness to her". Real human emotions are peeking from beneath the surface, but they are quickly suppressed by Bateman's immaculately composed outer demeanour. He can imagine a different life as is seen in this scene in the novel: "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, 255). There might be hope for Bateman after all. However, Jean is only one person in a sea of yuppies in Bateman's life, and even though he could see something real in Jean does not mean he wants that kind of life for himself.

Similarly, also in *Fight Club* there is one woman who could change the main character for the better. The protagonist's relationship with Marla is a big part of his growth as a human being. Marla is another sad and cynical character who he meets at the testicular cancer support group, another imposter leeching off of the hopelessness of others. At first, the main character feels only irritation towards Marla, since because of her he is forced to stop going to the support group as she mirrors his own lies. Nevertheless, he is intrigued by Marla, but

lacks the courage to approach her romantically or sexually, and that is why Durden steps in to take the main character's place. Jose Antonio Aparicio (2013, 211) claims that since the main character lacks masculinity he creates Durden to be his "symbolic phallus" so that Marla can love Durden in his place, and he even argues that Durden originally appears out of the protagonist's desire to fall in love. Eventually, Marla and Durden start a sexual relationship that the main character is forced to witness, which slowly turns his irritation into jealousy. Even though the main character created Durden himself to compensate for his own lack of masculinity, it does not mean he does not want Marla; he simply feels he is not good enough. Durden embodies hegemonic masculinity and possesses all the qualities the main character has always wanted to have, and yet again the main character is reminded of his own shortcomings when Durden ends up with the girl and he is left with nothing. However, to Marla they are one and the same person, and she has always liked the main character; not because of the Durden side of him, but because she likes him the way he is. It is because of the main character's own passive mentality that he loses Marla to Durden and lets Durden control his life.

When the protagonist realizes Durden's true manipulative nature, he can finally take back control and start a relationship with Marla. Durden was incapable of love, and for him Marla was only a way to satisfy his needs, which becomes evident from this scene: "I tell Tyler, Marla Singer doesn't need a lover, she needs a case worker. Tyler says, 'Don't call this *love*'" (Palahniuk 2006, 62). Even though the main character could be said to represent macho masculinity with his need for physical violence and rebellion against tightly constructed consumer society, in the end, he realizes there needs to be balance. It is the Durden part of him who only wants to have animalistic sex, but the real him wants to see the gentle side of life, and find happiness in other people rather than destruction. Similar to Bateman, first he is unable to form relationships, but what makes him ultimately different is

that he is capable of changing. He understands in the end that violence, hyper-masculinity and bringing down the society are not the answer to his problems, but he needs balance. With Marla he can feel love and peace instead of the sense of destruction that Durden brought to his live. It is only after Marla appears that the protagonists begins to question Tyler's actions, and only after Marla confesses that he likes the main character, he has the courage to pull the trigger and get rid of Tyler at the end of the novel. Aparicio (2013, 212) has come to the same conclusion: ultimately, it is Marla who saves the main character, and by having the courage to approach Marla, he also gains back part of his masculinity. Bateman could get a glimpse of a different life with Jean, too, but ultimately, he rejects it and nothing has changed at the end of the novel.

Apart from peers and women, the interactions the main characters have with other people that have touched their lives are worth discussing in more detail. In *American Psycho*, Bateman's abusive treatment of people is not only directed towards the ones close to him, and, in fact, his behavior is as bad towards people he does not know personally, such as the homeless. He has no respect for people he sees as inferior regardless of their status or social class, but especially the homeless bear the brunt of his disdain. They lack all the qualities of hegemonic masculinity that Bateman regards as important: they are not financially well off, they do not take care of themselves physically, they are not successful, and they are not the kind of self-made men that Bateman likes to see himself as. To him homeless people are lazy, whereas he has earned everything in his life by himself and by hard work, which is not entirely true, since his job was handed to him by his father. In one scene, Bateman taunts a homeless man by asking why he does not have a job and whether it is fair that he is asking money from people who do have jobs (Ellis 1991, 125), which shows that Bateman is incapable of feeling sympathy for and understanding the circumstances of people who are not doing as well as he is. Giles (2006, 162) introduces the idea that by mocking them and

denying they have anything in common, Bateman is trying to close his eyes from his own vulnerability and the fact that there is a possibility he could end up poor, as well. Bateman also argues that he and the homeless person are "in some qualitative, objectively verifiably way, different" (Giles 2006, 162); however, nobody is invincible, no matter how much Bateman would like to think that he is somehow superior to and different from the people he looks down on. That is another reason he treats the homeless with disdain; he enjoys the feeling of power he gains from it. His own ego is so fragile that by bringing down people that are already beaten makes him feel even more superior about himself. They are not a direct threat to his self-esteem like some of his peers, but he sees them even less like humans or equals so there is nothing to gain from them and, for example, killing them does not make him feel any shame.

The worship of wealth shown through the details Bateman puts into describing all his extravagant possessions affects his perception of people who are not as financially well off as he is. His inability to sympathize with others and place himself into other people's shoes is a result of the way he was brought up and the circles he associates himself with. Bateman comes from a wealthy family as do all the other people in his circles, which blinds him to the fact that not everybody's upbringing is as good as his. He could afford to go to Harvard and his job was handed to him by his father, and in the novel he hardly seems to work at all, focusing more on going to clubs and restaurants and picking up girls. Because of his bias, he thinks poverty is caused by internal factors, such as laziness or stupidity, and not because of, for example, an illness or poor job market. As was noted in the theory section, because of the industrialization in the 1980s, the role of manual labour diminished which resulted in rising unemployment rates. Unemployment was a widespread issue during the time, but Bateman is unable to see the cause behind it, and instead, puts the blame to the unemployed themselves. Bateman thinks that everything good that has happened to him is the result of his own actions

rather than his family's wealth that guaranteed a good education and a job. His peers only confirm that bias because they are as successful as he is, so Bateman cannot comprehend how somebody could not do well in life. Capitalist hegemony is the most beneficial for only a small percentage of people, but that percentage is the most powerful one; people like Bateman do not have to worry about money when the hegemony works for their favour. The homeless are not part of that percentage and they do not have any sway of the way the society is run, either.

Homosexuals receive a fair share of Bateman's contempt, as well, partly because they enact subordinate masculinity, and are not therefore part of the dominant group Bateman belongs to. Even though they are men and might not be so inferior to him financially, he still automatically sees them as below him. Giles (2006, 163-164) brings forth the notion that because heterosexuality and male virility are such an important part of masculinity to Bateman and his peers and because homosexuals do not follow that code, they therefore "defy the deification of the phallic that is so central to *American Psycho's* abstract capitalist space" and "they seem to mock everything in which Bateman and his acquaintances believe". Luis Carruthers, one of Bateman's peers, is homosexual and greatly annoys Bateman because even though Bateman sees him as inferior because of his homosexuality, Carruthers is still as wealthy as Bateman and even has a good looking girlfriend. Somebody who should not be as successful as Bateman is actually doing really well for himself and it annoys Bateman. He even wonders why somebody like Carruthers can get a girl as good looking as Courtney, a girl in their peer group that Bateman also sleeps with. Homosexuals do not fit into the ideal of what a masculine man should look like according to Bateman and they do not follow the doctrines of hegemonic masculinity. He himself sets the par for what a man should be like in his own opinion: successful, virile and heterosexual, and if a man lacks one of those attributes, he is not a real man. Without virility men would feel themselves castrated similar to the

protagonist of *Fight Club* who is figuratively castrated by consumer culture. Homosexuals are another reminder to Bateman about his fear of being castrated and the fear of becoming less masculine in the eyes of the society.

As I mentioned before, one of Bateman's peers, Luis Carruthers, turns out to be closeted homosexual with a crush on him. He is as successful and good-looking as Bateman, but because he is attracted to other men, it makes him a lesser man; for example, Bateman takes great pleasure in sleeping with Carruthers' girlfriend to further cement his status over him. He is still above women in Bateman's hierarchy, but below what he considers to be true men. In the theory section, I discussed subordinate masculinities and Carruthers falls into this category, since he exhibits qualities that are the opposite of the qualities of hegemonic masculinity: he appears weak and shy, and more importantly, he is not completely heterosexual. Before Bateman finds out about Carruthers' infatuation with him, he dislikes Carruthers because of his bad dress sense and meek demeanour, and even attempts to kill him partly because he wants Carruthers' girlfriend to himself and partly because he finds him annoying. However, after Carruthers' mistakes the failed murder attempt for a sign that Bateman reciprocates his feelings, Bateman starts feeling afraid and vulnerable before him: "I shake my head to clear it and look back at Carruthers, who has this horrible, love-struck grin plastered on his face, and I try to squeeze harder, my face twisted with exertion, but I can't do it, my hands won't tighten, and my arms, still stretched out, look ludicrous and useless in their fixed position" (Ellis 1991, 153). Carruthers' adoration and false assumption that Bateman might be homosexual too threaten his masculinity. Baker (2006, 74) has come to the same conclusion, when he argues that "Bateman reacts badly to this uncovering of uncoded male desire for a male body, a desire that casts ironic shadows on Bateman's own narcissism and his homicidal acts." He adds that Bateman's own body has become a site of homoerotic desire in the same way he desires female bodies. As was mentioned before, despite

Bateman's cocky and self-assured demeanour, his ego and sense of masculinity are extremely fragile, and that is why he is revolted by the idea that despite his dominant masculinity a person belonging to subordinate masculinity could regard him as a sexual object.

From his interactions with homosexuals, one can see how warped his view on masculinity is. He sees masculine men at the top of the social ladder, but his view on masculinity is extremely narrow. To him sexuality is a big part of being a real man, and not only sexuality, but heterosexuality where the man is more dominating. Furthermore, in hegemonic masculinity, it is not enough that the person is male, but they also need to be white, heterosexual and physically superior to an average person, which rules out a major part of the human population. Earlier, I mentioned how pornography is affecting Bateman's views on masculinity, but it is not only porn that shapes his actions; it is the society as a whole. He has seen his whole life how people like him succeed in the society, from his school years to working life. The biggest problem is that even if he is aware that there is a life that does not revolve around wealth and masculinity, it is possible that he would not want that kind of life. As was mentioned in the theory section, people who are subjected to hegemony do not want to get rid of the ruling hegemony. Bateman is happy with hegemonic masculinity because it works for his favour; he has grown up with it and does not see any other way of behaving than according to its teachings. Even if he is riddled with insecurities because of the pressure hegemonic masculine puts on him, on the outside, he is among the most successful people in his society. His idea of masculinity intertwines with the traits of what is considered a successful person in the society of *American Psycho*, and that is why wealth and taking care of oneself equal masculinity in Bateman's mind.

The main character of *Fight Club* does not belong to the same elitist upper class Bateman belongs to, but he is not the poorest person either; he is in the middle of the social ladder. He is not the most well-off person in the society, he had a modest upbringing, but he

works hard and is able to lead a comfortable life. He has two paths to choose from: he could either strive to be richer and aim to advance himself on the social ladder or try to change the society dominated by consumer culture. He chooses the latter one, because he sees the society differently from Bateman. He feels closer to normal workers, bartenders, waiters and cooks than with company CEO's and rich ladies whose dinner parties he is waiting at. To him those are the people who have had everything handed to them, while people like him have to work twice as hard to get by. In his opinion, the current hegemony is holding people back, and keeping them in their place and because of his sense of companionship toward the common man, he wants to help and free them from the prevailing hegemony.

It is only when Durden comes to his life that he learns to oppose the ruling class, because, as was stated before, he does not really have any direction in his life until Durden gives him a way to change his life and the social order. At first, their guerrilla tactics against the rich are childish and annoying rather than actually physically hurting people, for example, they sabotage the food at a fancy dinner party they are waiting at and claim they have urinated in at least one of the perfume bottles of the lady hosting the dinner party: "Tyler and me, we've turned into the guerrilla terrorists of the service industry. Dinner party saboteurs" (Palahniuk 2006, 81). It is similar to the way Bateman mocks the poor by waiving money in front of them; a seemingly harmless, albeit threatening, action to the victim, but gives the perpetrator satisfaction and the feeling that they have control over the situation. However, as with Bateman also in the main character's case his actions turn more sinister, when he and Durden want to completely overturn the existing social order. They do not settle for simple pranks, but want to show how there is a force in the society even bigger than capitalism that has power to change matters. There is nothing personal in the attacks Project Mayhem carries out, but they are needed to overthrow the ruling hegemony similarly to the way Bateman is

attacking people he deems weaker in order to maintain and strengthen his own control over others.

In a way Bateman and the protagonist of *Fight Club* are different sides of the same coin: Bateman sees poor people as the problem plaguing the society, whereas the main character blames the top elite who support capitalism. The main character wants to bring the rich and the poor to the same level and Bateman wants to maintain the status quo, but the factor that unites them is their need for control, and not only being in control of their own lives but also controlling the fate of other people. Even though the actions of the main character might seem noble at first, because he is fighting for the common people as a kind of modern day Robin Hood, in reality he is as selfish and controlling as Bateman. His operations are not only harming the rich, but everybody will bear the consequences if society is to be brought back to the Dark Age. He is forcing his agenda onto everybody and the only people included in his project are like-minded white men with a wish for a world where they can live as truly masculine men, aggressive and not controlled by bigger entities, without the feminizing effect of consumer culture. The people excluded from the decision-making are women, and men expressing different kinds of masculinities from hegemonic. Project Mayhem thinks it is the best for the society to be without capitalism, but that is a view that not everybody shares.

There are similarities between the members of Project Mayhem and Bateman's group of peers since both are white males enacting hegemonic masculinity and wanting to be at the top of the society. Naturally, because of their different social classes their views about masculinity differ, for example, in *Fight Club* groomed appearance is not part of masculinity, but their desires are the same. What eventually makes the main character different from Bateman is that he realizes that his narrow-minded view on masculinity is not a practical way to live in the long term. It the end he understands that violence and aggressive masculinity are not the answer to change society but harmony between the sexes. When he falls in love with

Marla, Project Mayhem loses its meaning to him, because he has found something else to live for instead of destruction. He ends his crusade against the rich, because he does not need to destroy and overturn the whole order of the society and people living in it to become happy. Bateman never has this realization, but he will continue along the same path causing havoc in the lives of others and his own, as well.

**5. Conclusion**

Different hegemonies are strongly present in the societies of *Fight Club* and *American Psycho*. While at a first glance, there might not be many similarities between the lives of the two main characters, in the end they turn out to be surprisingly alike. Regardless of class, status or wealth, anybody can be unsatisfied with the way their life has turned out and insecure about themselves. If money could buy happiness, Bateman would be the happiest person on earth, but the same capitalist hegemony that enables his financial status is also giving him a vast array of problems that are not solved by money. The main character of *Fight Club* is living an average life as a white-collar worker, and although he is not rich as Bateman, he can afford to indulge himself with IKEA furniture, but he similarly feels there is something lacking in his life. Instead of conforming to the ideology of the mainstream hegemony, he rebels against it only to become dissatisfied with the counter-movement as well. Extremes are not good, neither the worship of possession Bateman is practicing nor the total abandonment of it the main character of *Fight Club* wants to achieve.

Capitalist hegemony is the prevailing hegemony in both books and it is the cause of all the main characters' problems and their biggest motivation to accomplish anything in the novels. The hegemony shows itself mostly in consumer culture, in the names of the consumer goods and the companies providing them mentioned by the main characters, and in the way all the characters have a pressing need to consume. There is an allure towards consuming that nobody can pinpoint the source of, but it is still affecting everybody in different ways. Bateman links his self-worth and ego to appearance and possession as do his peers, while personality and other non-tangible matters are completely irrelevant to him. He is in favour of the current hegemony, because he seemingly benefits from it, more than many other people. He is at the top of the society because he has adopted the ideology of the capitalist hegemony, and values wealth and things it can bring more than anything else.

The main character of *Fight Club* is similarly consuming to build a perfect life using IKEA furniture, but he is unable to embrace the ideology and sees it as restrictive and oppressive. He is an uncomfortable position, because the capitalist hegemony is the current hegemony, but it fails to satisfy his need for human companionship. In Bateman's case, social interaction is not needed, because consuming has replaced it and people have been reduced to objects that he can compare himself with. The main character of *Fight Club* needs human contact, because he realizes that blindly following the ideals of capitalist hegemony is unhealthy. The absence of human interaction makes his life hollow and empty, and this leads to him trying to establish his own counter-hegemony and replacing capitalist hegemony with less consumer-oriented culture. Unfortunately, his idea, or the idea of his alter-ego, of counter-hegemony is to destroy the existing one completely by bringing down the whole society and going back to the primitive Dark Age with no banking system, no multinational corporations and modern-day consumer culture. Garrison (2012, 94) states that "Despite their fervent belief in their power to change the world, and despite the numerous acts of violence they commit in pursuit of this end, the characters in *Fight Club* never achieve their dreams. The world stubbornly remains more or less the same". The main character realizes that he cannot change the world with violence, and actually, his life is only becoming even more miserable with Tyler Durden and Project Mayhem. In the end, he rejects the counter-hegemony, because it does not provide the answers he needs either, and is left in an uncertain position where he has abandoned both hegemonies and must now find a balance between the opposite extremes. The novel gives a lesson that a person cannot reject capitalist hegemony completely; the only way is to learn to live with it.

Even though Bateman does not try to overthrow capitalist hegemony in *American Psycho*, it does not make the novel less critical of it. Consumer culture does not make Bateman's life any better than the life of the protagonist of *Fight Club*, but he has simply

learnt to live by the rules of capitalism in order to make it to the top, or what is considered the top by the guidelines of capitalist hegemony. He is wealthier, more successful and better looking than the average person, but it does not mean he is without problems; after all, the whole novel is dedicated to highlighting how broken capitalism has made him. He has no meaningful relationships, a cracked self-esteem, and the only thing that brings him even the tiniest bit of enjoyment is murdering people to give him the feeling of being in control. The most depressing part of his problem is that, unlike the protagonist of *Fight Club*, he does not seem to realize how damaging his situation is, and therefore does not even attempt to find a different and better lifestyle. At the end of the novel, he has all the same problems as in the beginning, and if possible, they have become even worse, and that is the horror of the capitalist hegemony that also *Fight Club* is preaching about: there is no exit, no escape.

The third important hegemony in the novels, besides capitalist hegemony and counter-hegemony, is hegemonic masculinity that explains most of the main characters' behaviour when interacting with others. Hegemonic masculinity with its hyper-masculine ideology is expressed by both protagonists. The main character of *Fight Club* feels emasculated by the current society that values consuming and strict social hierarchies, because to him masculinity is about violent, aggressive masculinity, where he makes his own rules instead of following the ones of the society. After forming fight club, and later Project Mayhem, he is finally able to gain his masculinity back, but at the cost of everything else, such as having a girlfriend or starting a family. Having Marla in his life gives the main character the understanding that following the ideas of hegemonic masculinity is not an ideal way to live, if he wants to become a well-adjusted person and form deeper relationships with people. The relationship he has formed with other fight clubs members are built on hegemonic masculinity and violence and is only held together by the common cause to fight. In the same way as he abandons counter-hegemony, he cannot hold onto the ideas of hegemonic

masculinity, because that would only lead to destruction. He has to find the status quo between his masculinity and the feminizing effect the society has on him.

On the other hand, Bateman could also be said to be an epitome of hegemonic masculinity even though the masculinity he is expressing is fairly different from the one shown in *Fight Club*. Bateman is also a white male, but instead of being a menial worker with an average life, he is a wealthy businessman with a high status and money to spend on appearance and luxury items. The same society that emasculates the main character of *Fight Club* has made Bateman the ideal man by the standards of the hegemonic masculinity in the society of *American Psycho*. His world revolves around glorifying himself and putting other people down and that is a common theme in all his relationships which remain superficial, because he is incapable of letting people close to him. He sees his peers simply as competitors against whom he can compare himself to determine who is the most successful, and if necessary, has no qualms about getting rid of some of the competition. His peers are the only people he sees as equals, but everybody else is inferior. Even though some of the women in his life are as wealthy as he is, to him they are simply objects to satisfy his sexual needs. Everybody else outside these categories, such as the homeless, homosexuals or otherwise less wealthy or unattractive people, are simply a nuisance to him and only bring joy to him when he can exert power over them by demeaning them and using physical violent.

All in all, both main characters are initially in similar situations in a society run by capitalist hegemony and the worship of consumer culture. They try to gain back control of their lives by controlling the lives of others and following the rules of hegemonic masculinity to do so, and in the case of the protagonist of *Fight Club* also counter-hegemony. Where they differ is that at the end of the novel, Bateman is in the exact same situation he started from and is still unsatisfied with his life. However, *in Fight Club*, the main character grows as a human being as the novel goes on and at the end realizes the importance of balance. As Diken

and Bagge Laustsen write (2002, 365) in their article, if there is no better alternative to capitalism, it continues to be the dominant hegemony, regardless of how unhappy and destructive it might be.  The endings might be different, but the capitalist hegemony still looms in the background in both novels and the main characters continue to navigate in the current society, trying to cope the best they can.

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