Abstract

In this Master's thesis, we examine to which degree it is possible to compare the works of the Literary Brat Pack in terms of the portrayal of Masculinity and Consumerism in *Slaves of New York* (1986), *Glamorama* (1998), *Lunar Park* (2005), and *The Last Bachelor* (2009), and we further discuss how these portrayals of respectively masculinity and consumerism are linked to identity formation within the literary characters of these novels and short stories.

In order to analyze the consumerism portrayed, we use several sociological theories on consumerism to shed light on this. Mainly, we use Bourdieu and his concept of capital as this theory provides us with a more extensive insight into the literary characters than other theories on consumerism, as he also focuses on aspects such as social relations and cultural accomplishments. When we analyze the portrayal of masculinity in the literature select, we also use several theorists. In this regard, we work under the impression that 'troubled masculinity' is linked to the rising consumerism of the 80s: the decade of the debuts of the Literary Brat Pack. We work with concepts such as hegemonic masculinity and multiple masculinities, as these are new ways of understanding masculinity. Lastly, when we discuss the identity formation of the literary characters, we mainly use Lasch's theory on the culture of narcissism combined with other theories on identity formation. Lasch is considered relevant to this project, as the immediate thought is that the literary characters are dysfunctional, which furthers the hypothesis that narcissism is prevailing in these literary works.

Based on our analysis of consumerism and masculinity in relation to identity, we find that Ellis, Janowitz and McInerney can be compared as they all have the same intention to mock consumerism, display crumbling relationships, men in deep masculinity crisis, and confused identities, yet, they do it differently, as there are small differences in how they portray respectively consumerism, masculinity and identity. For example, Janowitz hyperbolically glorifies commodities in *Slaves of New York*, as the characters all wish to own apartments. The same is visible in *Glamorama*, as Victor is obsessed with brands. On the other hand, commodities in *Lunar Par*k represent guilt and evil, while commodities are not really important in *The Last Bachelor*. In this way, we find that it is impossible to consider the chosen works by the Literary Brat Pack completely alike, even though they treat some of the same themes.

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Failing Masculinity and Consumerism in Abundance: A Comparative Analysis of Identity in Select Works by the Literary Brat Pack

1.0 Introduction

We have previously investigated how the setting of the city is linked to identity formation within literary characters in Bret Easton Ellis' *Less Than Zero* and Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City,* and we concluded that both novels portray male characters in deep identity crisis because the city accentuates their bad traits. Yet, following this, we wondered if there is more to the formation or incapability of forming an identity than that; if the city also deprives these characters of masculinity because of its developing industry and commodification? We also wondered, if this is a tendency evident not only in these works by Ellis and McInerney, but in all literature written by the Literary Brat Pack. Therefore, we wish to analyze select literature of the Literary Brat Pack with a particular focus on its portrayal of consumerism and masculinity: elements that all in one way or another can be linked to identity formation.

McInerney, Ellis, and Janowitz were all first published in the 1980s: a decade that brought great change in many ways; although many of these changes can be traced further back in history. Hodgson argues that after the turn of the 20th century, conservative politicians called for a new century that would be favorable to American principles and interests, and he furthermore argues that "From the outside, America can be seen as one successful unit, but when looking at the inside, we find constant disagreement over political issues such as 'the proper role of government in American society, over the meaning of equality between individuals, races, classes, and sexes, and over America's responsibilities towards the rest of the world'" (34). Viewing the nation as one unit in collective political agreement can thereby also be difficult if not unimaginable. Generally though

> Twentieth-century America was at once stubbornly conservative and obsessed with change, instinctively libertarian and often punitive, secular and religious, egalitarian and yet increasingly unequal, confident and – as the century went on – frequently self-doubting. It was also constantly torn between an impulse to withdraw from a morally dubious world beyond the oceans, and a desire to extend the American way to as much of that world as possible (Hodgson 34).

With these political tendencies in place, we can continue to focus on the period in American political history which, because of the narratives of interest to us, is mainly the latter part of the 20th century.

The late 1970s American society suffered from an uncertain economy marked by stagflation (G. Thompson 7). Yet, when Ronald Reagan entered the presidency in 1981 with promises of lower taxes and smaller government, the economy improved. This also meant that consumerism was encouraged and therefore flourished, and the advertising industry presented the term 'yuppies' which "became synonymous with wealth, their allegiance to expensive, branded products (cars, the new cell-phones emerging in the mid-1980s, and consumer technology in general), and urban lifestyles revolving around drinking, eating, shopping, fashion and body-sculpting" (G. Thompson 12). Being a yuppie equaled working in white-collar managerial or financial positions (Weir 959). After Reagan's presidency, George Bush Sr. continued much of the same policies by focusing on reducing government domestic programs and further eliminating taxes (Duncan and Goddard 32). The 1990s saw a new man, democrat Bill Clinton, take presidency in America, and "Coinciding with Clinton's presidency, the US economy entered its longest period of expansion, unemployment fell to historic lows, inflation bottomed out, crime rates plunged dramatically, civil disorders nearly ceased, and world leaders generally approved of the change in leadership styles" (Duncan and Goddard 32).

The growing prosperity did not mean, however, that consumerism would be encouraged during the Clinton presidency in the same manner as under Reagan's leadership. The 2000s saw the re-installment of republican values in the form of George Bush Jr., but given the events of this period, his leadership came to focus largely on the war on terror (Duncan and Goddard 35). Overall, this period in American history saw technologies developed, and that meant that the

American way of life to a large part came to center on the cities, thereby beginning the metropolitan life (Hodgson 44). This development continued throughout the last third of the 20th century, where American society shifted to post-industrial, meaning that factories were outsourced and new technologies were developed (Hodgson 46).

Accordingly, there is a convergence between these economical changes, the increased focus on consumerism and yuppie culture in the 1980s, and the troubled male characters portrayed in *Less Than Zero* and *Bright Lights, Big City*; hereby introducing why this Master's thesis is relevant. Since these authorships are extensive, we focus primarily on Janowitz' *Slaves of New York* (1986), *Glamorama* (1998), and *Lunar Park* (2005) both written by Ellis, and McInerney's *The Last Bachelor* (2009).

Ellis, McInerney, and Janowitz share common features both in their writing and in their lifestyle, which is why they have been labeled the Literary Brat Pack. Being young, fashionable novelists with "glamorous, nightclubbing lifestyles and frequent appearances in the gossip columns" (Moran 74), the trio was seen as celebrities of the 1980s. Features they use in their writings as well, combined with protagonists that are "young, lonely and vulnerable in a big city milieu rife with drugs, sex, and alcohol, and where life is one long party that unexpectedly can degenerate into horror. Lying in wait are boredom, the chase for ever more kicks, and a fair dose of revulsion at life, at society, and at oneself" (Bertens and D'haen n.p). Also, the authors were all first published in the 1980s, and have continued to publish their works until the present day. Yet, in our Master's thesis, we are interested in analyzing if it really is possible to compare the works of this trio.

The novels we have chosen to analyze represent different decades and, therefore, our analysis may also reveal a change in the masculinity and consumerism portrayed. Further, our texts represent different genres since *Slaves of New York* and *The Last Bachelor* are short stories while *Glamorama* and *Lunar Park* are novels. This means that when analyzing characters in these texts, we are given different premises since some characters are introduced in detail while others are introduced peripherally. In our Master's thesis, there is a majority of novels written by Ellis; this is a deliberate decision since the short stories present several male protagonists for analysis, while the novels only present two. All of the above-mentioned lead us to the following thesis statement:

To which degree is it possible to compare the works of the Literary Brat Pack in terms of the portrayal of Masculinity and Consumerism - exemplified by analysis of *Slaves of New York* (1986), *Glamorama* (1998), *Lunar Park* (2005), and *The Last Bachelor* (2009) - and how is Masculinity and Consumerism in this sense linked to Identity Formation?

In the following section specifying our methodological considerations, we will provide a more extensive description of the methods we deploy in order to answer this.

2.0 Methodology

As our thesis statement reveals, we have chosen to emphasize how consumerism and masculinity are portrayed in select works produced by the Literary Brat Pack; namely *Slaves of New York*, *Glamorama*, *Lunar* and *The Last Bachelor*, and how these portrayals are linked to the identity formation of the literary characters.

In order to accomplish this, we start the following section of our project with a paragraph in which we clarify the historical and theoretical background of respectively consumerism and masculinity. We hereby place the concepts in a historical and contextual perspective in relation to the novels in questions, since both the notion of consumerism and masculinity became much debated at the time the three authors published their debut novels, and the debates continue to this day. Following this, we will provide a clarification of the theoretical concepts we use in relation to consumerism, masculinity, and identity, since we use several theorists, and therefore also different understandings of the notions. We will further set up the parameters within which we are going to apply this theory.

Following this specifying chapter of our Master's thesis, the analysis will be presented. We analyze the literary works separately when focusing on their portrayal of consumerism and masculinity, yet in our discussion, we join the four works in order to compare their portrayal of identity. Each literary analysis will be initiated with an introduction to the author in question, along with a more general presentation of the themes in respectively *Slaves of New York*, *Glamorama*, *Lunar Park* and *The Last Bachelor*. The introduction to the authors will provide useful background knowledge in understanding the works, whereas the thematic introductions will

provide a general overview of the same, as we are aware that the works contain various other themes than the ones we have chosen to focus on.

As mentioned, we are going to conduct an analysis of the works of the Literary Brat Pack based on three major themes: consumerism, masculinity, and identity; we will conduct the analysis by close reading the four literary works. In relation to the analysis, it is important to mention that the order of these analyses is determined by the novels so that if e.g. masculinity is most prevailing in a particular work, this analysis will appear first and then be followed by consumerism and vice versa. It is further relevant to notice that we treat the short stories in *Slaves of New York* as an entity whenever a character with the same name appears.

When conducting the analysis of the portrayal of consumerism in the works, we use several theorists, yet what they have in common is that they are all sociologists. To a larger extent than the others, we use Bourdieu and his concept of capital since: "It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory" (Bourdieu *Handbook* 15). This means that Bourdieu's understanding of capital is much broader than that which is introduced by other theorists. In this way, his theory of capital provides us with a broader insight into the lives of these literary characters: their finances, their belongings, and their social surroundings. These will further be relevant in relation to the analysis of identity.

In relation to masculinity, our hypothesis is that the troubled masculinity somehow must be linked to consumerism, and this is what we wish to explore in the following analysis. When we analyze masculinity in the four books, we also make use of several different theorists. The study of masculinity has not always been considered relevant

> Until recently masculinity has tended to be absent from mainstream academic research. Earlier studies of gender relations, in which a unitary notion of masculinity was often employed, largely concentrated on women and girls. In much of this work, masculinity was assumed to be a monolithic unproblematic entity, with patriarchy attaining a universal status as the single cause of the oppression of women. From the late 1970s a continuing debate from different perspectives within feminism and pro-feminism has challenged this theoretical position (Mac an Ghaill 1).

It is interesting that this changed in the years around the debuts of Janowitz, Ellis, and McInerney's first works, and this is why we consider masculinity relevant in relation to our Master's thesis: there must be a convergence between troubled masculinity and the dysfunctional characters the authors portray.

In the theoretical discussion of identity in the four works, we mainly use Christopher Lasch and his theory on the culture of narcissism, yet we combine it with other theorists to a minor extent. Lasch published *The Culture of Narcissism* in 1979, and introduces it by stating that "Much could be written about the signs of new life in the United States. This book, however, describes a way of life that is dying – the culture of competitive individualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self" (Lasch xv). To Lasch, individualism has changed into a war of all against all, while the pursuit of happiness has become a narcissistic preoccupation with the self, whereby he presents an ego centered individual with no care for others. In this way, we can combine our findings of Bourdieu's social capital to Lasch's ego-centric understanding of the new individual.

Lasch further stresses that "Strategies of narcissistic survival now present themselves as emancipation from the repressive conditions of the past, thus giving rise to a 'cultural revolution' that reproduces the worst features of the collapsing civilization it claims to criticize" (xv), by which he emphasizes that the narcissist is a product of the worst features of the collapsing civilization. This presentation of the individual as a narcissist signifies why Lasch is relevant in our project, as the characters in *Slaves of New York, Glamorama, Lunar Park,* and *The Last Bachelor* are highly dysfunctional. It will be interesting to see, if these characters in fact can be determined as narcissistic individuals.

It is important to note that even though we analyze the aspects separately, we do not regard consumerism, masculinity, and identity as separate elements of the novels, rather, we consider all three important parts of a person's identity, and we are interested in exploring how these elements are combined in the works of literature. During the analysis, our focus will mainly be on the main characters, but analysis of other characters will be included in relation to these,

when relevant. The four works of literature will be compared and contrasted throughout the entire project.

However, we are also interested in broadening our analysis to all the works produced by Janowitz, McInerney, and Ellis, which is why we have included a section in which we compare our findings to analyses of the works which we have not investigated. In this way, we will be able to discover whether our findings are evident in all of the works written by the Literary Brat Pack. Also, we will be able to detect, whether the works of each author resemble a development. With these methodological parameters set, we now proceed to the section that clarifies the theories and concepts, we will use in this Master's thesis.

3.0 Clarification of Concepts

The three central themes we focus on in this Master's thesis have a basis in several fields of study, and are discussed by many different researchers. In the following paragraph, we therefore present a definition of the terms as well as a clarification of how we plan to put them into practice.

3.1 Masculinity

3.1.1 Historical Introduction to Masculinity

Previously, we have presented the main ways in which we are going to analyze masculinity, masculine behavior, or the absence hereof in *Slaves of New York, Glamorama, Lunar Park,* and *The Last Bachelor*, but before we begin the actual analysis, further boundaries for how the concept historically has developed must be established. In the following paragraph, we therefore place the concept of masculinity in the historical and socio-cultural context we need for the full scrutiny of the literary works chosen. Mac an Ghaill explains how the idea of masculinity is broad yet in many ways unclear and uncharted, and that is the main reason why a clarification is needed (1). What follows is therefore an overview of the concept of masculinity which focuses on the masculine not only in light of its supposed binaryness to the feminine.

The very idea of masculinity is old and has changed through time. In fact, both 'manly' and 'manliness' are much older words than 'masculinity' itself; "'being manly' had notions of godliness and Christian virtue during the nineteenth century and early 1900s" (Whitehead 14), but "by the end of the nineteenth century an idealized version of masculinity – encompassing physicality, virility, morality and civility – had emerged to some prominence, there was no one clear and

absolute definition of what being a man meant" (Whitehead 14). Looking at the theory surrounding the concept of masculinity therefore also means considering the changing meanings being masculine has encompassed over time – until we reach a clear idea of how we are going to utilize the essences in the following analysis. As seen from the quotation above, we encounter many changes in the idea of masculinity from the late nineteenth century and up until today; accordingly, this is the period, we will focus on. At this point, it is vital to stress one more point made by Whitehead, as he argues that there is historical fluidity to the concepts of manly; we are therefore not to view the development as a linear movement (17). This notion is supported by Kimmel, as he argues that "Putting manhood in historical context presents it differently, as a constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our relationship with ourselves, with each other, and with our world. Manhood is neither static nor timeless. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it's socially constructed" (5).

Kimmel defines the essence of masculinity, as he argues that manhood is a quest for escaping domination by dominating others instead (7). He connects this tendency as well to the early part of the nineteenth century, and adds that: "In large part, it's other men who are important to American men; American men define their masculinity, not as much in relation to women, but in relation to each other" (7). These are mainly sociological aspects, and we also need to take into account cultural and historical changes that occur; mainly the industrial revolution and the ever-increasing following technological progress. Kimmel stresses that America became an increasingly urban society, and that

> Rapid industrialization, technological transformation, capital concentration, urbanization and immigration – all of these created a new sense of an oppressively crowded, depersonalized, and often emasculated life. Manhood had meant autonomy and self-control, but now fewer and fewer American men owned their own shops, controlled their own labor, owned their own farms. More and more were economically dependent, subject to the regime of the time clock (83).

By stressing emasculation and lack of autonomy, Kimmel expresses the widely consented idea of a masculinity in crisis – an element we will focus further on in the analysis of the four literary works.

We now move up to the 1950s, where Whitehead explains that the theoretical foundation for 'gender functionalism' has its roots. Gender functionalism is the idea that men and women follow certain social patterns on an essentially biological level for the greater good of an ordered society. That is, we take on certain roles to make the society we inhabit most functional (Whitehead 18). At the same time, it is evident that gender functionalism is also the root of the still prevalent idea that gender is a social construct – independent from whether this is considered negative or not.

The 1960s and 1970s were centuries of great revolt and change: “In the late 1960s, in the wake of the civil rights movement, and with the rise of the women’s liberation, gay liberation, and the increasing visibility of ethnic and racial diversity on the American scene, white men begin to be decentered” (Robinson 2). What this means, is that with the increased focus on defining the woman as something apart from the man's other, theorists overlooked the definition of what it actually means to be male or masculine. Robinson further states that normative masculinity is not a simple construction, but “On the one hand, the forced embodiment of whiteness and masculinity is often represented as a violence; on the other, there is evidence of an undeniable attraction towards a more fully embodied, particularized identity on the part of white men ... The power to represent the normative must be constantly rewon” (4). She therefore also supports the previously mentioned idea of masculinity in crisis by stating that

> The idea that dominant masculinity is ‘in crisis’ is evidenced in widely divergent discursive registers ... From the late sixties to the present, dominant masculinity appears to have suffered one crisis after another, from the urgent complaints of the ‘silent majority’ following the 1968 presidential election, to the men’s liberationists call for rethinking masculinity in the wake of the women’s movement in the 1970s, to the battles over the cultural authority of ‘dead white males’ in academia, to the rise of a new men’s movement in the late 1980s (5).

The 1980s was a decade which continued to see social change which affected the perception of the masculine: “during the 1980s, particularly, as a result of feminist, gay, and lesbian writing, and AIDS activism, the changing nature of men's lives and their experiences were much debated within

a range of literatures, drawing upon sex-role, psychoanalysis and gender and power theories" (Mac an Ghaill 2), which also means that the study of changing masculinity is a mixture of many different fields of study. Kimmel adds to this that American men in the 1980s were more confused about masculinity than ever before; as a result they attempted to stress hyperbolic ideas of masculine behavior to regain a sense of manhood -

> But the manhood regained under President Reagan and Bush was the compulsive masculinity of the schoolyard bully, defeating weaker foes such as Grenada and Panama, a defensive and restive manhood, of men who needed to demonstrate their masculinity at every opportunity. Men who feel powerful in their lives do not need to wear 'power ties' or eat 'power breakfasts' or 'power lunches' as did yuppies arbitrageurs in the 1980s. Power is not something to be applied like a fashion accessory; it is both an inner confidence and security, as well as referring to a real hierarchical position. This kind of power American men still did not feel (Kimmel 292).

As this attempt of steering masculinity out of its crisis did not work, new marks of attention were sought; namely an attack on the wimp: "'Real Men' hated wimps because they were so obeisant, as devoted as simpering puppies and just about as sexually compelling" (Kimmel 294), and 'real' men were afraid to be perceived as wimps.

Kimmel also offers insight into how the idea of masculinity has been seen from the 80s and up until today: "As they sally forth into the urban jungle, today's middle-class men make themselves resemble their adventurous forbears through their fashionable clothes and masculinizing accessories … if manhood does not come from within, perhaps it can be worn" (310). Here, Kimmel also makes a connection between consumerism and troubled masculinity.

Throughout the many changes in the perception of masculinity, whether considered in crisis or not, one thing seems clear: "The definition of dominant social constructions of masculinity can be characterized as a form of hegemony. Derived from an analysis of class relations, hegemony is that sociocultural dynamic through which a dominant group maintains a privileged position" (Moffatt 7). However, this will be elaborated in the following section which clarifies the theory we have chosen to use in relation to masculinity.

3.1.2 Theoretical Clarification of Masculinity

Máirtín Mac an Ghaill in *Understanding Masculinities – Social Relations and Cultural Arenas* opens up a debate on masculinity by declaring that although it is a field of study rooted in many different areas, the topic is widely under-defined and overlooked. He claims, that masculinity generally has been a small part of feminist studies; thereby defining the male as the oppressor and everything the woman is not instead of discussing masculinity in its own right. He furthermore proposes that "A fragmentary literature has begun to suggest a more complex conceptualization of masculinity. Most specifically there has been a shift to the notions of hegemonic masculinity and multiple masculinities" (1-2).

That notion is supported and specified by Ken Moffatt in *Troubled Masculinities: Reimagining Urban Men*, as he states that

> In spite of the notion that multiple masculinities are not only possible but perhaps even preferable, one troubling legacy of masculinity is its tendency to be socially constructed as a singular, irrefutable, and unchangeable entity. Certain forms of masculinity are always more valued than others. The political purpose of expressing masculinity is to create a dichotomous relationship to the feminine (7).

In other words, socially dominant structures have created a hegemonic image of what it means to be male which there is a tendency for all of masculinity to be measured against. In the following analysis of *Slaves of New York*, *Glamorama*, *Lunar Park* and *The Last Bachelor*, it is therefore important that we attempt to keep an open mind with regard to what is considered masculine and masculinity in all of the novels and collections of short stories respectively.

Moffat further states that "Gender is both constitutive (constructing the limit of what it is to be male) and productive (creating practice for the production of masculinity) and is enacted through daily expectations and everyday activities" (13), giving us the idea that it is the general and repeated actions of our characters we need to analyze in order to determine what is considered masculine in each of our works of literature. With this in mind, any pre-constructed notions of what it means to be male cannot be disregarded as some stereotypes might be

displayed in works such as ours: “Certain gendered forms, such as athlete or warrior, continue to be favoured, their attendant desires and subjectivities considered superior to other male expressions” (Moffat 8). Moffat offers further explanations for what is typically male:

> Silence has historically been associated with the archetype of the western male. Popular images of men, such as movie stars Gary Cooper and Clint Eastwood, have represented silence as a singular, stoic attribute, indicating strength. Silence has also been associated with an idealized image of masculinity: the 'strong, silent type'. In fact, there are many kinds of masculinity (42);

offering us something to look for in terms of whether or not our characters are archetypical males.

In *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions,* Stephen M. Whitehead adds to this idea of archetypical masculinity, as he states that “In what might be termed the 'everyday world', those behaviours of males that are violent, dysfunctional and oppressive are frequently excused or explained away as 'natural' masculine behaviour, being understood in common-sense terms as fixed and, thus, as an inevitable aspect of social 'reality'” (8). He furthermore states that both men and women have generally been considered unitary identities resulting in “Gender stereotypes [that] are rooted in dualisms such as passive/assertive, strong/weak, irrational/rational, gentle/forceful, emotional/distant … and, as such, form a significant part of our everyday language and understanding” (10). Because of these understandings, people are forced to undergo gender-appropriate behavior, and the same patterns of what is considered male and female are therefore visible in society, and should be determinable through the analysis of our selected works. James Penner in *Pinks, Pansies, and Punks: The Rhetoric of Masculinity in American Literary Culture*, agrees with this notion and adds to the matter that in literary studies, these masculine qualities are often hyperbolically presented (21).

In *Manhood in America*, Kimmel to a large extent agrees with what has so far been presented concerning masculinity, but he adds some nuances to the cultural, masculine experience by arguing that

> Manhood is less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us, having power or control over us. Throughout the American history American men have been afraid that others will see us as less than manly, as weak, timid, frightened. And men have been afraid of not measuring up to some vaguely defined notions of what it means to be a man, afraid of failure (7).

and he therefore believes that the self-made man is the model of male behavior in America (16-17).

3.2 Consumerism

3.2.1 Historical Introduction to American Consumerism

Consumerism is a vital part of Americans' lives, alluding to notions such as the 'American Dream' and the 'American way of life' (McGovern 3). McGovern specifies that the Americans' "prodigious buying appetite is the lifeblood of the United States's economy and a major force worldwide. Material abundance, realized in thousands of goods, services, and experiences, symbolizes the United States around the world and is the hallmark of American everyday life" (2), and in this way, he grounds the importance of consumerism in American society today. Yet, the history of consumerism in America has its beginning centuries ago.

Several historians claim that consumer societies emerged in Europe as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and studies reveal that "Americans certainly had been purchasing ready-made consumer goods for decades" at that time (McGovern 10). However, McGovern argues that during the industrialization: "Rapid demographic, economic, and institutional growth, along with technological, intellectual, and material changes, fueled the United States's transition to a complex bureaucratic state, an advanced industrial economy, and a modern consumer culture" (10). He elaborates that "only between 1880 and 1930 did Americans come to depend on the commercial marketplace, with few feasible alternatives, for the necessity of daily life" (10): Americans "used the mass market to make their daily lives, from personal hygiene to communal leisure. People learned to buy brand-name, trademarked commodities and to adopt new products and behaviors sold through a dizzying array of emporia and media" (McGovern 3).

Many support the theory that consumerism emerged as a consequence of industrialization, since it was "seen as responsible for the spread of large quantities of standardized commodities, made accessible to ever-larger segments of the population" (Sassatelli 14). Sassatelli concludes that "consumer society can be conceived of as a *cultural* response which logically follows a more fundamental *economic* transformation" (14).

Changes in class followed industrialization and increased consumerism since "The introduction of rationalization, new methods of production, and a more effective division of labor in the United States in the early 1900s was achieved by greater production; by reducing the price of the product, more social classes were now to be won over to the cause of consumerism" (Wyrwa 7). McGovern emphasizes that "during the economic boom of the 1920s, the so-called New Era saw brand goods embraced throughout the American middle class and make inroads in the working class as well" (McGovern 3), and this was the beginning of the development of the throwaway consumer society (Wyrwa 9).

During the Depression, consumers became central to the political and social order: the economy "depended on workers' producing goods at adequate wages and sufficiently low prices to enable them to purchase what they made" (McGovern 3-4). In the prosperous post war years "the United States was unmistakably a society defined by and dedicated to consumer plenty for all. Being an American meant being a consumer" (McGovern 4). Yet, consumerism was criticized "for most of the twentieth century as leading to alienation, waste and selfish materialism" (Trentmann 1): that is until the 1970s and 1980s. During these decades consumption "appeared in a new, positive light. It was hailed as a source of creativity and meaning central to social relations and identity formation" (Trentmann 1). In this way, we can bridge the gap between consumerism and identity which our Master's thesis is concerned about

Consumerism remains, as mentioned previously, central to Americans: even on a psychological level. Dittmar explains how Americans "value and buy them [consumer goods] as means of regulating emotions and gaining social status, and as a way of acquiring or expressing identity and aspiring to an 'ideal self'" (2), and Featherstone elaborates that "One's body, clothes, speech, leisure pastimes, eating and drinking preferences, home, car, choice of holidays, etc. are to be regarded as indicators of the individuality of taste and sense of style of the owner/consumer" (92). Having thus provided the historical background for the notion of

consumerism, we will now proceed to an introduction to the theoretical fields which we deploy in our analysis.

3.2.2 Theoretical Clarification of Consumerism

In *Consumer Culture, Modernity and Identity*, Nita Mathur attempts to define the roots of what we understand as consumerism today, as she argues that in the wake of the recession, a new group of wealthy, the super-rich, has emerged. Because of tax havens, offshore financial services, and an expanding range of digital communication, a new type of mobile lifestyle with increased wealth has been made possible: "The leading representatives, along with the global billionaires who are found in the World Wealth list, feature prominently in the business and popular press, television and Internet" (Mathur 3-4). We take this under consideration in our analysis because, although not exactly billionaires, many of the characters we explore do tend to have a lot of money between their hands, or to travel in the circles of billionaires. She further addresses the cultural roots of consumer culture by noting some societal and ideological differences in the view on consumption as she states that in puritan, communist or such societies "luxury and excessive consumption were deemed wasteful and frivolous and not to be manifested in public. In other societies, the display of wealth may have been tolerated, but highly circumscribed with strong prohibitions, or social sanctions, on its movement and transformation into more liquid forms such as money" (Mathur 6).

Daniel Miller reveals, in *Consumption: Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences,* a less ideological and more pragmatic look on consumerism, as he suggests that consumers value products to a high extent – they consider them parts of themselves or an extension of the self. The sense of self needs support as it is fragile, and commodities can offer this support, thereby, making the consumers what they own (D. Miller 180). Loss of possessions can therefore also mean the loss of self; this can require adaptation, and might even call for a period of mourning (D. Miller 187). Lastly, Miller argues that the key to understanding consumerism is to understand the constant need for desires – the need for novelty is constant as the fulfillment of one need requires the establishment of a new desire. You therefore constantly make the consumers prefer the new to the old (D. 246).

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman supports this notion as he states that our society is built on consumerism, so you become part of society by your ability to consume (*Globalization* 79-80). And he further adds that "Ideally, nothing should be embraced by a consumer firmly, nothing should command a commitment till death do us part, no needs should be seen as fully satisfied, no desires considered ultimate" (Bauman *Globalization* 81).

In *Consumer Culture, Identity and Well-Being: The Search for the 'Good Life'*, Helga Dittmar supports the social importance of consumerism, as she stresses that consumerism centers on socializing and socialization (2). Adding to these ideas of consumerism, we also take into consideration Pierre Bourdieu's notion of capital as this extends the more narrow, economic concept considerably. Generally, Bourdieu's theory on capital is about power structures and how social order is maintained and reinforced, and he explains this by arguing that "Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its "incorporated," embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor" (*Handbook* 15). In the shortest and most simple manner

> Depending on the field in which it functions, and at the cost of the more or less expensive transformations which are the precondition for its efficacy in the field in question, capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility (Bourdieu *Handbook* 16).

Both cultural and social capital are then given further categorizations:

> Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural

> goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee (Bourdieu *Handbook* 17).

While social capital is explained as follows: social capital is basically dependent on membership of a group

> which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. These relationships may exist only in the practical state, in material and/or symbolic exchanges which help to maintain them. They may also be socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name (the name of a family, a class, or a tribe or of a school, a party, etc.) and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them; in this case, they are more or less really enacted and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges (Bourdieu *Handbook* 21).

Having introduced thoroughly the theoretical concepts of consumerism and masculinity, we will now move on to present the concepts we use in relation to the discussion of identity.

3.3. Theoretical Clarification of Identity

Donald Hall defines, in *Subjectivity,* the notion of identity as “a particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that, in short- or long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being” (3). He separates the notion of identity from subjectivity which he stresses “implies always a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity, at the same time allowing a myriad of limitations and often unknowable, unavoidable constraints on our ability to fully comprehend identity” (Hall 3). Hall notes that this consciousness about identity is a result of the time we live in, since: “we are commonly asked to rethink, express and explain our identities” (1). According to Hall “We are more freed from social roles, and therefore also not pinned down to become any one

particular thing. We have more possibilities than ever before" (2). He elaborates that it is up to the individual to make the right choice (2), yet, at the same time, Hall does not understand identity as something you can create freely since "We are widely led to believe that we have the freedom and ability to create and re-create our 'selves' at will, if we *have* the will, but at the same time are presented with a suspiciously narrow range of options and avenues that will allow us to fit comfortably into society and our particular gendered, regional, ethnic, sexual subset of it" (1).

In *Modernity and Identity*, Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman, agree that identity has become fluid. They argue that identity previously was static: "you became what you were born to be because the possibilities for change were small if not non-existent" (Lash and Friedman 141), yet, with the arrival of the modern and postmodern world, "people were more mobile and so was the identity" (Lash and Friedman 141). Lash and Friedman stress that "the bounds of what is possible continuously expand as there are more possible identities" (141), which corresponds with Hall's statements. Lash and Friedman continue to discuss the disadvantages of this fluid identity, as they believe it creates an anxiety "For one is never certain that one has made the right choice, that one has chosen one's 'true' identity, or even constituted an identity at all" (142). They elaborate that the modern individual "is aware of the constructed nature of identity and that one can always change and modify one's identity at will" (Lash and Friedman 142). Hereby, Lash and Friedman add to Hall's claim that the individual is conscious about its identity formation.

Christopher Lasch introduces a theory of narcissism that underlines Hall, Lash and Friedman's claim that a change in society has marked a change in the understanding of identity. Yet, Lasch states that these changes have had a negative effect on identity formation. Lasch describes in *The Culture of Narcissism* a way of life that is diminishing; giving way to egocentrism and a narcissistic preoccupation with the self (xv). So, according to Lasch, the societal changes have paved the way for a narcissistic personality.

Lasch builds his theory of narcissism on psychoanalytical discoveries by Freud, and "These discoveries in turn made possible an understanding of the role of object relations in the development of narcissism, thereby revealing narcissism as essentially a defense against aggressive impulses rather than self-love" (32). Hereby, Lasch deviates from many other theorists in his understanding of narcissism, since he does not understand it solely as selfishness (33). Instead, to Lasch, "Narcissism appears realistically to represent the best way of coping with the

tensions and anxieties of modern life, and the prevailing social conditions therefore tend to bring out narcissistic traits that are present, in varying degrees, in everyone" (50). Lasch argues that the narcissist "depends on others to validate his self-esteem" (10), which results in "an escalating cycle of self-consciousness – a sense of the self as a performer under the constant scrutiny of friends and strangers" (90). In this case, Lasch agrees with Hall, Lash and Friedman, that the modern individual is highly self-conscious about his/her identity.

Lasch elaborates that to the narcissist "Reality thus presents itself,… as an impenetrable network of social relations – as 'role playing,' the 'presentation of self in everyday life'" (91). Lasch hereby underlines a superficiality in the construction of identity which is linked to his idea of consumerism: "To the performing self, the only reality is the identity he can construct out of materials furnished by advertising and mass culture, themes of popular film and fiction, and fragments torn from a vast range of cultural traditions" (91). This quote also reveals why we have chosen to combine Lasch with theories of consumerism. All of these theories and concepts will be deployed in the following analyses of the four works.

4.0 Analysis

4.1 Analysis of *Slaves of New York*

Having thus presented the historical and theoretical frame to the concepts we use in this Master's thesis, we will now proceed to the analysis of *Slaves of New York*. Before we begin the actual analysis, though, we will shortly introduce Janowitz along with a general introduction to the collection of short stories that will be the focal point of the analysis.

4.1.1 Introduction to Tama Janowitz and *Slaves of New York*

As the sole female in a (brat) pack of men, Tama Janowitz (1957) appears sturdy and independent, and this impression is by no means lessened by her, at the time, voluminous, black hair and bright, red lips. In the 1980s the Literary Brat Pack was part of the celeb-culture and Janowitz was no exception: "She was hip, sophisticated. She knew Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat" (Young 150). Yet, despite her status and the parties it brought, she managed to balance it with her career: "Janowitz was Lifestyle incarnate – you could be cute and intellectual and celebrated and rich all at once and still have credibility" (Young 151).

Janowitz debuted her literary career in 1981 with the novel *American Dad,* which was labeled "new-wave" and "postmodern" by reviewers (Young 151), and she has written several pieces since – both fiction and non-fiction. Her fictional works following her debut counts: *Slaves of New York* (1986), *A Cannibal in Manhattan* (1987), *The Male Cross-Dresser Support Group* (1992), *By the Shores of Gitchee Gumee* (1996), *A Certain Age* (1999), *Peyton Amberg* (2003), and *They is Us* (2008). Some of the novels echo the life of Janowitz herself: she was born in San Francisco and raised in Massachusetts by her parents, who worked as respectively a poet and a psychiatrist: occupations that the parents of the protagonist in *American Dad* also fill (Prince 39). Further, Janowitz had a troubled relationship with the aspiring painter Ronnie Cutrone, whom she moved in with being broke herself (Prince 40). The resemblances to the story of Eleonora and Stash in *Slaves of New York* are numerous, yet Janowitz teasingly says in an article "that what is fact and what is fiction may forever be confused in *Slaves"* (Prince 39). This confusion between fact and fiction is also pervading in the works of Ellis and McInerney.

Whether autobiographical or not, her characters share many features: "The protagonists in her stories share with her a shyness and a sense of always being out of place. Although they try in earnest to fit it, they put on the wrong clothes or say the wrong thing or fail to grasp the subtle messages other people send their way" (Prince 38). Her portrayal of uneasy characters is linked to the milieu they inhabit: "Without ever taking themselves too seriously, her characters are alternately befuddled and intimidated by the daily emotional and intellectual obstacle course that is Janowitz's New York" (Prince 38-39).

Janowitz herself expresses that her strength is to be "funny about the social conditions and mores of the time we live in" (Prince 41). Hereby, she reveals that she is interested in the present and the issues it poses, and this truly is evident in *Slaves of New York* as the following thematic introduction to the short stories reveals.

Slaves of New York

In 1986, Janowitz published *Slaves of New York*: a collection of intertwined short stories. As the title indicates, the stories feature adolescents trying to make it in the tough milieu of New York - in short, they are chasing the American Dream. *Slaves of New York* presents various personalities; painters, prostitutes, scammers, jewelry designers, gallery-owners, anorectics etc. Everyone

leading pitiful lives trying to become rich and/or famous in order to obtain the ultimate goal: an apartment and an extravagant lifestyle.

Two characters in particular reoccur in the stories: Eleonore and Marley Montello. Eleonore is a struggling, insecure jewelry designer who is exploited by men, especially her boyfriend Stash. Marley thinks of himself as a self-assured, upcoming painter who, despite his confidence, does not seem to be appreciated for his art. As evident in particular with Eleonore and Stash, this narrative reveals a theme of unfaithfulness. Stash is continuously unfaithful, and Eleonore also initiates the beginning of an affair. The short stories do not reveal any relationships where both parties seem genuinely in love. This is linked to a theme of exploitation: Eleonore exploits Stash since he is her only option for accommodation. Marley exploits his art-dealer to become famous. Melinda is exploited by a homeless man who wants her apartment (Janowitz 225). Fred exploits young, naive girls in order to feel pleasure (Janowitz 56). It hereby becomes clear that all characters strive for money and stardom.

Inevitably, this makes consumerism and celebrity a theme. In *Slaves of New York*, the focus on celebrities is a way to accentuate these characters' obsession with fame. This is particularly pronounced in the chapter "You and the Boss" (Janowitz 36), where a female character allegedly lobotomizes Bruce Springsteen's wife in order to take her place, thinking life as the wife of a celeb is perfect. In the end, she discovers that it is not as fun as expected, epitomizing that the characters' strive for fame and money will not be satisfied if they obtain these goals. "You and the Boss" underlines another theme that is dominant in Janowitz' short stories: a confusion between the real and the imagined, which may be grounded in the excess of parties, drugs, and alcohol.

The short stories vary in style of narration as both 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person narrators are introduced; adding to the multiplicity of the characters the reader is presented to. It also adds to the hectic feeling the city and its requirements invoke in these characters. Also, the narrators narrate with an indifferent voice, perhaps with the exception of Marley, as he reveals that his sister committed suicide in "Ode to Heroine of the Future" (Janowitz 245)– though this scene is not utterly emotional, it contains a remembrance of the hours before her death, giving an impression of having meaning to Marley. This is underlined by the chapter title. Having thus provided useful background knowledge about Janowitz, and a more general knowledge about the themes in *Slaves of New York,* we will now delve into an elaborate analysis of the themes of

consumerism and masculinity: we will analyze, how each theme is portrayed in Janowitz' short stories.

4.1.2 Consumerism in *Slaves of New York*

In the historical introduction to consumerism in America, we noted how the economy and consumerism boomed in the 1980s, among others because of government encouragements. Janowitz published *Slaves of New York* in 1986 – in the beginning of this consumer madness – and money and material goods are indeed important issues in these short stories. Yet, instead of portraying the super-rich (Mathur 3), in the same way as McInerney and Ellis often do, Janowitz here portrays the exact opposite: struggling, poor artists, jewelers, and gallery owners. However, Mathur expresses that "There is a cultural fascination with wealth" (16), and this is indeed tangible in several of the characters in *Slaves of New York,* since they all in one way or another aspire to make it in New York and become part of the super-rich.

This fascination seems most profound in Eleonore: she was raised with a certain lifestyle that was deliberately primitive; living off the land with no TV. However, as an adult she moves to New York, and defies this lifestyle: "Well, I had also made a choice: I would rebel against my parents and join the rat race. I wanted things, and the things I wanted weren't inexpensive" (Janowitz 125). Yet, not all characters in *Slaves of New York* are fascinated with wealth. Cora has always been poor (Janowitz 20), and when exposed to Ray's extravagant lifestyle her response is: "It made me nervous to think I wasn't envious of this sort of lifestyle. What could be wrong with me? Had I no cravings for a milky-white fur coat, an ice cream maker to spin gelato from invisible threads" (Janowitz 19). Even though Cora is not fascinated with wealth, her thoughts still emphasize Mathur's statement, since it has become so normalized to admire wealth that she feels wrong for not doing so. What is striking is that Cora and Eleonore have the same background, yet Cora reacts towards wealth in the exact opposite way than Eleonore. In order to explain this, we might need to consider that Cora is not interested in Ray (Janowitz 18), while Eleonore is dependent on Stash to fulfill her materialistic dreams as the following analysis will reveal.

Aside from Cora, most of the characters in *Slaves of New York* are not only fascinated by wealth: they also wish to be wealthy themselves, however, they constantly lack money. Economic capital - here referring to money and property according to Bourdieu's theory - is an

overshadowing element in the lives of these characters, since it equals power and independence, and, therefore, the characters are willing to do anything to obtain it.

In this manner, Eleonore stays with Stash because she does not have any economic capital: "my dream was that someday I would get some bucks and then maybe I could move out. I said I got along all right with Stash, but that he never wanted to have anyone over, we had no couch, just a bed, all his stuff was all over the place" (Janowitz 11). Eleonore is an unsuccessful jewelry designer (Janowitz 7) who first came to the city with expectations of making it through hard work (Janowitz 125), but she is soon betrayed by the idea of the American Dream, because everything is expensive in New York. Eleonore lives in Stash's apartment, because she cannot afford one herself, and, as the quote reveals, she is unsatisfied with several things that seem fundamental to agree upon when living together. This stresses the way she undermines her own desires because she is dependent on Stash and his economic capital. Eleonore herself also believes that her independence relies on economic capital: "Perhaps it's true, what he says, I need his approval because I'm willfully insecure, a wimp with a will to be one. Well, I've made up my mind in one way. If I ever get some kind of job security and/or marital security, I'm going to join the feminist movement" (Janowitz 87). Yet, she proves unreliable as a narrator when she later exclaims that "'Women these days are supposed to be tough and independent,… But I don't see what's wrong with wanting to be bonded to another person'" (Janowitz 237). Hereby, the reader is left uncertain on what Eleonore wants: does she actually enjoy being suppressed by Stash, or does she want independence? We will seek to answer this throughout the analysis.

Marley is also short on economic capital (Janowitz 43), and he acts extremely shallow in his quest to gain it: "I guess the old guy just wanted me to know how it had been for him. Still, I was frantic to get on with my life; I was willing to listen, though, if the end result would be my getting some money" (Janowitz 111). Marley is selfish because he only has his own wants in mind. Yet, what is interesting about Marley is that, to him, money is not the goal in itself: "If Dolger took me on as his protégé, so to speak, he would arrange for me to have all the money I needed; then I could complete my greatest work; I'd go to Rome to build a chapel. That was my main lust in life. Sure I was tired of being broke, but what I really wanted was to construct the Chapel of Jesus Christ as a Women" (Janowitz 102). Marley wishes to convert economic capital into cultural capital in the shape of a chapel.

In “Kurt and Natasha, a Relationship” (Janowitz 273), Kurt is described as someone who is on the verge of becoming – if not super-rich – then at least rich: “It was clear Kurt was well on his way to becoming a major art-world figure” (Janowitz 273). Yet, throughout the story, Kurt’s opportunities seem to vanish: “In the fall Kurt had another show, but though he expected that sales would start out slowly and pick up during the latter days of the exhibition, this year not a single painting sold” (Janowitz 276). His possibilities vanish because he spends his time thinking of ways to humiliate Natasha rather than working (Janowitz 276) – something that will be interesting to conclude upon in the section about masculinity. What is interesting for now, is that Kurt adds to the conclusion that none of the characters in *Slaves of New York* so far have proved to be in possession of economic capital, though they all wish to be. Rather, it has become evident that they all depend on transferring their art into economic capital.

However, Clarence differs a bit from Eleonore, Marley and Kurt, since he seems to be in possession of economic capital although it appears to be inherited wealth: his parents live in a luxury apartment (Janowitz 175) and work in publishing (Janowitz 171), whereas Clarence has not even finished college (Janowitz 182). Thus, Clarence has not earned the economic capital himself and this is significant in relation to masculinity.

Victor, the gallery owner, on the other hand, is one of the few characters in *Slaves of New York*, who has a solid job, and he also appears well-off as he wears a §150 shirt (Janowitz 68). Yet, the gallery is not particularly successful, since it does not generate any money (Janowitz 67), and this issue enhances itself: “Nothing was going Victor’s way. He should have spent more on real ceramic tiles. The linoleum in the gallery was already cracking near the bathroom on the upstairs floor. Gray squares creased with pink, this should have been elegant, but in comparison to Betsy Brown’s black and white Italian tiles there was no comparison” (Janowitz 66). Victor wishes to present a successful, elegant gallery, yet, the lack of money has forced him to buy cheap look-a-like materials that eventually crack and reveal their lack of quality. On a figurative level, it can be said that Victor tries to put up a fake surface of wealth that falls apart when examined closely.

This goes not only for Victor, but also a number of other characters: they all wish to present themselves as successful – whether that is reality or not. Dittmar elaborates that people use material goods “to express who they are and to construct a sense of who they would like to be” (27). Eleonore is run down by a car, and her main concern is that: “First of all everyone would

know that I got my hair cut in a cheap joint on Lexington Avenue and not some SoHo or East Village spot" (Janowitz 121). In reality, Eleonore does not have the money to get her hair done in the expensive parts of town, but she would like to give the impression that she has. In fact, this charade is more important to Eleonore than her own well-being. Clarence, whom we have concluded is in possession of economic capital, indeed uses clothes to express who he wants to be: "Because he was so inconspicuous in appearance he had developed the habit of dressing outrageously. All of his clothing was made for him by an elderly tailor familiar with the styles of 1928" (Janowitz 171). Hereby, Clarence maintains an image of being fierce: a trait he does not seem to possess in reality. We will elaborate on this when analyzing masculinity.

Marley, on the other hand, allegedly does not care what he wears: "I stood out. With my long, lanky stride, my scuffed Italian loafers, and my beat-up, faggoty Italian jacket. It had deep pockets on both sides, ripped because I kept a lot of variables and disregards in the pockets – and the shoulders had a little padding in them, by now somewhat lopsided. It didn't bother me, the looks and stares I got" (Janowitz 43). Yet, when Marley later meets a friend, who is also a painter and hereby a rival, he expresses that: "The guy obviously wasn't doing too well. I felt embarrassed to run into him like this, in my black Italian sweater with neon blue stripes like an early Frank Stella, my elegant rumpled old jacket, my gold, angelic hair" (Janowitz 51). It seems like Marley oxymoronically is aware that his clothing is shabby, yet at the same time, he considers himself superior in looks to a terminally ill friend, who, on top of it all, has just been dumped by his girlfriend as a result of Marley's interference. The idea of Marley as selfish is reinforced, and he hereby also comes off as unreliable – something that occurs continuously throughout the short stories, and is accentuated by the 1st person narrative. Marley's unreliability in regard to his looks gives the impression that creating a mental picture of himself as elegant, is his way of dealing with an appearance that he in fact is not satisfied with. In the same manner, he tries to explain away his starvation: "I didn't mind not eating, it was part of what I had chosen for myself" (Janowitz 49). Yet later he reveals that he starves because he has no money (102). This emphasizes Marley's attempt to glorify reality. Our interpretation that the characters wish to present an image of being wealthy corresponds with Young's interpretation of *Slaves of New York* that "Everyone dreams of a better, more creative life" (Young 159), since the characters embellish reality in order to appear in the manner they dream of.

Linked to the characters in *Slaves of New York*'s dreams and understanding of wealth, is the importance of owning property: apartments are the number one desired commodity. Miller stresses that consumers value products to a high extent – they consider them parts of themselves or an extension of the self. He believes that the sense of self needs support as it is fragile, and commodities can offer this support: we, thereby, become what we own (D. 180). In *Slaves of New York*, this is true for apartments, they define you, and as visible above; if you do not own an apartment, you are someone's slave.

This is particularly evident with Stash and Eleonore: Stash is the one who owns the apartment, while she merely moves in because she has no other options (Janowitz 7-8). Eleonore hereby becomes highly dependent on Stash: "Well, it's his apartment, and if we have a fight or something I sometimes get this panicky feeling: Where the hell am I going to go? (Janowitz 9). This situation puts Eleonore in a vulnerable position, where Stash holds the power; giving him the right to demand her to conduct various duties (Janowitz 8). Eleonore's sense of self is indeed fragile, since she is so reliant on Stash: she literally and figuratively drowns in his being, and she changes her personality to accommodate him: "We've been living together in his place in the Village about a year now. One room, it's big, but he has a lot of stuff here – boxes, closets full of papers" (Janowitz 8). Dittmar adds to this by saying that: "Material goods fulfil a range of psychological functions, such as giving people control, independence, enjoyment, or emotional comfort" (27), which is transferable to Stash who has control and independence in opposition to Eleonore. Further, he has emotional comfort, which Eleonore does not have at all since she constantly has to worry about being kicked out of the apartment.

Ray and Cora can also be defined by their apartments. Ray's parents have bought an apartment for him (Janowitz 34), while Cora lives with her mom (Janowitz 27). In their relationship, Ray provides Cora with furniture (21) and food, and her response is: "Ray would probably expect some form of compensation for this meal, this much I knew from past dinners with men. I tried to put it out of my mind" (Janowitz 20). Ray is, according to Cora, in control, because she feels like she 'owes' him for the items she has received: this also introduces a hierarchical order that reflects their apartments. This hierarchical order will be interesting to analyze further in the section on masculinity.

Victor also expects compensation from Sistina: “He [Victor] paid the rent, he gave her money - she didn’t earn §200 a week, after taxes, had no money of her own – he always left §50 or §100 around, for food and her taxis, she never walked and hated the subway. But instead of getting up to greet him she was sitting on the bed, wearing filthy sweatpants and a sweatshirt with a pink rabbit, watching TV” (Janowitz 76). Victor is annoyed that Sistina does not prepare food for him (Janowitz 76), and that she does not greet him when he comes home. He feels that she owes him this in return for providing for her. This also reveals that Victor is not in control of Sistina, even though he would like to be.

Clarence also wishes to control Inez: “’If you intend to stay in my apartment,… I suggest you compliment me from time to time” (Janowitz 171). But in reality, Inez is portrayed as superior to Clarence, since she has the power to make Clarence lose face to his parents (Janowitz 173). It is interesting that Inez holds the power, when our previous analysis revealed that it is the one owning the apartment that holds the power. We will analyze this more thoroughly in the analysis of masculinity.

Kurt is the one who owns property, while Natasha merely exploits him for accommodation and fame (Janowitz 273-274). In this relationship, it is Kurt who is in control; at least in the beginning: “Kurt would make Natasha clean the house while dressed in Frederick’s of Hollywood brassiers and thigh-high boots” (Janowitz 275). A change occurs in this hierarchic relationship, yet, this will be analyzed thoroughly in the masculinity section.

We previously concluded that Marley has the least economic capital of the characters in *Slaves of New York*, and allegedly, he has the least interest in it, and this is reflected in his accommodation. First of all, Marley lives in a sublet from which he is about to be evicted (Janowitz 145), and this apartment is described to be just as shabby as Marley’s clothing: it is freezing because the heat is off (Janowitz 149), a pool of urine is on the floor (Janowitz 146), there is a broken window in the bathroom (Janowitz 147), and a hole in the couch (Janowitz 149). However, as with his clothes, Marley is able to dismiss this: “I have always had that skill of being able to escape my immediate surroundings by diving into a book” (Janowitz 147), once again underlining his unreliability and also his misperception of reality.

Related to the possession of property is also the characters’ possession of material goods. Here, Bourdieu presents the notion of cultural capital in the objectified state, and, based on the

previous analysis, it becomes clear that the cultural goods which these characters own are mostly their own works: both Marley, Stash, Victor, and Kurt occupy jobs that revolve around art. This is significant because it accentuates how these characters are not able to buy cultural goods themselves.

So far, we can conclude that only few of the characters portrayed in *Slaves of New York* hold considerable economic capital, and those who do have not earned it themselves. Also, they do not possess any cultural capital in the objectified state besides what they are able to produce themselves. This economic failure might be explained by looking at the characters' cultural capital in the institutionalized state. Marley has gone to art school (Janowitz 42), Ray is graduating from the Architecture School (Janowitz 17), and Eleonore has attended college in London at some point (Janowitz 187), but that is about as much as we are told about her education. We also learn that Victor previously has tried his hands at painting, but realized that "he was never going to be a great artist" (Janowitz 68), and afterwards he plunges into dealing art instead; expecting more success at this (Janowitz 68). We do not get any suggestions that he has an education, though. Clarence, on the other hand, has spent six years getting through college, and he still has one semester left (Janowitz 182), while Cora – as the most ambitious – attends feminist criticism courses at Yale (Janowitz 17), but eventually drops out because she is disillusioned with her studies after a disagreement with the teacher (Janowitz 25), and moves back home to her mother's.

Clearly, some of the characters in *Slaves of New York* have educations, however, mostly they don't. It seems like, to most of these characters, education is not important: they strive to become rich and famous, relying solely on their creative production of cultural capital in the objectified state such as paintings and jewelries. This might be part of these characters' failure: they hope to make the short cut to money and fame. However, this does not explain why Marley, who has an education, does not succeed in accumulating economic capital. Here, another factor may also be taken into consideration: the place that surrounds them.

All of the short stories take place in and around New York, emphasizing how this was the place to be for aspiring artists and people working in finances in the eighties. However - or perhaps because of the influx of new arrivals - the city is merciless: "If you live with Bruce, you'll be the slave. It's not the same in other cities, the rents aren't so high. Roger doesn't have the

same power over you, because you could always threaten to move out and get your own place in Boston" (Janowitz 16). Eleonore believes that the high rents in New York are the reason for the hierarchical order where apartment owners have the power, while those who cannot afford their own apartment are considered slaves.

So far, we have addressed the hierarchical orders dominating the relationships in *Slaves of New York*, but we can address the social order more thoroughly using Bourdieu's notion of social capital. What is interesting in relation to *Slaves of New York,* is that all of the characters interact in relations as ways to gain accommodation, fame, or money. It is also clear that networking, especially by attending various gallery openings, is important (Janowitz 81). Through these parties, the characters prove their affiliation to the art world: the name-dropping of various painters, dealers, and buyers they know serves to create an image of having a lot of social capital.

Yet, what is striking is that their social capital does not reach beyond the practical state: most of the characters have no close relations besides those they exploit for personal gain. In this way, Eleonore considers herself lonely, though she tries to reassure herself that she is content with only knowing Stash's friends (Janowitz 9). Eleonore hereby lives her life through Stash. Yet, Stash also hinders Eleonore from forming her own life, though he on the surface encourages her to (Janowitz 11): he manipulatively excludes her from socializing (especially with men): "Stash is half-Polish and half-Italian, so conversation between the sexes doesn't go over so good with him" (Janowitz 10). Eleonore is trapped since she will never succeed in making Stash happy, and in her quest to try, she also forgets to make herself happy.

Clarence seems to be lonely as a somewhat deliberate choice: "Do you know, apart from Inez, you two are the first new people I've befriended in a long time – I almost never speak to anyone, lacking social grace" (Janowitz 182). Clarence is aware that he is socially awkward, and to him it is easier not to speak to anyone and hereby not experience failure. Marley is also socially awkward, lacking sense of propriety, as visible when he ruins Sherman's dinner by inviting his ex-girlfriend as a date. This makes Sherman exclaim: "You have absolutely no feelings" (Janowitz 219), which is accurate since Marley, unlike Clarence, does not have any idea that he is behaving socially unacceptable: "Okay, I was the kind of guy who had to be superior to everyone all the time, whenever I could. In some ways I was very vain, but everyone knew this about me, and it was an endearing part of me that my true friends were able to accept?" (Janowitz 143). Marley is

convinced that everyone likes his self-absorption, when in fact the opposite is reality. This emphasizes how unlikable he is, but it also expresses a childish naivety which, makes it difficult to hate Marley as a character at the same time.

What characterizes Victor, is that he is dominant and distrustful to the point where he only trusts himself to do the work properly: “every single thing his staff should have taken care of had to be checked and double-checked by him” (Janowitz 67). His coworkers and clients avoid him, because he has an attitude problem (Janowitz 73). Victor is aware that people do not like him, and he also has an idea why: “He could not help but be critical of others, this was something they must have sensed in him. Especially when he saw so clearly what was wrong with each of them. Yet underneath this, perhaps they could not tell, was a feeling of love” (Janowitz 81). Hereby, Victor is portrayed unsympathetically, adding to his role as a slave owner – both in terms of work and leisure time – yet a small hint of empathy is also suggested: Victor is able to feel love and appreciation, he is just not able to express it. This reveals a dichotomy in Victor as a character, as it becomes difficult to decide whether he is unpleasant or pitiable. Young also catches this dichotomy: “Overall the stories that describe a particular circle of art-world characters are probably the least effective; they have an unwitting, unbuilt paradox in that Janowitz cannot decide if these characters are lovable, madcap, zany kooks or thoroughly unpleasant and inadequate human beings” (160). The confusion might add to the insecurity of the characters: they are only on the verge of defining themselves, and hence their sense of self might not be fully developed. We will analyze this further in the section discussing identity.

Our analysis of consumerism has revealed that the characters in *Slaves of New York* are extremely fascinated with wealth, and they all strive to become rich themselves. However, most of them lack economic capital referring to money and property. Instead, they construct false images of being wealthy by wearing expensive shirts or pretending to go to the right hair salon. The characters use property to display their status, and they all strive to own property themselves, since this will provide them with independence and power. Most of the characters also lack cultural capital in the institutionalized state, and this might be an explanation, along with the expensive setting of New York, why these characters struggle so hard. Added to this struggling is that the characters lack genuine social relations, and therefore most of them express feelings of loneliness.

Bourdieu explains that capital takes time to accumulate (*Handbook* 15), and this might reveal a little hope for these characters. All of them are fairly young, wanting everything as soon as possible, as a result of the encouraged consumerism. But perhaps they are all still in the stage of making their capital accumulate. Another, and more gloomy interpretation, is that there is no hope for these characters because they so far have been unable to make their capital accumulate at all, and therefore they will not be able to make it accumulate ever. On this note, we will now move on to an analysis of the portrayal of masculinity in *Slaves of New York*, in order to investigate if the male characters display masculine behavior.

4.1.3 Masculinity in *Slaves of New York*

In the following chapter, we will explore the notion of masculinity in Janowitz' *Slaves of New York.* We are interested in how masculinity is portrayed in various male characters: specifically Stash, Marley, Victor, Ray, and Kurt, and ultimately answer the question of whether they actually display masculine behavior.

Moffatt claims that men are anticipated to measure themselves against a model of hegemonic masculinity: "The hegemonic image [of masculinity] is constructed and understood through its relationship to subordinated masculinities and, most importantly, to women … the male identity is defined by the domination of women, and of men who are marginalized according to race, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and able-bodiedness" (7). Moffatt presents domination as a key word of the masculine understanding. We have previously discussed domination in *Slaves of New York*, yet this was only in relation to economic capital. Mac an Ghaill, however presents several other key patriarchal structures including not only "capitalist work" (1), but also the "family, the state, violence, sexuality and culture" (1).

In relation to capitalist work, our conclusion was that none of the people seem to make a lot of money, since both men and women are struggling artists, and none of them are really affiliated with the capitalist world. There is a general dream, though, of becoming financially independent. Here, especially Marley is worth mentioning: "It was unfair, I was so much more alive and talented than any human being had a right to be; and if I had the financing I could have shown this to my son and the world, by writing books, making movies, forming a rock-and-roll band and various other plans I had in mind for myself once I got rich enough to hire slaves" (53).

Neither of the relationships the men in *Slaves of New York* have portray close family relations: all relations are furthered by exploitation. And further, none of them have children. Yet, these 'families' all follow a patriarchal pattern, where the man works, while the woman is provided for. It is arguable, though, whether this is a result of the men favoring this, or if it is merely coincidental that only the men have been able to find jobs. The only one who explicitly reveals a patriarchal understanding of the family, is Victor: "We can afford a bigger apartment, you can have children. Why don't you stop work and devote yourself to the home?" (Janowitz 85).

Domination through physical violence is particularly pronounced in the stories about Kurt and Natasha as he violently rapes her, which is also an example of sexual dominance. Yet, Kurt also indirectly abuses her physically: "Natasha… was forced to cook elaborate Russian dinners night after night, dressed in only a G-string (this made frying uncomfortable, as often grease would spatter from the stove)" (Janowitz 276). This is also a way for Kurt to conduct psychical violence on Natasha by humiliating her. Verbal abuse is something Kurt also practices by exclaiming: "You will do as I tell you" (Janowitz 275) whenever Natasha hesitates to do what he wishes.

Verbal abuse is also distinct in the stories about Eleonore and Stash. Stash belittles Eleonore: "'What is it about you I hate the most?' 'My messiness?' I said. 'No.' 'My personality?' 'No,' he said. 'Your insecurity. That's what I hate about you the most" (Janowitz 13): perhaps so that it becomes easier for him to dominate her. It seems that Eleanor is afraid of Stash and what he will say or do if she does not obey him (Janowitz 11), yet, it is interesting that Stash at no point in the short stories threatens her physically. Instead, the ultimate threat seems to be being evicted from the apartment.

So far, the analysis has revealed that the male characters in *Slaves of New York* do tend to dominate the women, however, it is difficult to determine whether the dominating factor here is masculinity or economy: are the women suppressed because they are poor beings living in an expensive city, or because of the dichotomy between males and females? As mentioned previously, masculinity is often understood as the binary opposition to femininity, meaning that the two are expressions of each other's differences. This has inevitably resulted in a stereotypic and dualistic understanding of respectively masculinity and femininity. In this relation, Whitehead mentions "passive/assertive, strong/weak, irrational/rational, gentle/forceful, emotional/distant"

(10) as some of the qualities each stereotypic sex represent. When considering the previous analysis which revealed that the men in *Slaves of New York* strive to dominate the women, we might expect to find men that are dominant and women that are submissive when analyzing dualism between the sexes – but is it really this simple? When analyzing the duality between the portrayal of masculinity and femininity in *Slaves of New York*, it is necessary to consider the male- and female characters in interaction with the opposite sex.

As our analysis of consumerism revealed, the short stories about Eleonore and Stash portray a dysfunctional relationship, where Eleonore succumbs to all of Stash's demands. Some of the most pronounced dualisms we found are that Stash is semi successful, while Eleonore is not. He is the dominator, while she is the slave; he is social, while she is antisocial, and generally, her life is defined only in relation to his. But, what we have not analyzed in the section on consumerism, is that Eleonore eventually breaks free from Stash.

In the second to last short story about the couple, "Patterns", we learn that Eleonore breaks up with Stash and moves into an apartment by herself (Janowitz 227) with a new realization: "I knew then it was up to me to negotiate a new life for myself" (Janowitz 228). Yet, it is difficult to determine whether she actually changes or remains in the same patterns, since she expresses both change and stagnation. In relation to Stash, she first expresses that she misses him (Janowitz 227), and that "It was hard living alone, though: I kept waiting for someone to come home and yell at me" (Janowitz 227). On the other hand, she turns him down when he attempts to rekindle their relationship (Janowitz 228), leaving Stash as the weak, begging part, and hereby reversing their roles. At the same time, Eleonore is desperate to find a new man, and she is unintentionally "interested in a particular type of guy who made me [her] feel rejected" (Janowitz 242). This inevitably gives other men the power to dominate her once more, and hereby she enforces the stereotypic, hegemonic gender dualisms, since it will not be possible for her to be in a relationship where she is not inferior to-, or dependent on the man.

Our analysis of consumerism also revealed a dualism between Victor and Sistina. Here, Victor has the money, the job and the apartment, while Sistina has neither. However, we found that she is not fulfilling the role as a slave that she is supposed to occupy in return for money and accommodation. In relation to Victor, there is another relationship we can conclude upon: namely the relationship to the competing art dealer Betsy. Betsy steals Victor's clients (Janowitz 66), and

has “all the best artists. Those with style, sophistication. He [Victor] was handling hustling jerks” (Janowitz 84). This quote reveals a dualism in itself: Betsy as successful, and Victor as less successful – which also stresses our previous discovery: that Victor has linoleum tiles, while Betsy has real tiles. What is further interesting about the relationships Victor have with Sistina and Betsy is that though he wishes to give another impression, the women are superior to him: he has no power, neither at home nor at work.

Something similar is apparent in the relation between Kurt and Natasha. As our previous analysis revealed, Kurt has the apartment and therefore also the power, and this is accentuated by Kurt’s violent, sexual behavior towards Natasha. Kurt has physical control over her: “Kurt took out a roll of adhesive tape, strapped Natasha’s mouth closed, and wrapped her wrists together behind her back. He felt her struggling on the bed; he ripped off her clothes” (Janowitz 274). This particular scene accentuates the dualistic physical differences between the two: Kurt is strong, and Natasha is weak. However, as the story escalates, something changes. We have previously concluded that Kurt’s success fades, but his physical power fades along with it: he becomes shorter (Janowitz 276) and skinnier (Janowitz 277). This culminates when Kurt once again tries to put tape over Natasha’s mouth and rape her, and she effortlessly ends up wrapping tape around him instead (Janowitz 278). Suddenly, Kurt is the one who is weak, and Natasha is the one who is strong.

When looking at Clarence and Inez, there are also dualisms to be found. First of all, Clarence has the financial means and the apartment, while Inez has neither: she is from a wealthy family, but the family has disowned her (Janowitz 174). There is also duality in their physical descriptions: Clarence is “exceptionally tiny” (Janowitz 171), while Inez’ hair “was quite short; her face, more masculine than Clarence’s” (Janowitz 172). The same goes for their personalities: Inez unscrupulously punches a boy, who is tormenting an animal (Janowitz 172), while Clarence is reluctant and does not “want to get involved” (Janowitz 173) - here, Clarence is passive and Inez is assertive. Clearly, both in stature and personality, Inez represents the masculine, while Clarence represents the feminine, and this might be why, as in the case of Victor and Sistina, Clarence has no power over Inez.

Ray has money and an apartment, and he is also able to provide furniture for Cora, who we learn is poor. Once again, the man is in possession of wealth whereas the woman is not. However,

Cora is the one who has the power: she declines his proposals (Janowitz 30), and is left with the power to decide whether they should meet after his marriage (Janowitz 35). Marley is, as one of few in *Slaves of New York*, not in a relationship. Yet, we can look at dualisms in relation to his female art dealer, Ginger. First of all, Ginger is described as glamorous (Janowitz 103), while the section on consumerism revealed that Marley wears shabby clothes. This gives an impression of their differences in wealth and success. Secondly, there is a specific distribution of power connected to their work relation: Marley is dependent on Ginger to sell his paintings (Janowitz 110). This also allows her to criticize his works – something he chooses not to listen to, though (Janowitz 201). When thinking of dualisms, Ginger represents a successful, guiding person to Marley – almost on the verge of a motherly figure. This is accentuated by Marley's need to feel like he is the most important person in her life (Janowitz 201).

The conclusion to the analysis of dualisms between genders in *Slaves of New York* is that there are dualisms to be found, but they are not connected to a specific gender. In this manner, both men and women obtain the same roles, and sometimes they are reversed throughout the story as evident with Eleonore/Stash and Kurt/Natasha. However, in *Slaves of New York*, the pattern is that the men have power at the beginning of the stories, since they are the ones who own economic capital, yet, the women always end up having power and control; leaving the men helpless or begging. This gives the impression that the reason why these women are suppressed is to be found in the expensiveness of the city, and therefore not because of the dichotomy between male and female. A following conclusion is also that in *Slaves of New York,* there is always duality between men and women, because someone always has the power: none of the relationships featured present equality between men and women. Young stresses that "The novels [those of Janowitz, Gaitskill and Texier] in question actually display many of the impulses charted by feminist theory: the urge towards androgyny wherein women reject the dichotomies between masculine and feminine as being… purely 'metaphysical'" (Young 147), and this supports our findings in *Slaves of New York.*

We have previously stated that domination is an important part of masculinity, yet, Kimmel adds that:

> Manhood is less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us, having power or control over us. Throughout the American history American men have been afraid that others will see us as less than manly, as weak, timid, frightened. And men have been afraid of not measuring up to some vaguely defined notions of what it means to be a man, afraid of failure (7).

In this light, domination serves as a defense mechanism to the male characters: they will lose their sense of self if they are dominated. This poses a new question: is it possible for the men in *Slaves of New York* to be masculine, if the women always end up being in charge? We will attempt to shed on light on this in the following.

So far, we have conducted an analysis on how there are dual representations of gender in *Slaves of New York*, but we have not addressed how – or if – the men correspond to masculine stereotypes. One such stereotype is that men has long been considered the breadwinners of the families (Whitehead 113). Whitehead elaborates on this, stressing that: "There is no more potent symbol of the heroism, potency, mythology and mystery of the male public domain than the idea of an empire" (Whitehead 120). We previously discovered that the men in *Slaves of New York* are the ones who provide the women with money and accommodation. Yet, we also discovered that they are all failing in one way or another at their jobs. Therefore, it is valid to conclude that none of them have built an empire. Here, Marley is portrayed as even less heroic, potent, or mysterious than the others, as he exclaims that: "On the streets crowds of people were staggering this way and that, newly released from their office tombs. Grim faces, work down like cobblestones, never to make anything of their lives. These were the worker bees and drones, who had been imprisoned in American thought-patterns since birth, with no escape but the weekly million-dollar lottery" (Janowitz 43). Marley mocks the American Dream and excludes himself from the public domain, as he refuses to be part of 'the worker bees and drones'.

Another masculine stereotype is that "Certain gendered forms, such as athlete or warrior, continue to be favoured, their attendant desires and subjectivities considered superior to other male expressions" (Moffatt 8). There are no representations of neither athletes nor warriors in *Slaves of New York*, but if we consider the attributes often connected to such, some of the men might come close. Warriors are often considered courageous and fearless, fighting battles to

defend their territory. This alludes to an animal force, and both Stash and Marley are compared to animals by their looks and behavior. Eleonore observes that: “Stash’s thick blond hair, loose from its ponytail, was practically covering his face. He had an ominous, unshaved look. He wasn’t wearing a shirt; his hairy chest had an animal ferocity” (Janowitz 122). She also narrates that “One reason I was attracted to him in the first place was his dangerous appearance. Before I knew him, I thought he was a member of some motorcycle gang” (Janowitz 88). The adjectives ‘ominous’, ‘unshaved’, ‘hairy’, ‘animal ferocity’, and ‘dangerous’ all allude to a perilous animal – and they further underline Moffatt’s understanding of masculinity. Yet, in this case we must bear in mind that Stash’s looks and behavior are reported through the eyes of Eleonore: the infatuated woman who is attracted to men that reject her. Therefore, the representation might be dubious, as she has previously proven unreliable.

Marley presents himself as “’a carnivore. I don’t even like to use a knife and fork. If I have a steak or roast beef I’d rather tear it off, bite by bite, with my teeth. There’s nothing like the texture of meat, dense and red, the smell, the bloody taste’” (Janowitz 220). Yet, as in the previous example, Marley has also proven unreliable at several occasions. This unreliability is stressed by himself, as he later modifies his alleged carnivorous behavior: “Of course, I’ll admit, I don’t want anything to do with the killing. I don’t want to see any cows bawling’” (Janowitz 220). Marley also reveals violent tendencies against humans: “Often I longed to give him [Sherman] a bruising poke, not out of malevolence, but from curiosity, the desire to kick at something helpless and spongy” (Janowitz 141). Both incidents reveal that Marley never acts on his supposed violent tendencies; giving the impression that being violent is yet another part of the way he imagines himself. Whitehead stresses that “In what might be termed the 'everyday world', those behaviours of males that are violent, dysfunctional and oppressive are frequently excused or explained away as 'natural' masculine behaviour, being understood in common-sense terms as fixed and, thus, as an inevitable aspect of social 'reality'” (8), and this might be the reason why Marley feels the need to appear violent: it is considered part of natural masculine behavior.

When discussing violence in *Slaves of New York*, it is inevitable not to mention Kurt, and bearing Whitehead’s claim in mind, we are able to make a conclusion. Kurt gets away with being violent, and Natasha’s first utterance after being raped is: “When you were a kid,… which program on TV was your favorite? The ‘Munsters’, ‘The Addams Family’”? (Janowitz 274), while her sister,

after being raped, exclaims "'That was fun'" (Janowitz 276). Two interpretations can be inferred from this: first of all, in agreement with Whitehead's claim, the women might explain and excuse his behavior as part of his masculinity, and secondly, it might be interpreted as the women not taking Kurt seriously.

A third stereotypic, masculine trait is silence, which "historically [has] been associated with the archetype of the western male. Popular images of men, such as movie stars Gary Cooper and Clint Eastwood, have represented silence as a singular, stoic attribute, indicating strength" (Moffatt 42). However, in *Slaves of New York* there are no such portrayals of a silent man: all of the men have several lines, opinions etc. This is specifically pronounced in Marley, who likes to talk about himself to the point where he gets offended if people interrupt him (Janowitz 104). Throughout the analysis, it becomes more and more evident that Marley is the most extreme at several incidents: he is extremely self-confident and delusional (Janowitz 144-145). Penner stresses that literary depictions of masculinity are often hyperbolic in their essence (21), and this certainly fits Marley's understanding of himself. Nevertheless, it might also be transferable to the other male characters. We have discovered how all the men strive to dominate the women in one way or another, yet, they are all portrayed extremely unpleasant in doing so through rape, physical violence, and verbal abuse such as belittling and humiliating. This hyperbolic representation of the men almost mirrors a parody. We have previously quoted Young for being dubious about whether to sympathize with the men in *Slaves of New York* or not, and we joined this confusion. Yet, based on the masculinity analysis our conclusion is that the male characters are predominantly unsympathetic.

This analysis of the portrayal of masculinity leads us to answer our original question: are the males in *Slaves of New York* masculine? The male characters do control key patriarchal structures such as the family, violence, and sexuality which gives the impression that the men are dominant, and in this sense, they portray a hegemonic masculinity. Yet, this hegemonic masculinity crumbles when we discovered that women in *Slaves of New York* always end up being in possession of the power.

Our analysis also revealed that, generally seen, the men do not fill masculine stereotypes - with the exception of warrior attributes - and that they generally are portrayed hyperbolic in their unpleasantness, verging on parody. However, Moffatt stresses that "there are many kinds of

masculinity" (Moffatt 42), which might seem more suitable to the men in *Slaves of New York*. These men portray multiple masculinities, since they are presented as both strong/weak, and as dominating/dominated.

4.2 Analysis of *Glamorama*

With this being the end note of the analysis of *Slaves of New York,* we will now proceed to an analysis of *Glamorama*. The analysis will be commenced with an introduction to Ellis and the novel in question, in order to provide general knowledge about the novel, since it contains more aspects than the ones we focus on.

4.2.1 Introduction to Bret Easton Ellis and *Glamorama*

Bret Easton Ellis (1964) debuted as an author in 1985 with the novel *Less Than Zero* – while he himself was still attending college. Since then, Ellis has published five other novels and one collection of short stories: *The Rules of Attraction* (1987), *American Psycho* (1991), *The Informers* (1994), *Glamorama* (1998), *Lunar Park* (2005), and *Imperial Bedrooms* (2010). He has also written several screenplays, and till this day, Ellis is continuously in the spotlight as he runs a podcast discussing current events and popular culture; often accompanied by other celebrities. What follows is a brief survey of Ellis' literary career.

Annesley characterizes Ellis as a crucial and founding member of the Literary Brat Pack, and continues to state that Ellis writes in the style of blank fiction: a style which focuses on "the experiences of American youth (teen, twenty and thirty somethings)" (*Blank* 2). Annesley further characterizes blank fiction by stating that "Reflection on the relationships between commodification and the representation of violence and explicit sexuality in blank fiction has produced a powerful image of the extent to which late twentieth-century experiences have become integrated into the commercialized world of late capitalism" (Annesley *Blank* 58). The idea of consumer culture and the relation to the time in which the novels were written is one of the elements, we will focus on in the following analysis of *Glamorama* and *Lunar Park*.

On a more specific level, Colby also discusses Ellis' literary career. Colby assures us that there is no doubt Ellis has always been famous and even infamous since the publication of *Less Than Zero* (1). His critical acclaim, however, has only begun to follow in the 21st century, as he has

been given literary merit (Colby 1). With this critical acclaim followed a reevaluation of many of his early works – they were simply all of a sudden seen in a new light. What this means to us, and with regard to this thesis, is that the novels produced by Ellis have been scrutinized to an extreme degree – as Ellis himself puts it in *Lunar Park*: "After all what's left to say about *American Psycho* that hasn't already been said?" (17) – making a pun on his probably most discussed novel. However fitting a novel like *American Psycho* would be for a project such as this one, we have deliberately chosen not to incorporate it, as it seems like every word has already been discussed.

From the beginning of his literary career, it would seem that the novels produced by Ellis show resemblances to his own life: *Less Than Zero, The Rules of Attraction,* and *The Informers* all follow privileged young adults attending college, as the reader to an increasing degree is introduced to their casual attitudes toward drug intake and sexual encounters. Adding to this feeling of familiarity with the author's own life, is the fact that all of Ellis's novels are composed as 1st person narratives. With his fourth novel, however, Ellis moves away from the college-scene, and instead emerges himself in Wall Street and the mind of the American psycho, Patrick Bateman. This is most certainly one of the novels Colby has in mind when she talks about the reevaluation of Ellis's work, as the novel was first considered pure misogynistic violence; causing Simon and Schulster to drop their publishing deal with Ellis (Murphet 15). Since then, the novel has gained critical acclaim – beyond doubt, the book is filled with hatred and violence, but the critical voice now tends to agree that it does not display violent behavior simply for the sake of violence. Rather, *American Psycho* is to be seen as a social and cultural comment.

Hereafter, the publication of *Glamorama* and *Lunar park* followed – both of the novels will be discussed more thoroughly below, as they will be the focus of our analysis. The seventh and so far last publication on Ellis' bibliography is *Imperial Bedrooms*; a novel which reintroduces the scenery and the characters from *Less Than Zero*, only some twenty years later. The main function of the novel appears to be to thoroughly erase any redeeming qualities we might ascribe to the main character, Clay, after the initial novel. As such, the reader follows Clay deeper and deeper into substance abuse, violence, and sexually deviant behavior.

Directly above, we mentioned that Ellis' works are now considered cultural commentaries, and Colby offers an explanation to this: "Through their roles as cultural products, Ellis' books function to disclose the ways in which the contemporary political and cultural apparatus affects

the individual" (1). With the focus being on the individual, we also have a valid explanation for Ellis' seemingly preferred use of the 1st person narrative: a literary style which holds the potential to bring the individual into focus. With regard to Ellis' general style of writing, Colby furthermore says that he underwrites, and thereby creates the potential to make a correlation between literature and politics (2). In our analysis of his novels, we will interpret this potential, as we look into the politics of a prevalent consumer culture, and how this becomes the root of a narcissistic culture within the individual.

One last general and important thing to mention about Ellis' authorship is his use of metatextuality. On this subject, Dumas states that metatextuality and duplication is prevalent in *American Psycho* and *Lunar Park* (NP), but really, this goes for all of Ellis' works. This is visible, as characters, settings, and objects are introduced in one book, and then reappear in another. As an example, Patrick Bateman is the brother of one of the students in *The Rules of Attraction*, the gruesome killer in *American Psycho,* and a student of Ellis' in *Lunar Park*. Ellis not only reuses his own characters in this manner, he also borrows from other writers such as McInerney. To make the metatextuality complete, it has been announced that 2018 will see the release of a movie with Ellis as screenwriter entitled *Disappear Here* – one of the most recognizable lines from *Less Than Zero*.

Glamorama

Ellis' 1998 novel, *Glamorama*, follows the rather unsuccessful model/actor Victor Ward in a life where, as Mandel puts it, surface is everything and "to be is to be perceived" (65). Presenting a notion about the novel which is supported by Colby, who even adds that by making the characters fashion models, Ellis literally makes them images of their time (1). In other words, *Glamorama* seemingly presents the ultimate consumer product by making the characters commodities – an element of the novel we are going to explore much further in our analysis, as we decipher the consumer culture represented.

For a large part of *Glamorama,* Victor is presented as dense, shallow, and dim. He concerns himself merely with his appearance, the parties he has opportunities to attend, the celebrities he has the possibility to spot, and nothing more which would suggest a deeper level to him. In this sense, it would seem that the novel is more about manipulating your way to being seen and

constructing an image than having an actual identity (Mandel 65). This is an interesting and prevalent element of *Glamorama,* which we are going to further explore as we compose an analysis of the ways in which identities are constructed, or maybe omitted, in the novel.

With this being said, two important themes of *Glamorama* are presented: consumerism and identity, but two more elements are consequential to the novel, terrorism and conspiracy. Mandel states that much of the scholarly discussion pertaining to *Glamorama* was produced in the light of 9/11, and therefore reads the terrorism and conspiracy portrayed in this light (66). This is not a discussion we are going to partake in with this project. Instead, Mandel also places the terrorism as a way of exploring a fragmented identity. "*Glamorama* is the quintessence of the postmodern, charting the evaporation of subjectivity as a coherent, stable locus of meaning, sensation or emotion" (66), and as we focus on Victor, this is of interest to our project.

As presented, Victor is viewed as clueless – at least in the beginning of the novel, but it might be argued that the novel, with regard to this, can be construed as structurally containing two parts; the first part where Victor is unaware of all but his looks, and the second part, where he finds himself taken in by a gang of terrorist supermodels and where he might be searching for a deeper meaning. Mandel supposes that Victor looks for something within the conspiracy, but at the same time, she argues that there is no ultimate truth revealed, as the narrative keeps leading up to something which is never revealed (75). This would mean that Victor tries to evolve as a character without really being able to, and this attempt at growth might be something to set Victor apart from Ellis' earlier main characters. In the analysis of Victor's identity and masculinity, this is going to be an interesting part of our thesis.

In *Glamorama,* another element also distinguishes Victor from Ellis' other main characters, namely the use of violence. Mandel argues that Ellis uses violence to make his characters break free from an otherwise "flat" world (76). In other novels by Ellis, we see how violence becomes a natural part which many of his characters either crave or are unresponsive to. Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* kills freely in more and more gruesome manners, and which ever redeeming qualities might be ascribed to Clay in *Less Than Zero* are thoroughly removed in *Imperial Bedrooms*, and this leaves Victor as an exception as he never seems to seek the violence as a way of satisfying his own pleasures. What Victor then represents will be analyzed in the following analysis of *Glamorama.*

4.2.2. Masculinity in *Glamorama*

When analyzing the masculinity portrayed in *Glamorama*, it is important to keep in mind that the novel, as mentioned, is written in a 1st person narrative. What this entails is that the entire story is seen through Victor's eyes: it is what he registers, the reader gains insight to, and this might not always be the most reliable renderings of what takes place. But this also means that it is Victor's ideas of masculinities, we focus on. However, we are given one great advantage as readers, and that is Victor's declining or non-existent intelligence. Because he never really seems to reflect over his own actions or the comments other people make about him, Victor freely relays everything to the reader, and there are therefore instances where we can see through Victor's stupidity and superficiality, and are able to analyze what other people think. When, as an example, the gang of super-model-terrorists say to Victor: "We like you because you don't have any answers" (Ellis *Glamorama* 287), we are able to tell their real opinion apart from his own inflated ego. These are vital considerations for the following analysis.

Mac an Ghaill suggests that we in most western societies have accommodated a thought of certain key patriarchal structures which include: "capitalist work, the family, the state, violence, sexuality and culture" (1). We are going to discuss the most important ones of these supposed patriarchal structures. With regard to capitalist work, we are going to explore Victor's job and income further in the next paragraph on consumerism in *Glamorama*, but at this point, we can conclude that he does not really have a glorious, high paying, masculine job: he is a male model, and not a successful one. He has to do additional work helping Damien open his club, while Victor secretly, or not so secretly, dreams of having his own place. This, however, is not Victor's sole problem when it comes to employment; the very fact that he, as a man, works as a model is questioned as we learn from this conversation with Lauren: "'Where are you going?' Lauren hugs her wrap coat tighter around herself. 'Todd Oldham show,' I sigh. 'I'm in it.' 'Modeling,' she says. 'A man's job.' 'It's not as easy as it may look.' 'Yeh, modeling's tough, Victor,' she says. 'The only thing you need to be is on time. Hard work" (Ellis *Glamorama* 110). Lauren is convinced that modeling is not difficult or demanding work, and she sarcastically mentions that it is not a man's job. This quote also sheds light on one more problem with regard to Victor and work – the fact that he appears to shy away from hard work and long hours, and in this manner he comes to

resemble Marley from *Slaves of New York*. Therefore, Victor can hardly be considered a man in terms of capitalist work. One more element in *Glamorama* which confirms this is the fact that Victor works under Damien. In the first paragraphs of the novel, Victor gives the impression that he is a big deal, since he is followed by a journalist and a cameraman while he is opening a new, hip club frequented by celebrities for its grand opening, and it is only later the reader finds out that Victor actually works for Damien, who is the one with real money and contacts. On those terms, Victor is the lesser man of the two, which is further exemplified by a conversation Damien and Victor have over breakfast: "'When are you gonna move uptown with everyone else" (Ellis *Glamorama* 47), Damien asks Victor and thereby displays the fact that geographically Victor is not placed with the people he surrounds himself with, stressing yet again his inadequacy.

Family, state, and culture does not really provide insight into Victor's masculinity, and although he ends up getting mixed up with a gang of terrorist super models, he does not really display violent behavior. One more of the key patriarchal structures mentioned by Mac an Ghaill, however, is relevant in relation to Victor's manhood: his sexuality. We see Victor connected romantically to Chloe, a supposedly highly attractive supermodel, but this one woman is not enough to satisfy Victor, as he also entertains an affair with Alison, the current girlfriend of his employer, Damien. However, this status of relationships does not mean that Victor's sexuality is ever-present and magnificent; already at the beginning of the novel, we hear how Victor fakes intercourse with Alison: "I jerk off a little until I'm almost coming and then I think, Oh screw it, I don't really have time for this, so I just fake it, moaning loudly, my head between her legs, movement from my right arm giving the impression from where she lies that I'm actually doing something. The music in the background is mid-period Duran Duran" (Ellis *Glamorama* 21). This displays very well the fact that Victor's greatest pleasures are not obtained through exploring his sexuality, but rather through simple popular culture. A fact which is reinforced as Victor continues the night by playing *Super Mario Bros.* claiming that "The whole point of Super Mario Bros. is that it mirrors life … Kill or be killed" (Ellis *Glamorama* 22), while he tells Alison to not disturb him; all of which will be explored further when we focus on consumerism in *Glamorama*. At this point, we need to stress the fact that Victor's lack of potency is not only in regard to Alison – he also declines sex with Chloe, claiming that he is simply too "wiped out" (Ellis *Glamorama* 42). What we can conclude from this, is that if we evaluate Victor in terms of sexuality, and consider sexuality a key

patriarchal structure, we once again have to conclude that Victor's masculinity leaves a lot to be desired.

Aside from the traditional, key patriarchal structures just mentioned, Mac an Ghaill also offers a beginning insight into a different, more nontraditional interpretation of masculinity by advocating that "A fragmentary literature has begun to suggest a more complex conceptualization of masculinity. Most specifically there has been a shift to the notions of hegemonic masculinity and multiple masculinities" (2). In order for this to be true in the case of Victor, he would have to have other traits in his personality, which could be considered to make up an alternative masculinity, but on all accounts, Victor seems to be devoid of content. In *Glamorama,* we see this exemplified by the fact that Victor seems unable to provide anyone with a genuine answer when having even the simplest of conversations – instead, Victor often answers with misinterpreted versions of current song lyrics. On those terms, "Is this a That's me in the Corner / That's Me in the Spotlight moment?" (Ellis *Glamorama* 13) echos the R.E.M song *Losing my Religion*. This apparent lack of personality traits will be explored further, when we conduct a discussion of identity in *Glamorama*.

So far, it appears evident that Victor, for the most part, does not adhere to traditional or more nontraditional expectations of masculinity. Instead, however, there are instances where his metro-sexual tendencies make his behavior appear more feminine: "I have to look up at my reflection in the panel of steel mirrors lining the columns above the automated tellers: high cheekbones, ivory skin, jet-black hair, semi-Asian eyes, a perfect nose, huge lips, defined jawline, ripped knees in jeans, T-shirt under a long-collar shirt, red vest, velvet jacket, and I'm slouching, Rollerblades slung over my shoulder" (Ellis *Glamorama* 16). This could be a rather feminine depiction Victor provides of himself, but even if we do not take this into account, we have to acknowledge the fact that this at least plays into the idea of Victor as nothing but an empty shell whose main concern is his looks. Not only because he is attempting to make it as a model, but also because he considers looks a real attribute worth maybe as much as actual money in the pocket.

Furthermore, in the introduction to masculinity, we present the idea that being masculine also entails shying away from the concept of the wimp. Victor, however, is blatantly scared in several instances of *Glamorama*, and he finds himself digging deep for just a hint of courage: "For courage I just kept telling myself that I was a model, that CAA represented me, that I'm really good

in bed, that I had good genes, that Victor ruled; but on deck I started to semi-seriously doubt this" (Ellis *Glamorama* 233). Contradicting everything we have so far discovered about Victor's manhood, it is actually the idea of himself as a sexual wonder with endless potency, one of the key patriarchal structures, which Victor attempts to find comfort in. However, Victor quickly begins to doubt the high thoughts of glory he has instilled in himself – maybe because he hardly believes this in the first place himself. We know it not to be true, and maybe Victor is not so shallow and conceded that he does not know deep down that he is not very masculine.

One further argument about masculinity which is interesting to explore with regard to Victor, is made by Moffatt, as he stresses that

> A model of masculinity is constructed against which men are expected to measure themselves. The hegemonic image is constructed and understood through its relationship to subordinated masculinities and, most importantly, to women … the male identity is defined by the domination of women, and of men who are marginalized according to race, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and able-bodiedness (7).

Even though Victor generally does not live up to masculine ideals, it does not mean that he does not attempt to present himself as manhood epitomized. As an example, it appears evident that Victor attempts to assert himself by displaying dominant behavior. Already in the first few pages of the novel, we see how he blatantly yells directions at everyone in the club to make himself look all the more manly for the cameras following him (Ellis *Glamorama* 5). Instead of installing fear or respect in the people around him, however, Victor more or less ends up looking obsessed in the episode – generally not resulting in a very masculine impression of him. The episode rather ends up exposing Victor's ignorance and removal from reality from first off in the novel; as seen by the fact that he confuses the French pronoun 'moi' for a real name (Ellis *Glamorama* 5), and ends in a tantrum after everyone has attempted to calm him down (Ellis *Glamorama* 11). In any case, the attempts at masculine dominance are futile, and they leave the idea that the behavior is really only for show as long as the camera is rolling and not displaying his true essence. This is always difficult to tell in the case of Victor, because his life in general is all about being able to step into character and assume the most desirable facade: most blatantly so in his work as a model, but

really in his entire life in general as well. With regard to Victor's masculinity, this is also important, as his everlasting efforts to appear in the right way – to follow the trend rather than being a trendsetter, so to speak – make him seem more subordinate than dominant in general. On those terms, Victor is self-conscious in the same manner as many of the characters in *Slaves of New York*.

Even though Victor is unable to assert dominance in the sense just analyzed, there are other ways in which he attempts to secure his status as a masculine man – one example being that Victor in several instances of the novel can be interpreted as quite the predator; his prey of choice of course being the women around him. Contemplating one encounter with Lauren, Victor ponders: “She [Lauren] starts walking away again, which only makes me want to follow her more” (Ellis *Glamorama* 85), and this actually makes him seem rather eerie and dangerous, revealing quite a darker side of Victor's personality and masculinity than so far analyzed. From what we have considered, Victor has seemed to be more of a joke than anything else because of his shallow and dense nature, but we see here how his deep instincts are that of a hunter, echoing ancient understandings of the male as pursuer. What is furthermore interesting, is that this is the first instance we have been led to through our analysis, where a clear idea of Victor's masculinity is present, and it almost makes him resemble the hegemonic image of masculinity.

The above mentioned encounter with Lauren is not the only instance in which Victor is described as the predator on the hunt, as the reader is also presented with this paragraph:

> I lean in, kiss her on the mouth hard, and I’m surprised that she lets me and after I pull away she presses her face up into mine, wanting the kiss to continue, her hand clutching mine, her fingers grasping my fingers. Finally I break it off and mumble that I’ve got to get uptown and in a very casual, hip way, without even trying, I hop on the Vespa, kick it into gear and speed up Park without looking back (Ellis *Glamorama* 112).

From first off in the quotation, Victor can, once again, be seen as the dominating hunter seeking out his prey, the female. On those terms, he grabs her and almost forcibly kisses her, but then one of two possible interpretations present themselves. First off, we can interpret the scene as Victor being intrigued by the hunt, and then not really caring more about the 'prey' once the hunt is

over, therefore, speeding away on his Vespa without looking back. The second interpretation that presents itself could be that Victor is caught off guard, as the woman begins to answer the kiss with an aggression which mirrors his own. Since he does not know how to handle a woman who exhibits masculine qualities, he has to remove himself from the situation. As we have not so far considered Victor to be either callous or calculating, but rather dense and unable to hide his true nature, we have to consider the latter interpretation the most likely, and this serves to remove part of what has just been considered the only masculine behavior we have so far been able to detect in Victor. Again, it therefore seems that when Victor is met by someone who presents strength against him, he quickly becomes the subordinate.

With Victor's masculinity still highly questioned, we therefore look for other possible ways in which masculine behavior can be displayed – Moffatt offers one such example, as he states that "Certain gendered forms, such as athlete or warrior, continue to be favoured, their attendant desires and subjectivities considered superior to other male expressions" (8), and it does seem like Victor attempts to live by these supposedly desired forms of masculinity. One very clear image of this is the fact that Victor is seen as highly protective; behavior which could be interpreted as him being a warrior. As an example, he yells "If you ever touch her, Bobby, I swear to god, I will fucking kill you, I swear to god,' enunciating each word" (Ellis *Glamorama* 391). What this shows us, is that even though Victor is usually not the one to seek out a confrontation, he is able to muster protective – and thereby warrior-like – behavior, when he is pushed to a certain point. So, deep down, Victor does have the testosterone-defined characteristics of an archetypical male, although this is not the behavioral trait most evident in him.

From this point on, however, further traits of masculine behavior can be analyzed, as Moffatt also suggests that an "epistemological construct that serves social dominance is the idea of the rational man, which characterizes men as reasonable via an instrumental / emotional dichotomy set up between men and women. Rational man is associated with technology and science, as well as the foundation of social progress, each assumed to be a male enterprise" (8), and we can therefore look further into whether or not Victor can be considered a rational being: we will argue that Victor is anything but rational. Instead, Victor often shows erratic behavior – this is visible already in the first few pages of the novel, where he obsesses over tiny details in the club he is opening for Damien: "'Specks – Specks all over the third panel, see?' – 'no, *that* one' … 'I

couldn't register the complaint, but, gentlemen – and ladies – there they are: *specks,* annoying, tiny specks, and they don't look accidental but like they were somehow done by a machine'" (Ellis *Glamorama* 5). The thing is that the specks Victor here so vividly complains about are either not noticed by the crew he is speaking to, or else they are simply not able to understand the problem with the supposed specks, as the presence of those has already been discussed with the designer, Yoki Nakamuri, whose name Victor by the way keeps mispronouncing. What this shows us, is that Victor obsesses over the tiniest of details, while he is unable to see the bigger picture – behavior we would far from be able to call rational. Instead, he seems stressed and distracted. When analyzing this, we have to keep in mind what we have so far discovered about Victor; namely the fact that he is – most of the time – on the verge of appearing completely dense, and it would be difficult to imagine that a person so dense would be able to muster great rational potential. It would actually be out of character for him. What is also interesting when talking about masculinity and this exact quotation from *Glamorama* is how Victor mentions 'and ladies' almost as a side comment – this could be either because he has forgotten that there are ladies present, but this seems unlikely as he is very aware of the reporter and the camera in the rest of the paragraph, so it could also be due to the fact that he considers the women around him to be less worthy of a mentioning. This adheres to the previously mentioned theory which states that hegemonic masculinity to a large extent is about establishing a suppressor and a suppressed.

From this point, we move on to include Penner in the analysis, as he claims that literary depictions of masculinity are often hyperbolic in their essence (21) – and for once, Victor completely adheres to the theory. At the beginning of the novel, he has absolutely no doubts about his compelling manly attraction, as he confidently declares that: "I know just inhaling my manly scent must make you want to faint" (Ellis *Glamorama* 50). So, even in spite of all the rather depressing details we have so far revealed about Victor and his masculinity, Victor is nothing but hyperbolic self-confidence. The same generally goes for Victor's own ideas of his body, even though we have heard him obsess about this as well. As he is to begin a workout, he confidently states: "'I want calves and thighs and definitely abs today,' I stress. 'But no biceps' I warn. 'They're getting too big'" (Ellis *Glamorama* 55), maybe because he is so obsessed with looks that his ego will only allow him to think about them in a hyperbolic manner. Another comparison can be drawn

to *Slaves of New York,* as we also found that the masculinity portrayed here was generally hyperbolic.

At this point in the analysis, only one more thing in regard to Victor's masculinity needs to be discussed; namely his changing fear of and lenience towards homosexuality. On this topic, Kimmel offers the following information: "At the turn of the century, thousands of American men trooped off to gyms and athletic fields as part of a national health craze, there to acquire manly physiques, shore up the flaggin energy, and develop masculine hardiness as ways of countering the perceived feminization of culture" (126). We see then, how Victor's frequent visits to the gym can be related to a latent fear of feminization and thereby also homosexuality. Kimmel gives us further information on the topic, as he states that: "In large part, it's other men who are important to American men; American men define their masculinity, not as much in relation to women, but in relation to each other. Masculinity is largely a homosocial enactment" (7). At the beginning of the novel, Victor shows blatantly bashful aggression towards the homosexual men around him: "'Just that you are both very unheterosexual,' I say, stretching. 'I might be a homo, Victor.' JD yawns. 'But I'm still a man – a man with feelings'" (Ellis *Glamorama* 63). Maybe this is because of a fear of homosexuality, and as way of establishing his own masculinity against those he considers less manly. This is in line with the previously mentioned notion of hegemonic masculinity being established by a system of suppression. But then a rather inexplicable change appears to happen within Victor, as he himself is revealed to have sex with other men (Ellis *Glamorama* 334), and talks about "the guy I had slept with the night before" (Ellis *Glamorama* 480). And lastly, there is the very strange relation he has to Bobby. On one level, Victor seems to be fascinated and impressed by Bobby, but on another level, this could also be interpreted as attraction:

> And now he's here in the flesh – four years older than me, just a foot away, tapping keys on a computer terminal, sipping Diet Coke, wearing white athletic socks – and since I'm not really used to being around guys who are so much better-looking that Victor Ward, it's all kind of nerve racking and I'm listening more intently to him than any man I've ever met because the unavoidable fact is: he's too good-looking to resist (Ellis *Glamorama* 267).

What this, in any case, serves to prove, is that Victor's masculinity is not straight forwardly determinable. On one hand, he hardly adheres to any of the theory on what masculinity – hegemonic or not – is supposed to be, but on the other hand, there is no doubt that Victor thinks of himself as manhood epitomized. His idea of masculinity is always closely linked to his looks and facade, and then there are those instances, where Victor displays blatantly homosexual behavior. Generally, Victor cannot be considered masculine. With this in mind, we will now turn to an analysis of the portrayal of consumerism in *Glamorama.* Here, it will be interesting to see, if the lack of masculinity affects- or is affected by consumption.

4.2.3 Consumerism in *Glamorama*

To begin the analysis, we include theory by Mathur, who mentions that the world of consumerism is highly concerned with the super-rich (3), and it is important to firmly establish that Victor is not one of these super-rich people; however, there is no doubt that he aspires to be. We conclude this from the fact that he has several business ventures: he is a model, he is opening a club for Damien, and he also wants to open his own club – but none of these are very successful. Another instance where these aspirations of Victor's are visible, is in the fact that he talks about the super-rich constantly by name dropping random celebrities as though these were people he knows closely. Based on this, we also have to propose that because Victor is so, dense and shallow, we cannot be entirely sure that he himself realizes this dichotomy between not really having money, but considering himself as belonging to a certain exclusive elite. We as readers know for a fact, however, that Victor has no money, as the balance on his account says negative $143 as he attempts to make a withdrawal – but the unfeasible Victor of course still has the pin 'coolguy' (Ellis *Glamorama* 17). In this light, Victor seems very much like the characters in *Slaves of New York*, who all generally do not have any money.

Furthermore, Victor is not alone in his fascination of wealth, as seen from the fact that Mathur further stresses that “There is a cultural fascination with wealth” (16), and on those terms, Victor is simply a person who very willingly adheres to societal expectations; without reflecting much over these, we might add. One of the instances where this consumer-craze of his is seen, is the fact that the cameras in the club all have to be turned on to MTV instead of the news (Ellis *Glamorama* 7), making it evident that what he wants is the fast changing pace of sensational

popular culture TV, instead of content that would actually enlighten him of the world around him. For Victor, MTV becomes the real world as seen from his thoughts: “On one of the monitors lining the walls on the third floor, MTV, a commercial, Helena Christensen, 'Rock the Vote'” (Ellis *Glamorama* 7), and this is what he experiences as truly important. Because of his general shallowness, Victor does not seem to think that reality is something he needs to concern himself with, and he blatantly says to JD: “I'm not in a realistic mood … so spare me” (Ellis *Glamorama* 11).

At this point in the analysis, we move on to discuss the claims proposed by Miller, who states that consumers value products to a high extent – they consider them parts of themselves or an extension of the self. The sense of self needs support as it is fragile, and commodities can offer this support. We, thereby, become what we own (D. 180). In the case of Victor, there is absolutely no doubt that he values consumer goods to an extremely high extend, and we see this not only in the multitude of products he uses or mentions, but also from the fact that these products are mentioned by brand or maker. Victor does not simply drive a moped, he has a Vespa (Ellis G*lamorama* 16), and he does not just own a cellular phone, he uses a Panasonic EBH 70 (Ellis *Glamorama* 16), and the list goes on. Victor hereby makes it most evident to which extend the products he consumes is a part of his self: it might even be argued that the products become a substitute for what Victor lacks in personality, an idea we will explore further when we conduct a discussion of the portrayal of identity in *Glamorama.* What is also important, is the fact that Victor does not buy these products simply because he likes them; he acquires them because magazines like *Elle Decor* has told him that these consumer goods are the latest craze (Ellis *Glamorama* 17), and it is thereby evident that Victor is not an edgy trendsetter, he is rather someone who blindly follows the demands of other trendsetters. On those terms, it can therefore also be concluded that Victor to a large extent uses consumer goods in the exact way that Miller proposes; namely to support a fragile ego, or in Victor's case maybe an elusive sense of self.

For Victor, this fragility is also seen in his constant need to see himself on display in the very same popular culture magazines, however, Victor never really manages to get as far as *Elle Decor* or the likes of it: ”I notice I’m still on the cover of the current issue of YouthQuake, looking pretty cool – the headline 27 AND HIP in bold purple letters above my smiling, expressionless face, and I’ve just got to buy another copy, but since I don’t have any cash there’s no way” (Ellis *Glamorama* 19). *YouthQuake,* a lesser known magazine with a name that addresses teens, seems

to be as far as Victor's lacking talent can take him in the world he desires. Again, it is not completely clear if Victor even realizes this because of his shallow nature: to him, exposure is exposure. What is interesting, however, is the fact that the oblivious Victor is able to notice and render details of the layout, when he is normally so easily distracted. This would seem a point of enlightenment, but sadly it is not, for Victor is unable to see the fact that he, being a model, is a commodity in the same manner as the products he desires: “someone from Dolce and Gabbana, Garren… and Sandy Gallin are hanging out, staring at us impassively, like we’re for sale or something, and let’s just face it – as if (Ellis *Glamorama* 58). An incident which shows complete irony as all of the models actually are for sale and on constant display for movies, magazines, and commercials – a lesser model such as Victor should only be so lucky as to be desired by Dolce and Gabbana. In fact, because Victor and his peers are models, the consumerism is taken to one further extreme; they actually become products themselves, and because it always seems to be one certain look that is in style, they all look more or less interchangeable: “All the guys [models] basically look the same: cute head (one exception), great body, high hair, chiseled lips, cutting edge, naughty or however you want us” (Ellis G*lamorama* 58). Victor actually says it himself here – they appear 'however you want them', which also reinforces the idea that Victor is more concerned with facade and products than with his own identity.

Miller provides us with even further details about what possessions mean to the fragile self, such as Victor's, as he stresses that “If possessions are viewed as part of self, it follows that an unintentional loss of possessions should be regarded as a loss or lessening of self” (D. 186). Victor does not face an actual loss, but we can see an aspect of this theory at play when consumer objects do not play exactly into his idea of what they should be, as seen from the previously mentioned fit he throws when he finds the specks disturbing; all of which serve to reinforce the idea that Victor's image is immensely fragile and build entirely on the rightness of the products around him. And Victor uses celebrities as consumer goods in the same manner – the right people have to show up for the opening of his club, and he talks about them exhaustively, sometimes filling entire pages of the novel with mere listings of names (Ellis *Glamorama* 68-72). It is not only famous people Victor utilizes in this manner, it is also the never ending list of lyrics to popular music which seem to be the answers he always has at hand: “Do you have the time to listen to me

whine?" (Ellis *Glamorama* 33), which is very indicatively from Green Day's *Basket Case,* is just one out of the seemingly endless list of examples.

Miller also stresses that "Objects in our possession literally can extend the self, as when a tool or weapon allows us to do things of which we would otherwise be incapable. Possessions can also symbolically extend self, as when a uniform or a trophy allows us to convince ourselves (and perhaps others) that we can be a different person than we would be without them" (D. 193), and to a certain degree this can be related to the way in which Victor uses his Vespa. He rides it straight up to Alison's apartment building and takes it all the way up the elevator (Ellis *Glamorama* 19). The extension is about the comfort provided by consumerism, and maybe also about caring too much about his things to leave them downstairs. Again, it therefore seems reinforced how closely Victor is linked to the stuff he owns. Possessions are fundamental in knowing who we are, as "doing is merely a transitional state or a manifestation of the more fundamental desires to have or to be" (D. Miller 193), and based on what we have so far analyzed in accordance to consumerism in *Glamorama,* it is true for Victor that he is, and considers himself, nothing more than what he owns.

One more complexity with regard to the nature of consumer culture and the individual consumer is stressed by Miller: "Theories of modern consumerism generally stress its dependence on the presence of a continuing desire for the new on the part of consumers, identifying this as the feature which most distinguishes it from more traditional patterns" (D. 246), and Victor truly does have continual desires throughout the entire novel – he wants it all, both women and commodities. However, a conundrum is presented as Victor seems unable to follow through. For example, he wants a relationship with both Alison, Chloe, and Lauren but – as previously analyzed – he seems unable to really be in any of these relationships, most evident by the fact that he does not want sex with either of the women once he feels he has 'secured' them in his grasp. Furthermore, Victor is so dense that he is constantly distracted by the novelty of new things, or is unable to really see or communicate with people because he gets distracted by their appearances. This is seen from the way he watches and describes Damien as they meet for breakfast: "looking very studly in a Comme des Garcons black T-shirt under a black double-breasted jacket, a Cartier Panthere watch wrapped around a semi-hairy wrist, Giorgio Armani prescription sunglasses locked on a pretty decent head, a Motorola Stortac cell phone next to the semi-hairy wrist" (Ellis

Glamorama 44). As clueless as Victor often is, he sure provides keen descriptions of the people around him, and we can ascribe this both to his own obsession with consumer culture, but also to the fact that Victor is, as analyzed, more of a follower than a trendsetter himself, so he therefore has to carefully watch the latest fashions.

This does not mean, however, that Victor is above critiquing other people for their choices, in fact, it might even be argued that he has to do so in order to establish some sort of reputation and position for himself. One example of such a moment is seen in the following encounter, where Victor freely criticizes someone for being intellectually inclined; a quality Victor clearly does not comprehend: "What do you even do besides going to fucking poetry readings at Fez? Why don't you go to a fucking gym or something?" (Ellis *Glamorama* 93). Clearly, going to the gym is seen as more important than exploring your intellect. This is generally a thought process of Victor's which we can follow through most of the novel, but towards the end, we might be able to detect a small change within Victor when he says to Chloe:

> 'A smart suit,' she sighs. 'Being buff. A cool haircut. Worrying about whether people think you're famous enough or cool enough or in good enough shape or… or whatever.' She sighs, gives up, stares at the ceiling. 'These are not signs of wisdom, Victor,' she says. 'This is the bad planet.' 'Yeah,' I say. 'Yeah, baby… I think I was paying too much attention to the way things looked, right? I know, baby, I know (Ellis *Glamorama* 410).

But as it is so often the case with Victor, it is difficult to tell whether he actually has realized that money and looks are not everything, or if he is just telling Chloe what she wants to hear.

The argument that Victor is only paying lip service when admitting to Chloe that he has been overly shallow is a tendency in consumer societies which is to a degree explained by Annesley: "Depicting a world in which commodities have replaced relationships and identities become subsumed by branding, aspirations towards celebrity and the ideals of advertising, *Glamorama* offers a critique of consumption and constructs a portrait of a world lost in a commercial frenzy" (*Fictions* 27). This is actually one of the instances in which *Glamorama* and *Slaves of New York* are much alike, as there are no close inter-human relations in either of the two. With Victor it seems to be the case that he cares too much about himself to be able to show

real compassion for another person; that is after all difficult, when you seem all too willingly to share the fact that you live by the self-inflicted motto “The better you look, the more you see” (Ellis *Glamorama* 27).

When taking into account the arguments made by Dittmar, the concept of the consumer world is put even further into perspective: “consumer goods have come to play a stronger psychological role for us: we value and buy them as means of regulating emotions and gaining social status, and as a way of acquiring or expressing identity and aspiring to an ‘ideal self’” (2). At this point in the analysis, it has already been firmly established that Victor's main personality traits are being shallow and dense, and as Victor is such an empty shell, it is difficult to determine if he has an idea of an ideal self – or if he really is nothing more than the empty shell of an image, he sets forth to portray. We will not presume to provide a definitive answer, but one of the more interesting conundrums of *Glamorama* does end up being what the true essence of Victor Ward is, and if we can even talk of one such thing. An explanation for this possible voidness in Victor, is offered by Dittmar who stresses that a tendency in consumerist culture is, of course, dependent on material goods as

> Material goods fulfill a range of psychological functions, such as giving people control, independence, enjoyment, or emotional comfort. However, the main purpose here is to propose that the link between material goods and identity is of central psychological importance, thus arguing that, yes, in many ways, ‘to have is to be’ in contemporary culture (27).

As seen from the previously mentioned motto Victor lives by in addition to the fact that he lives off of his looks, and believes these are maintained by possessions, Victor definitely lives by the idea that to have is to be.

The idea of how the consumer culture is dependent on the products it produces can be specified by considering that “our clothing system [is] not simply … a set of material objects to keep its wearers warm, but ... a symbolic code by which its wearers communicate their membership of social groups” (Lury 18). As an example, this would mean Victor expressing his masculinity by attempting to look like the men around him he finds it desirable to look like, or

cementing his status as a model by blending in with that crowd. We also see how Victor changes his appearance as he gains affiliation with a group of terrorist super models. He assimilates well – sometimes so well that he is confused for having been in pictures or places he has not been – or so much so that his own agent is confident he, after an entire conversation, is a person named Dagby (Ellis *Glamorama* 30). This idea of consumer culture causing assimilation is further stressed by Lury as she argues that "Commodity aesthetics is thus deemed central … to the creation of what they call 'the mass individual'" (59). Like in so many of Ellis' novels, people are confused for one another – even our main character – because they look alike. They are slaves of fashion which dictates what they all look like, especially for a person like Victor, who only cares about reflection in regard to looking at himself in a mirror, and never in regard to producing deep thoughts. It is almost as though Victor likes the idea of becoming part of 'the mass individual', even though he also harbors dreams of being that special number one celebrity in the spotlight.

The last part of the analysis of consumerism in *Glamorama* will revolve around Bourdieu and his concept of capital. First off, Bourdieu argues that capital takes time to accumulate (*Handbook* 15), and in the novel, it is evident that Victor wants to make it, but he does not seem capable of hard work and making an effort. Capital is supposed to be the product of accumulated labor, but Victor generally does not work hard, but always opts for the easy way out. In the following, we are going to look into how Victor relates to the three forms of capital proposed by Bourdieu. First off, we will turn our focus to the topic of economic capital.

With regard to economic capital, we already know that Victor's account is empty. Things, however, seem to fall into his lap anyways. He clearly hopes that the club he is opening for Damien will transfer into economic capital – and in a way it already has, as he is receiving economic contributions from donors, even though they do not have a cause (Ellis *Glamorama* 9); which really also displays the callousness with which money is handled within the novel. As is often the case, this is the most obvious and important form of capital in this novel. We also know that Victor's father has bought an apartment for him, on the Upper East Side no less, after Victor has been evicted from his previous residence, and that Victor is financially dependent on his father (Ellis G*lamorama* 457) - in the same manner as Ray is in *Slaves of New York* – but this is not the only relationship from which Victor enjoys financial support. At the Bowery Bar, Victor seems embarrassed by the fact that Chloe has to be the one to pick up the tab, and out of shame he

attempts to downplay the incident so the media present will not discover it (Ellis *Glamorama* 39). Although we often doubt Victor's true intentions, in this case there seems to be no reluctance in his shame; reinforcing the notion of just how important economic capital is. Still, Victor seems highly unable to grasp the true value of money or the harsh reality of what it means to be without capital, as seen from his less than serious reaction to being evicted: "An eviction notice is pinned to my door and when I pull it off I glance over at the director and roll my eyes, groaning 'Oh puhleeeze'" (Ellis *Glamorama* 180). Again, however, this might only be for show for the cameras, but there is no doubt that Victor would never consider living a more affordable lifestyle, as seen from the following conversation with his father: "'So I guess more cash is out of the question.' 'I think the trust should suffice.' 'Hey, New York's expensive – ' 'Then move.' 'Oh my god, get real.' 'What are you trying to tell me, Victor?' 'Dad.' I breathe in. 'Let's face it. I'm broke'" (Ellis G*lamorama* 82). What is conceivably evident at this stage, is how much Victor values financial capital, while the true value of money or how to obtain them constantly seems to elude him. It could also simply be that Victor is unable to take his financial decay seriously, as long as he has his father to bail him out.

We then move on to an analysis of cultural capital; both in the objectified- and the institutionalized state. In the objectified state, what we can mainly focus on is Victor's ever-present need to describe everything by brand and maker, and how he, as previously analyzed, mixes celebrities into this concoction:

> Stills from Chloe's loft in a space that looks like it was designed by Dan Flavin: two Toshiyuki Kita hop sofas, an expanse of white-maple floor, six Baccarat Tastevin wineglasses – a gift from Bruce and Nancy Weber – dozens of white French tulips, a Stairmaster and a free-weight set, photography books – Matthew Rolston, Annie Leibovitz, Herb Ritts – all signed Fabergé egg – a gift from Bruce Willis (pre-Demi) (Ellis *Glamorama* 39).

When Victor has no money, it seems that the cultural capital in the form of knowledge about designers, expensive labels, and famous people becomes what Victor considers his true value – except for maybe his looks.

With regard to cultural capital in the institutionalized state, what we first have to consider is the fact that Victor has no education, and has made no real career for himself – expressed by his father in the following manner: "'I mean, my god,' he sighs. 'Victor, you're twenty-seven and you're only a model?" (Ellis *Glamorama* 79). In *Slaves of New York,* we saw something similar: education not being valued particularly. However, at the end of the novel, Victor attends law school, yet he is still not able to see the value in education: previously, we have mentioned how Victor mocks people seeking out their intellectual needs, and in the following quote, we see how he thinks a profession is nothing more than a role you assume through clothes:

> At Industria for the George magazine photo shoot I can't fathom why the press is making such a big deal about this. Simple before-and-after shots. Before: I'm holding a Bass Ale, wearing Prada, a goatee pasted on my face, a grungy expression, eyes slits. After: I'm carrying a stack of lawbooks and wearing a Brooks Brothers seersucker suit, a bottle of Diet Coke in my left hand, Oliver Peoples wireframes (Ellis *Glamorama* 450).

The last aspect of consumerism which we are going to discuss is the presence of social capital. What is most evident is the fact that the characters in the novel all seem to network a lot – they tend to believe that this is what makes or breaks your career in New York – but at the same time, there are no close relations between any of the characters. We see this as Victor becomes part of a terrorist association which he does not really like, but feels he has to succumb to, and also in the fact that he frequently cheats on his girlfriend without showing real if any remorse (Ellis *Glamorama* 21). This makes it evident that networking in *Glamorama* is valued to the same extent as it is in *Slaves of New York.* Yet, we also have to take into consideration that by the end of the novel, Victor might – if we can consider him genuine in this instance – eventually be showing a change: "At first I was confused by what passed for love in this world: people were discarded because they were too old or too fat or too poor or they had too much hair or not enough, they were wrinkled, they had no muscles, no definition, no tone, they weren't hip, they weren't remotely famous. This was how you chose lovers" (*Glamorama* 480-481).

Based on the analysis just conducted, it seems evident that consumerism is tangible and plays a large part in *Glamorama* and to Victor in particular - what also becomes evident, is the fact

that this consumerism takes on many forms. On the most basic level, consumerism is seen in the obsession with having money and being able to acquire possessions, but Victor is not a man of many means, and for him consumerism is therefore also present on a more abstract level. By this, we mean the fact that Victor in fact consumes everything around him - this entails fashion, musical lyrics, celebrities, and so on. This is all done to such a degree that it would seem that Victor is nothing more than a shallow, empty shell who consists of nothing more than all the consumer products he appears to depend upon.

4.3 Analysis of *Lunar Park*

Thus reaching the end of the analysis of *Glamorama*, we will now turn to an analysis of *Lunar Park*, which will be initiated by an short introduction to the novel.

4.3.1 Introduction to *Lunar Park*

Published in 2005, *Lunar Park* is currently Ellis' second to last novel, and with regard to structure, it clearly distinguishes itself from all of his other works. Ellis is known for his use of intertextuality, and the composition of *Lunar Park*, is extremely dependent upon this reference back and forth between all of Ellis' books. This is clear to the reader from the very first sentences of the novel, as Ellis begins by writing "'You do an awfully good impression of yourself.' This is the first line of *Lunar Park*" (*Lunar Park* 3), only to reuse this line at the beginning of chapter two, and then really begin the story he plans to tell. The remaining part of chapter one recounts what has supposedly been the course of the writer's life from the publication of *Less Than Zero* till the point where the story takes off. Structurally, *Lunar Park* hereby both epitomizes the intertextuality Ellis is known for, while also being most unlike any of his other works.

Hereby, we have also opened the discussion of what is going to be one of the major difficulties in the analysis of this novel, namely, the fact that the format also furthers a reading that makes it challenging to distinguish between Ellis the author of the novel and Ellis the character of the novel. By using actual facts from his own life – titles of novels, critique of novels, names of celebrities (like McInerney) – Ellis weaves a web which sometimes leaves us guessing what is fact and what is fiction. Some data we are able to verify, some we are able to dismiss, but when it comes to deeply personal and subjective interpretations of events, we simply have to guess. Adding to this is the fact that Ellis even had a false website, which contained fictitious facts

about his life which adhered to the Ellis in *Lunar Park,* created around the time of the publication. When analyzing Bret Easton Ellis, the character in *Lunar Park* in terms of masculinity, consumerism, and identity, this analysis, therefore, sometimes becomes impossible to distinguish from what an analysis of the author's life would look like; to such an extent is the metafictionality in *Lunar Park* complete. Ellis is able to complete this intricate structure while still having critiques saying: “On the surface, *Lunar Park* is the most traditional of Ellis's novels” (Mandel 113).

At this point, we have touched upon the structure of the novel, but there are more interesting elements to mention: “Though it has a plot, that plot is blurred by multiple beginnings and endings” (Mandel 113). When doing an analysis, this also means that the storyline can be challenging to fully follow; an element which is certainly reinforced by the narrator's growing paranoia that seems to obscure reality from hallucinatory imaginings.

Mandel further states that *Lunar Park* can be seen as Ellis playing with the mockumentary genre, which was widely popular in the 1980s (114), and this is consistent with what is mentioned about the novel above. However, this does not singularly define the genre of the novel. When reading it, we have to keep in mind that we find elements pertaining to the autobiographical genre – even if we choose to read *Lunar Park* simply as a piece of fiction – while there are also elements of horror. In the following analysis of the Ellis character portrayed in *Lunar Park,* the horror-aspects are of seemingly little value to us, and will only be considered when incidents can be ascribed to the main character's growing paranoia, and therefore hold importance to the study of masculinity, consumerism, and identity.

4.3.2 Consumerism in *Lunar Park*

With *Lunar Park,* Ellis moved past writing about the rich, spoiled, adolescents that he portrayed in *Less Than Zero, The Rules of Attraction, American Psycho,* and *Glamorama,* and began writing about the lives of the middle-aged with “The wife, the kids, the posh suburbs” (Ellis *Lunar* 66). One interesting feature in this novel is, as we have mentioned previously, that Ellis named the main character after himself. In order to differentiate between the two in the analysis, we therefore refer to the author as Ellis and the character as Bret.

In our previous analysis, we found that neither *Slaves of New York* nor *Glamorama* portray the super-rich (Mathur 3), yet in *Lunar Park* we might come close to this definition. The people

portrayed are not royalty or aristocracy, but they are part of an elite that excel at what they do and accordingly have a lot of money. In *Lunar Park,* this is particularly pronounced in the beginning of the novel, where Bret, who is also the narrator, depicts his extravagant lifestyle being part of the Brat Pack and the parties that follow (Ellis *Lunar* 11). Allegedly at this point, Bret has a lot of economic capital, and wealth seems to accumulate along with his career: "It all kept coming: the cases of champagne consumed, the suits Armani sent over, the cocktails on first class, the charting on various power lists, the court seat at Lakers games, the shopping after hours at Barneys, the groupies, the paternity suits, the restraining orders against 'determined fans'. The first million, the second million, the third million" (Ellis *Lunar* 15). The excess is accentuated by the repetitive noun phrases name dropping various brands, celebrities, and night clubs.

Connected to Bret's career is also his cultural capital in the institutionalized state. Unlike Victor in *Glamorama* and most of the characters in *Slaves of New York,* Bret actually has gone to college: the infamous Camden (Ellis *Lunar* 6) that reappears in most of Ellis' works. This cultural capital has accumulated into a teaching job at a college, and also success as a writer. However, Bret's wealth does not seem to be the result of accumulated labor, and it certainly has not taken time to accumulate either (Bourdieu *Handbook* 15): instead money seems to come easy and without much effort. This might also emphasize how easy the money can be lost again.

And money is indeed important in *Lunar Park,* as the characters express "a cultural fascination with wealth" (Mathur 16). First of all, Bret lives in an expensive neighborhood inhabited by people with money they like to exhibit (Ellis *Lunar* 78). Also, Jayne and Bret's interior is neat and packed with designer furniture (Ellis *Lunar* 78). However, it does not seem like they value any of the commodities on an individual level, instead they value what they in their entirety provide them with: image and status. What furthers this idea, is that they do not have any cultural capital in the objectified state with the exception of Bret's novels. This is similar to our findings in *Slaves of New York.* In this neighborhood, success is what matters and this is passed on to the children: "Jayne wanted to raise gifted, disciplined children, driven to succeed, but she was fearful of just about everything: the threat of pedophiles, bacteria, SUVs… refined sugar, ultraviolet rays, terrorists, ourselves" (Ellis *Lunar* 41). The children are incited to do well in life, and this is accentuated by absurdly long school hours (Ellis *Lunar* 90). Also, the quote reveals that Jayne undisputedly is a helicopter parent, and this is further accentuated by the children's constant

medicine intake (Ellis *Lunar* 97). In short, the children's lives are portrayed dystopicly, and this has a horrendous outcome: first of all "eight and a half percent of all children under the age of ten tried to kill themselves last year" (Ellis *Lunar* 225), and secondly rumors abound that the children conspire to disappear to 'Neverland' to avoid growing up like this (Ellis *Lunar* 233).

However, it is not only Jayne that incite wealth, Bret's surroundings also rouse it through commercials among others: "'Why haven't you become a millionaire yet?' followed by 'There is not more to life than money' followed by 'You *do* need to own an island'… 'If you aren't rich you deserve to be humiliated'" (Ellis *Lunar* 132). However, Bret expresses his dislike for commercials (Ellis *Lunar* 132), which might reveal that he does not consider wealth and commodities that important, and this is an interesting change from the Bret we meet in the beginning of *Lunar Park* – a change we will explore further in the following.

The cultural fascination with wealth is also visible in relation to Bret and his career, although that too is mostly tangible in the beginning of the novel. This is first of all present after the publishing of Bret's first novels: "And I was on display. Everything I did was written about. The paparazzi followed me constantly" (Ellis *Lunar* 13). The press and publishers want him constantly, even though he is sidetracked by excessive use of drugs (Ellis *Lunar* 29). Bret exclaims how "Everything about my career was now measured in economics" (Ellis *Lunar* 31), which emphasizes how no one cares for his health, since wealth exceeds it, and wealth also seems to exceed creativity and talent: money is more important than the actual content of the novels he produces. Following this is a wafer-thin line between success and failure: "Celebrity was a life lived in code – it was a place where you constantly had to decipher what people wanted from you, and where the terrain was slippery and a world where ultimately you always made the wrong choice" (Ellis *Lunar* 37). And eventually, Bret makes the wrong choice and loses his fortune to the consumption of drugs, parties, girls, clothes, and cars (Ellis *Lunar* 36). However, hitting rock bottom is what initiates a change in Bret in regard to money and consumerism, and he expresses a desire to "return to that past simplicity" (Ellis *Lunar* 5). Bret is overwhelmed by the monotony of his lifestyle: "there were other girls, there were other boys; there was always another party to get lost in" (Ellis *Lunar* 16). There is a tangible repetitiveness visible in this quote: the sentences mirror each other in syntax, and the verb phrase 'get lost in' accentuates Bret's indifference. The repetitiveness is a tactic often employed by Ellis: in *Glamorama*, it is always freezingly cold (Ellis

Glamorama 400), and in *Less Than Zero*, Clay often encounters the "disappear here" sign (Ellis *Less Than Zero* 171) - all messages that are used to emphasize the feeling of despair and entrapment within the main characters. As in *Less Than Zero, The Rules of Attraction,* and *Glamorama,* Ellis once again portray the indifferent attitude the life of excess brings, which here also is amplified by the devastating scenery of New York with its "increasing horror of urban life" (Ellis *Lunar* 40), and its fearful incidents of "the missing boys [that] are scaring the hell out of me [Bret]" (Ellis *Lunar* 127).

A change from this life of excess is already marked in the format of the novel. The first chapter is called 'The Beginnings' and starts in the present tense (Ellis *Lunar* 3), and moves into past tense as the narrator explains in retrospect his previously indulgent life. This further creates a meta-level, as this chapter also reflects on the beginning of the first 'real' chapter in *Lunar Park.* The change in Bret is final as he moves to the suburbs and marries Jayne Dennis, with whom he has a son. This appears as the only option of rescue for Bret, and he expresses that he merely exploits the family: "She [Jayne] should have known that the reason I was there had nothing to do with her, but that I was just trying to locate someplace where I might find the will to live again" (Ellis *Lunar* 443). Along with the move, Bret's focus seems to shift from life in the fast lane to the quiet family life of suburbia**:** "It was all about what he [Robby] wanted. It was all about what he needed. Everything I desired was overridden, and I had to accept this" (Ellis *Lunar* 41). However, it is difficult to tell whether this is part of an acquired way of thinking put on as part of the rules Jayne has set up, and which is enforced by among others his therapist**,** or whether it is Bret's natural behavior. Allegedly, Jayne, Robby, and Sarah have no significant meaning to him, other than being his rescue, and the previous quote stresses the idea of Bret only using the family to rise from his misery. The massive need for therapy both to save the marriage (Ellis *Lunar* 67) and the relationship to Robby accentuates (Ellis *Lunar* 67), how Bret does not make a genuine effort himself to fix these relationships.

In fact, Bret does not have any social capital that exceeds the practical relations to other celebrities, writers, and publishers, whom we discovered exploit him to further their own purpose. He even expresses himself that "very few (close friends included) knew anything about this, my secret son" (Ellis *Lunar* 24). The lack of social capital is epitomized in the words "Distrust everybody" (Ellis *Lunar* 83), which accentuates how everybody is encouraged not to have or make

close relations. The only character that seems close to Bret is ironically named Jay McInerney. The two share coke and conversations about relationships and being a parent (Ellis *Lunar* 65), and this is one of the only conversations throughout the novel that seems genuine and meaningful. Including a character named Jay McInerney presents the author McInerney without truly presenting the real author - an element which also accentuates Ellis famous writing style that confuses and fusions fiction and reality. This lack of social capital other than for practical reasons was also pervading in both *Slaves of New York* and *Glamorama.*

What further supports the idea that Bret's change is insincere, is the later exclaim that: "by the end of that summer everything I had learned started to disappear" (Ellis *Lunar* 44). Our interpretation of this, is that, unlike Victor in *Glamorama*, Bret is genuinely disgusted with consumerism when talking about material goods, however he maintains a massive drug addiction which is also a commodity in some sense, and this makes it impossible for him to completely change. In fact, drugs seem to be the only commodity that he seems interested in.

The immediate thought then, is that writing a section on consumerism based on a book where the main character does not favor it becomes difficult, yet this is interesting in itself. First of all, it becomes relevant what consumerism then symbolizes in this novel and second of all, we can analyze the meaning of drugs being the only commodity that Bret favors. Here, it is noticeable that Bret does not hold clothes and cars in such high regard that he considers them to be part of himself (D. Miller 180), which we previously noted. In fact, Bret seems to criticize consumerism: "everyone looked as if they'd stepped out of an Abercrombie and Fitch catalogue" (Ellis *Lunar* 112), emphasizing the conformism consumerism brings, and in this manner, he emphasizes somewhat the opposite of what Miller claims: products do not make you an individual, products make you like everyone else, which echoes the claim that "Commodity aesthetics is thus deemed central ... to the creation of ... 'the mass individual'" (Lury 59). What it further echoes, is the conformism that was also present in *Glamorama,* as the models all look the same, and Victor is constantly confused for other people.

As mentioned, Bret has a completely different opinion of the value of commodities when it comes to drugs. Bret is very calculating when being around drugs, which is seen in the following: "I needed two eight balls of the pure stuff and a couple of the heavily cut grams for drunken guests who were going to bum off me and be too wasted to notice the difference" (Ellis *Lunar* 54). What

this quote reveals first of all, is that Bret is casual around drugs: he finds it normal to give it to guests. Yet the quote also reveals how well he knows the drug milieu and the slang revolving it. This quotation also serves to reaffirm the notion of Bret's lacking social capital - when he has any of 'the pure stuff', he does not want to share with his guests. On several occasions, it is stated that Bret's drug use actually does extend his self (D. Miller 180): "the cocaine I'd snorted in the dingy bathroom giving me a burly, reckless confidence" (Ellis *Lunar* 171). However, he also uses medicaments just to deal with life: "I had taken an Ambien and finished the rest of the Ketel One and after easing myself into bed I was soon sleeping soundly, freed from having to deal with my wife's desires, the scratching at the side of the house, the furniture that was rearranging itself downstairs and the darkening carpet it rested on" (Ellis *Lunar* 188). This might, in fact, be the case for all of Bret's substance abuse: he uses them just to get by. Hereby, giving up the drugs would also mean that Bret would lose or lessen his sense of self according to Miller (D. 186). Bret does not really mention much about quitting drugs, other than a failed attempt as he moved in with Jayne: "Yes, I was no longer technically clean. I had mildly relapsed. It hadn't taken long" (Ellis *Lunar* 50). A couple of weeks was how long he could endure without drugs, and this emphasize his continuing desire (D. Miller 246). Yet, we might also be able to interpret the inability to quit drugs as Bret's fear of not being able to live life without them.

We have so far concluded that Bret is not interested in commodities other than drugs, yet this is not the entire truth. It is true that Bret is not interested in buying commodities to extend his sense of self, yet a few commodities do seem to have significance to him. One of the focal points of *Lunar Park* is the Terby: a mechanical bird that Bret has purchased for Sarah (Ellis *Lunar* 62). Bret experiences that the bird is alive: "As I laid the doll down on Sarah's bed next to the mutilated pillow I realized the thing was actually warm and something was pumping beneath its feathers" (Ellis *Lunar* 76), and this initiates a fear in him. The bird is connected to Bret and a sense of guilt, which is revealed as it occurs to him that Terby spelled backwards becomes 'Y Bret', and Bret's own interpretation is that it has to do with his father (Ellis *Lunar* 388).

Another commodity that is the focal point in *Lunar Park* is Bret's fictional works, in particular *American Psycho.* Like the Terby, the Patrick Bateman-Clayton-character also hunts Bret by conducting the fictional crimes of the novel in reality. This also initiates guilt in Bret, since he feels like he therefore is the catalyst of the murder and torture (Ellis *Lunar* 184). In relation to both

the Terby and the resurrection of Patrick Bateman, it is difficult to tell what is real and what is imagined: what figures inside Bret's head, and what actually takes place? This creates an opposition to *Glamorama,* where Victor is confused for other people, since in this novel it is Bret who has trouble distinguishing people from one another: who is Bateman? Is he the actual villain from his previous novel, is he Clayton, Donald Kimball, or is he part of himself? (Ellis *Lunar* 335). The confusion between real and imagined, is further questioned by the use of 1st person narrator: we only see the events from Bret's point of view, and this results in an insufficient outline of them. Also, Bret himself teases with the exclamation that "As a writer you slant all evidence in favor of the conclusions you want to produce and you rarely tilt in favor of the truth" (Ellis *Lunar* 217). The reference to a writer could allude to both Bret himself, but it could also allude to Ellis, the author. In this way, it denotes a metafictional level suggesting the fictionality of the novel.

What further obscures what is perceived as real and imagined, is that there are indications of both. What supports the idea that everything is made up by Bret himself, is that he first of all believes he has a psychosis (Ellis *Lunar* 379), and this is indeed emphasized by the fact that Bret on several occasions appears torn in his sense of self. This appears as he refers to himself in the third person as "the ghost" (Ellis *Lunar* 79), and as he on several occations refers to 'the writer': "Yes, the writer was back. He did not want to be left out of this scene and was already whispering things to me" (Ellis *Lunar* 357). 'The writer' could be part of Bret himself, as he always appears out of nowhere and instructs Bret on what to do in a given situation. What is further interesting about the quote is the use of the word 'scene' alluding to the same confusion between what is real and what is part of a movie in *Glamorama.* As with Victor Ward, Bret hereby appears as an unreliable narrator which is even further accentuated by his excessive drug abuse.

On the other hand, what indicates that the incidents in fact are real, is that a man is arrested for multiple murders while pretending to be Patrick Bateman (Ellis *Lunar* 441). Further, both Robby and the paranormal investigators acknowledge the Terby and its connection to the presence of demons, although, Robby is not certain: "Robby didn't look at me when he confirmed that what had invaded the house was not human but an animal and that it could have been the dog" (Ellis *Lunar* 361). This leaves us yet again at a dead end, which might suggest that there is no actual answer to the plausibility of the events, and perhaps it is not of importance. In fact, Ellis

refuses to explain what is real and imagined in *Lunar Park,* as he "don't like demystifying the text" (Karnicky 119).

Robert Miller, the paranormal investigator, however, makes a link between Bret and the demons: "these spirits might be projections from your inner self" (Ellis *Lunar* 388), defining how either way you interpret the incidents - real or imagined – both the Terby and Patrick Bateman in one way or another originate from Bret, and this is important since it cements how the commodities are psychologically linked to Bret. Further, lines can be drawn from most of the commodities to Robert Ellis, Bret's father. As mentioned, the Terby is purchased by Bret, and he himself links the demons it possesses to a guilt directed at his father. Also, Bret explains that *American Psycho* "had been about my father (his rage, his obsession with status, his loneliness), whom I had turned into a fictional serial killer (Ellis *Lunar* 181). In addition to this, a third commodity seems important: the cream-colored 450 SLA that reappears several times throughout the novel, and which is similar to the vehicle that his father once owned (Ellis *Lunar* 111). All of the incidents reveal that Bret is haunted by the memory of his father.

What can be added to this is that the commodities do not symbolize something desirable, instead they come to symbolize evil and guilt. In this manner, *Lunar Park* appears as more of a mockery of consumerism than a celebration of it. We have previously noted how Annesley interprets *Glamorama* as "a critique of consumption" (*Fictions* 27), and based on our findings, this may also be true in *Lunar Park*. At the same time, all of the uncanny events intrigue a new change in Bret, and this time it seems genuine: "I was going to concentrate only on our family now. It was the only thing that meant anything to me" (Ellis *Lunar* 295). In this manner, it is cemented that family means more to Bret than commodities will ever do. Thus ending the analysis of consumerism in *Lunar Park* on a more positive note than in *Glamorama*, we will now proceed to an analysis of its portrayal of masculinity.

4.3.3 Masculinity in *Lunar Park*

In the previous section, we have touched upon nearly all aspects of Bret's life including work and family. Yet, what we have not mentioned, is their significance in relation to Bret's masculinity; therefore, we will now once again turn to the key patriarchal structures that Mac an Ghaill mentions (1).

From our previous analysis, we can conclude that Bret does not do capitalist work in the traditional sense (Mac an Ghaill 1). Instead, he makes a lot of money on his novels in certain periods of his life, but he spends it just as quickly again. Bret furthermore, as mentioned, works as a teacher at a college, yet he does not seem good at it since he does not care: "'Well, I only teach here once a week, and I'm canceling tomorrow's class and –' I realized how careless that made me sound and so I began to make case for myself. 'I mean, I take my job seriously even though it's not very demanding… I mean it's fairly routine'" (Ellis *Lunar* 277). Instead, Bret's father adheres more to these capitalist structures in terms of occupation: "My father made the bulk of his money from highly speculative real estate deals, most of them during the Reagan years, and the freedom this money bought made him increasingly unstable" (Ellis *Lunar* 7). This might suggest that Bret's father is more of a patriarch in this manner than Bret. Throughout the novel, indications of a complicated father-son-relationship are continuously made and often, the complications are connected to the father's hegemonic masculine behavior (Ellis *Lunar* 8-9). The dysfunctional relationship seems to be one of the reasons why Bret is haunted by guilt in relation to his father (Ellis *Lunar* 404-405).

Generally, it seems like Bret's finances is a mess of which he has no control. We concluded earlier that Jayne is the one who saves Bret, and this is tangible in relation to money as well. Jayne owns the house he moves into (Ellis *Lunar* 40), she holds a profitable job as an actor (Ellis *Lunar* 38), and she is "practical and maternal and stable" (Ellis *Lunar* 24) – everything Bret is not. In this way, Jayne becomes the one who is dominant in relation to money, while Bret therefore does not come off as the breadwinner of the family, which, according to Whitehead, has long been considered a masculine feature (113). Following this, Bret is not the patriarch of the family (Mac an Ghaill 1), and he does not strive to be either: "all these pressures about being the man of the house or whatever you wanna call it are getting to me" (Ellis *Lunar* 127). At the same time, Bret feels lonely because of this: "I realized how very little I had in common with them – the career dads, the responsible and diligent moms – and I was soon filled with dread and loneliness (Ellis *Lunar* 196), revealing that he is out of his natural habitat, and does not take on the role as a patriarch in the family to make the society he inhabits functional (Whitehead 18).

Bret is content with letting Jayne occupy the role as a matriarch, which might be linked to our previous discovery that Bret is only using Jayne, Robby, and Sarah to get back on track. At first

in the novel, he does not even want a family: “I has already seen what I wanted and it did not involve children. Like all single men the first priority was my career. I had a fantasy bachelor’s life and wanted to keep it” (Ellis *Lunar* 22). Yet, as was seen in the previous section, Bret experiences a change, and this change also includes his opinion on family life. In the end of the novel, Bret thus takes responsibility for Robby: “That was when I realized there was someone else who was more important. ‘Robby’” (Ellis *Lunar* 434). However, this realization in relation to his family appears to late: Robby has disappeared (Ellis Lunar 435) and Jayne wants a divorce (Ellis *Lunar* 443), and this makes him relapse into a heavier drug abuse, this time using heroin (Ellis *Lunar* 443). So, despite the change, Bret still does not manage to be a patriarch in relation to family.

This pattern is also visible with regard to Bret’s sexuality (Mac an Ghaill 1), as Jayne is the one who wants sex, not him (Ellis *Lunar* 124), and this even makes Jayne question his manhood (Ellis *Lunar* 124). Bret seems to have some insight into this issue: “Jayne – whom I was once so highly attracted to that she’d complained about the frequency of sex – resembled something new to me now, something other than the hot girlfriend. She was the wife, the mother, my savior” (Ellis *Lunar* 124). However, he fails to make the connection between this new meaning and the celibacy: a connection that derived from previous analysis, plausibly could be that he feels emasculated by Jayne, and therefore he is not sexually attracted to her anymore. Instead, Bret explains the celibacy as a result of his sexual attraction to Aimee Light (Ellis *Lunar* 125). With Aimee, Bret is portrayed as a very sexual being (Ellis *Lunar* 59), and as an opposition to Jayne, she does represent the ‘hot girlfriend’ that he believes he can control “even though she was throwing of the opposite vibe” (Ellis *Lunar* 171). However, despite several attempts he is not able to “trigger a sexual response” (Ellis *Lunar* 120) in Aimee. In this sense, Bret can somewhat be considered to possess a dominating masculine sexuality since he has affairs, yet, the opposite might also be claimed to be true, because he is unable to arouse the object of his sexual desires.

In relation to Bret’s sexuality, it is also relevant to consider the indefinability hereof. He claims himself that: “I wasn’t straight, I wasn’t gay, I wasn’t bi, I didn’t know what I was” (Ellis *Lunar* 27). Kimmel mentions that a fear of femininity, homosexuality, and being connected to such eluded men at the turn of the century (126), however, this is not the case with Bret at all. He several times mentions his sexual excesses with men, and when his success is at its highest, he does not even care if people think he is gay, in fact, he gets a kick out of being “a mystery, an

enigma" (Ellis *Lunar* 27), since this has the potential to increase his wealth and fame. Once again, money seems to be all that matters to Bret during this part of his life.

Bret also does not convey any violent behavior (Mac an Ghaill 1) towards other people. The only violence we encounter is that being done by Bret to the Terby, and this is more out of self-defense. At the same time, it can also be discussed whether Bret portrays qualities of a warrior (Moffatt 8), since he is scared of all of the events that happen around him, and it is not until the end of the novel that he acts upon it. However, he attempts to save his family, and is aware that he is the only one, who is able to do so (Ellis *Lunar* 216). In this manner, Bret appears as a complex character, which is also visible in relation to the creation of *American Psycho*. Bret explains that "the novel forced itself to be written", and that "*something* –else took over" (Ellis *Lunar* 18) and wrote the book without him being psychically a part of it. This can be interpreted as a compulsion from deep within him: that Bret might have the prospects of the violent warrior archetype inside, but that he is unable to really understand it.

American Psycho was – as in the case of Ellis – Bret's masterpiece, and regarding the last of Moffat's notions, culture, Bret might convey some patriarchal dominance, since most of his novels are successful. In this manner, Bret can also be said to have built an empire (Whitehead 120). However, Bret does not take the success seriously: "publishing a shiny booklike object was simply an excuse for parties and glamour and good-looking authors reading finely honed minimalism to students who would listen rapt with slack-jawed admiration, thinking, I could do that, I could be them. But of course, if you weren't photogenic enough, the sad truth was you couldn't" (Ellis *Lunar* 12-13). He does not consider the impact of his novels in regard to culture, but neither in regard to the impact e.g. *American Psycho* might have in the wrong hands until after the publishing and therefore also too late (Ellis *Lunar* 19). In this regard, Bret also fails to be a patriarch.

The overall conclusion to whether Bret displays behavior significant to the key patriarchal structures is that he does not. In fact, in terms of family life, Jayne seems to be the matriarch, and the argumentation above reveals several dualisms (Whitehead 10) between the two. However, there are more dualisms to be found. First of all, Bret is passive throughout most of the novel, both in relation to the family and in relation to the uncanny events that unravel in front of him. Even though he in the end attempts to save his family, he cries several times out of powerlessness

(Ellis *Lunar* 77), and crying instead of acting appears as a weak response to his problems. However, he always cries alone, and he keeps his fear of the mysterious events that unravel around him to himself: "Immediately: I was cut off. I was on my own. Telling Kimball about Clayton wouldn't mean anything. It didn't matter now" (Ellis *Lunar* 279). According to Kimmel, "American men have been afraid that others will see them as less than manly, as weak, timid, frightened. And men have been afraid of not measuring up to some vaguely defined notions of what it means to be a man, afraid of failure" (7), and this is somewhat what Bret expresses himself, as he considers how much of the story about the Terby he should tell the police; refraining from specific details that seem unrealistic (Ellis *Lunar* 54). In this way, Bret practices the "strong, silent type" (Moffatt 42), yet, because the silence stems from fear, he does not appear neither strong nor manly.

While Bret is mostly passive, Jayne, on the other hand, is active, particularly in relation to the family. Unlike Bret, she makes several attempts to mend the family, among others by purchasing a house in Amagansett and investing in a Christmas trip to London (Ellis *Lunar* 442). Further, she seems more psychically stabile than Bret, especially because she is his savior, but also because there is no mentioning of her doing drugs or acting out of hand in any other similar way.

In this way, Jayne becomes the dominant character in their relationship, which is accentuated by the fact that Bret moves into *her* house, and that she sets up certain rules for him to obey in order to live there (Ellis *Lunar* 37). Bret disobeys these rules by doing drugs and cheating, but it is evident that he fears the consequences being discovered: "I needed to prove something this morning: that I was responsible, that I wasn't an addict, that I was clean" (Ellis *Lunar* 77). This emphasizes how important it is for Bret to be in this family, and this is interesting, as we previously concluded that he does not wholeheartedly attempt to be part of it. The question that remains is: why is this so important to Bret? Kimmel offers the answer that "Women themselves often serve as a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking with other men" (7), and in many ways, this is what Jayne is to Bret: "I was proud to have Jayne Dennis as my wife. Millions of men found her image magnetically sexual" (Ellis *Lunar* 124). Yet, she does much more for him, first of all, she saves him from the chaos he is in. Secondly, and this is what Bret himself emphasizes as the primary reason for patching up things with Jayne: "no one else wanted me [Bret]" (Ellis *Lunar* 38). This reveals that it is not Jayne whom he wants; he just needs *somebody*, which gives way to the interpretation that he is not able to take care of himself and is

afraid to be alone. The latter is what Bret himself sees as reality (Ellis *Lunar* 301). Either way, it portrays Bret as highly dependent on others, which can be interpreted as a sign of weakness.

In relation to masculinity, Bret's inferiority to Jayne, according to Moffatt, makes him deviate from the hegemonic model of masculinity (7). Yet, Bret does not seem to dominate marginalized men (Moffatt 7) either, and what accentuates this, is that Bret is part of the marginalized men himself because of his queer tendencies. However, it might be fair to say that he dominates Robby to some extend (Ellis *Lunar* 160). At the same time, this domination does not appear to be present because of a desire to dominate, nor a fear of Robby dominating him (Kimmel 7). Rather, it appears as a way to cope with the fact that they are both "scared and wary of each other" (Ellis *Lunar* 90), because they do not understand one another.

An overall conclusion to the previous analysis would be that Bret is highly dysfunctional: he has no close relations, he is not independent as he is afraid to be alone, and he does not fit in in suburbia like the rest of the parents. However, Bret's dysfunctionality is not explained away as 'natural' masculine behavior (Whitehead 8), as our analysis reveals that he in no way proves to express stereotypical masculine behavior. In this way, Bret resembles Victor Ward in *Glamorama.* Instead, Bret's behavior is explained away by his massive drug use, and an unpleasant childhood. In fact, his father is portrayed as more oppressive and violent (Whitehead 8) than he himself is. In this way, Bret's father's masculinity is portrayed hyperbolically, whereas Bret's is not at all. His dysfunctionality, however, is portrayed hyperbolically (Penner 21). What is further important in relation to Bret's father, is that part of Bret's closure is that he reconciles with his father by spreading his ashes (Ellis *Lunar* 450), which seems to put him in a more peaceful state of mind (Ellis *Lunar* 450-453). It is also noticeable that the three pages do not contain one single period; emphasizing that these lines are Bret's unspoiled train of thoughts. The last lines of *Lunar Park* further reveal the ultimate reconciliation for Bret: a declaration of love to his son Robby, whom he in the beginning of the novel did not acknowledge. In this way, Bret in the end proves himself (Kimmel 4): he has gone through all these obstacles to make peace with his past so that he can embrace his future. In this change, there is also a glimpse of the possibility of Bret restoring his masculinity in the future (Ellis *Lunar* 421) – however, as in *Less Than Zero*, it is nothing more than a glimpse, since a relapse into the world of drugs still lures in the background (Ellis *Lunar* 443).

4.4. Analysis of *The Last Bachelor*

We now turn away from Ellis for a while, and direct our attention to our third author: McInerney. *The Last Bachelor* presents individual stories, and therefore also a new set of characters with each new chapter. What this entails for the analysis, is that we have chosen certain of the short stories that are of special interest when it comes to masculinity and consumerism: mainly “Sleeping with Pigs” (McInerney 1), “I Love You, Honey” (McInerney 29), “The Madonna of Turkey Season” (McInerney 48), “Everything is Lost” (McInerney 66), “Invisible Fences” (McInerney 78), “Summary Judgment” (McInerney 113), and “Putting Daisy Down” (McInerney 165), while other of the narratives are left out completely or merely mentioned when they can provide a pertinent comparison.

As a result of this selection, one point of interest with regard to how the authors of the Literary Brat Pack are akin is, however, overlooked. This is the fact that in the short story “Penelope on the Pond” (McInerney 145), we are introduced to the mistress of an aspiring president, and her name is Alison Poole: a character we encounter both in the narratives of Ellis and McInerney. As an example, we know her as the girlfriend of Damien and one of Victor's love interests in *Glamorama.* With this being established, we can begin the analysis by introducing McInerney and his life and writings, while a general introduction to *The Last Bachelor* follows.

4.4.1 Introduction to Jay McInerney and *The Last Bachelor*

Jay McInerney (1955) was born in Hartford, Connecticut, yet, in 1979 he moved to Manhatten (“jaymcinerney - biography”). He initiated a literary career in 1984 with his debut novel *Bright Lights, Big City*. During the span of several decades many other works of fiction followed, and counts such titles as *Bright Lights, Big City* counts *Ransom* (1985), *Story of My Life* (1988), *Brightness Falls* (1992), *The Last of the Savages* (1996), *Model Behavior* (1998), *How it Ended* (2000), *The Good Life* (2006), *The Last Bachelor* (2009), and latest *Bright, Precious Days* (2016).

As in the case of both Ellis and Janowitz, it is difficult to separate the life of McInerney from the lives of his characters. Caveney expresses that “The intersections of the writers’ lives and that of their characters has been located in the nightclubs, in their sexuality, speculations about their drug use, and cynical responses to their mutual self-promotion” (45). McInenery lives in Manhatten – the centre of many of his works - and like many of his characters he did party, drink,

and do cocaine (Teeman). Also, McInerney had a fact-checking job at The New Yorker which resembles the job of the protagonist in *Bright Lights, Big City* (Teeman). In fact, this particular novel has been considered one of the most biographical novels McInerney has published, since it presents a young, aspiring writer moving to New York with his model girlfriend, who falls in love with someone else. This story mirrors what happened between McInerney and his girlfriend at the time, Linda ("jaymcinerney - biography"). Yet, the relationship with Linda was not the only relationship that went wrong: four marriages prove that McInerney had a tempestuous love life (Teeman), which once again can be transferred to his novels that often portray dysfunctional relationships.

Caveney explains how "these writers have made it their project to strip away disguise, enabling us to read the rhetoric of their fiction over the shoulder of their self-advertisement" (47) - accentuating that there is a link between the literature of the Literary Brat Pack and their actual lives. Yet, Caveney stresses how this has been misinterpreted: "The bratpack have been received as thinly-disguised autobiographers; this needs to be reversed. They are literary performers, allowing the reader to observe the observers, their work continually signifying its own activity" (47). Caveney elaborates that "What needs to be thought through about these writers is the critical implications of their relationship to the media, the ways in which their positions as literary socialites has worked as a *para-text* to their fiction" (45) signifying how the resemblance between the social status, the parties and the careless behavior of the Literary Brat Pack, and action portrayed in their fiction might not exclusively be autobiographical, but also a way of promoting their works.

As mentioned, New York and Manhatten are central settings in most of McInerney's novels: "McInerney has continued exploring the perils and pitfalls of New York, especially its nightlife and publishing worlds" (S. Miller). Yet, Caveney argues that the first novel of his trilogy about Corinne and Russel, *Brightness Falls,* marks a shift away from the party scene otherwise shown in McInerney's works: "Here is a novel that appears to embrace convention, the work of a writer who has finished sowing his wilder oats and eased himself into the more adult world of matrimony and mortgages" (69). Yet, Caveney also expresses that "the novel in many ways continues McInerney's earlier concerns, and indeed suggests the impossibility of ever fully escaping the emotional and sexual narratives of our younger selves" (70).

The Last Bachelor

The Last Bachelor resembles *Slaves of New York* in genre since it is a collection of short stories. The difference is that these stories are not intertwined in the same way as Janowitz'. Yet, the stories still have one common denominator: they all portray malfunctioning relationships, as both families and lovers are portrayed in situations that reveal the dysfunctionality between the characters.

As in *Slaves of New York,* infidelity is prevailing in these short stories, and these affairs have serious repercussions when discovered. In "I Love You Honey" (McInerney 29), Lora provokes miscarriages as a way to punish Liam for his affairs, while in "Putting Daisy Down" (McInerney 165), Bryce's wife forces him to put down his beloved cat as punishment. In both narratives, the couples continue to live together after the punishments pretending nothing has happened. Other stories end in divorce as visible in for example "Sleeping With Pigs" (McInerney 1) and "The March" (McInerney 99).

Two of the 12 stories portray dysfunctional families: "The Madonna of Turkey Season" (McInerney 48), where violence seems to be the only way of communicating, and "The Debutante's Return", where a son exploits his mother's illness to steal her belongings.

Almost inseparably from infidelity is a theme of sex. Yet, sex is not necessarily connected to something pleasurable. In "Invisible Fences" (McInerney 78), Dean and Susan pick up strange men that Susan has sex with, even though she does not want to. Here, sex functions as another way for Dean to punish Susan for an affair she has previously had – once again underlining a theme of punishment for infidelity.

What *Slaves of New York* and *The Last Bachelor* further share is that money and wealth are highlighted. In "Summary Judgement" (McInerney 113) and "The Waiter" (McInerney 135), two narrators struggle to become wealthy. Alysha is intent on marrying a wealthy man at all costs. She attempts to scam men into marrying her; giving them the impression that she herself is rich. Seth, on the other hand, is honest about being a waiter to the wealthier Cara, yet, he is embarrassed, as he is aware that to her friends this is an inferior job. Both chapters ascertain that what is important is money and perhaps also status.

This leads to another prevailing theme in *The Last Bachelor:* an obsession with fame and celebrity. This is evident when Alison Poole exclaims that she has dated "actors, and artists and rock stars" (McInerney 149), and when Sabrina in "Everything Is Lost" plans a party at "the hottest place in TriBeCa" (McInerney 66). Parties, alcohol and drugs are all evident in McInerney's short stories, yet not as distinct as in Janowitz' and his other works.

All the narratives reveal characters that are miserable in their quest for the perfect life, and this is underlined by a narration in an indifferent tone. The short stories are written mostly in a 3rd person narrative with some 1st person narrations as exceptions. What has just been described touches upon the themes that will be our focus in the analysis, but the following section will provide a more in-depth analysis of respectively masculinity and consumerism in McInerney's collection of short stories.

4.4.2 Masculinity in *The Last Bachelor*

As mentioned above, we will begin the analysis of *The Last Bachelor* by focusing on how masculinity is represented through the various male characters, we are introduced to. As a way to initiate our knowledge of the men in a broad perspective, we commence by correlating them to the key patriarchal structures presented by Mac an Ghail (1). In this regard, what is first and foremost noticeable is the fact that only two of all the men are occupied in capitalist work; Billy Laube from "Summary Judgment" and Bryce from "Putting Daisy Down". Although we only hear of the deals he closes on the golf court, Bryce describes how he is becoming a member of the club, and how he is now one of "the big boys" (McInerney 165). Billy Laube has family money while he has also created an empire for himself; what exactly he does we do not know, since Alysha de Sante mainly seeks him out and seduces him because of his manly looks and his money: she wants a man who can support her (McInerney 115). The fact that only two of the male characters are employed in capitalist work, does not mean that the other men are uninteresting when it comes to their jobs. In "Sleeping with Pigs", McSweeney, whose given name we do not know, is a writer, but he begins to gain recognition and make a name for himself within his field – which also entails that he begins to make a lot of money (McInerney 7). Comparable to this is "Everything is Lost", where Kyle is also a published author, who now teaches writing at NYC; the main difference being that Kyle is not as successful as McSweeney (McInerney 71). In fact, it seems that culture is really

given pride of place as all the characters in this collection of short stories are accomplished each within their own creative field, as writers or as chefs, and we actually see how Sabrina is more fascinated by a student of Kyle's who has had more critical acclaim (McInerney 72). “The Madonna of Turkey Season” introduces us to a dysfunctional family consisting only of men, where violence is ever-present, as the brothers fight and argue persistently because the mother is no longer there to keep the peace (McInerney 48). In spite of this evident dysfunction, the brothers all seem to be accomplished within their fields: when they journey home for thanksgiving, they are arriving from prep schools and college, and as they grow up, one writes a well-received play and speaks French (McInerney 54), another becomes the youngest ever vice-president at General Electrics (McInerney 63).

From this point, we will move on to a discussion of how the men in question are comparable to two of the other key patriarchal structures; family and sexuality (Mac an Gaill 1), and we begin with McSweeney. In this short narrative, there are no strong ties between the members of his little family – although he continues to visit them on the countryside once a month after their divorce, his wife consistently seems to be more of a mystery and a fascination to him than anything else: “Blythe had burned pretty bright and steady in her early days in New York” (McInerney 20), McSweeney speculates, but he now sees that she has changed (McInerney 20). Instead, McSweeney takes up a life with other women – a lot of them – which complies somewhat with the general notion that his need for sex is stronger than hers, especially post partum (McInerney 13). “Everything is lost” reverses the roles as Sabrina ends up being unfaithful to Kyle. Sabrina begins the narrative by stating that she and Kyle tell each other everything (McInerney 66), while they really do not. All the men she encounters, including Kyle, lust after her – and she complies to sex, considering the way his needs control him almost infantile and simple (McInerney 67), although it is not until her affair that she initiates sexual encounters herself (McInerney 77). Following in the footsteps of Sabrina, Susan, the wife in “Invisible Fences”, has cheated on her husband prior to the beginning of the events of the short story, and as a result, the husband presumes to gain control by making her have sex with a long line of men while he watches (McInerney 86). This is easily seen as his attempt to put the pieces of his masculinity back together, but it ends up being the final destruction of his family instead. This one narrative seems to be an exception in the collection of short stories, as a general pattern appears to be that the

men cheat while the women hold some unbearable threat over their heads afterwards. To support this argument, we can mention how the wife in “Putting Daisy Down” forces her husband to put down a most beloved cat after he has had an affair (McInerney 176), while the discovery of unfaithful behavior leads to abortions in “I Love You, Honey” (McInerney 42). What stands out in this line of argumentation, is the fact that even though the men would appear to be in control of their cohabitation, the real power is found with the women, who are then to a higher degree in charge of the families. Another argument proposed by Mac an Ghaill can support this notion, as he states that: “A fragmentary literature has begun to suggest a more complex conceptualization of masculinity. Most specifically there has been a shift to the notions of hegemonic masculinity and multiple masculinities” (2), and the idea of a complex assortment of masculinities being at play in *The Last Bachelor* is assertable, as the men generally all seem to display self-righteousness and independence by having affairs, while they also submit to the will and vengeance of their respective wives.

This relation between the spouses might be further explored by considering Moffat's thoughts on hegemonic masculinity; namely the fact that men are expected to measure themselves against other men, and that certain men are generally considered the oppressors of women and men they consider subordinated themselves (7). When reading “Sleeping with Pigs” with this in mind, it almost appears that Blythe refuses to marry, or even pay attention to McSweeney before he has made something of himself – even in spite of the fact that she later on in the narrative seems more than a little oblivious to the value of consumer goods. The relation between man and woman is also peculiar in “Summary Judgment” – Billy Laube is in many ways described as extremely manly, but sort of like Victor Ward in *Glamorama*, he does not appear too smart. He seems to have the respect of his peers, and he has made a business empire for himself, but in spite of many hints, it takes a lot for him to see that Alysha has scammed him (McInerney 131). Overall, it appears that it is not so much that she needs him to be the man, but more the fact that he needs and likes her to be the damsel in distress: “'Oh, darling, I didn't want to bore you with my problems,' she said in a quavering voice … 'Whatever it is, it's nothing we can't fix,' he said, squeezing her hand” (McInerney 127). Taking this into account, it seems quite evident that there, broadly speaking, is no male domination and thereby no oppression of the women to be found in *The Last Bachelor*. In fact, it is more or less implied that the women take charge

throughout the narratives. The narrative that most clearly would support this argument is “Invisible Fences”, where Susan has suffered a period of oppression due to her previous unfaithfulness, but ends up standing up to her husband's obscure desires (McInerney 96-97).

As previously made clear, Moffat asserts that male stereotypes such as warrior or athlete are preferred as opposed to other gendered archetypes (8), and even though the men presented in the narratives of *The Last Bachelor* cannot be considered dominating or oppressive, the stereotypes are present. Again, Billy Laube is described as the big, strong man who comes to the rescue of the woman, and even more evidently so, the three brothers in “The Madonna of Turkey Season” communicate mainly by fighting verbally and physically: “Mike had the fiercest temper in the family, and he was three inches taller and thirty pounds heavier than his elder brother” (McInerney 56) – on those terms, they become the epitome of favored masculinity if we consider the warrior violent. In fact, this is seen in every depiction of every encounter between the brothers: “Manly hugs were exchanged” (McInerney 49) is said as they meet, displaying the need to stress the gendered form even their greetings take. Throughout the narrative, it becomes increasingly evident that these men are unable to act in any way that is not gendered.

Moffat concretely mentions one more archetype of masculine behavior which has been idealized – the stereotype of the strong, silent man (42), and this is what we turn our focus to in the following. This stereotype is not really found in the typical sense in *The Last Bachelor*, however, we are able to detect certain aspects of it. As an example, we would emphasize the fact that there is a tendency for the men to not talk about their emotions. For Bryce and Carly in “Putting Daisy Down”, Liam and Lora in “I Love You, Honey”, and Susan and McSweeney in “Sleeping with Pigs”, it even results in the destruction of their marriages. Furthermore, an extra aspect is added to this consideration as none of these men object to what the women put them through. In *Lunar Park*, the same tendencies are tangible, since Bret does not share his fear with anyone.

In the analysis that follows, we will put the already discussed ideas of masculinity in *The Last Bachelor* into further perspective by considering that: “In what might be termed the 'everyday world', those behaviours of males that are violent, dysfunctional and oppressive are frequently excused or explained away as 'natural' masculine behaviour, being understood in common-sense terms as fixed and, thus, as an inevitable aspect of social 'reality'” (Whitehead 8). When

considering what we have just stated about “The Madonna of Turkey Season”, there is absolutely no doubt that these brothers are both violent and dysfunctional, and it furthermore becomes interesting to see how they compete to be the most dominating one. It almost appears as though this archetypical, masculine behavior is more pronounced when there is no female influence – their mother – asserted on them. One narrative element which is not general for *The Last Bachelor*, but only for this one short story is the fact that the pronounced, violent behavior is accentuated by the fact that even though this is written in a 1st person narrative, the reader is given no clear indication of who the 'I' is. All three brothers are mentioned by name and generally in great detail, but we do not know, which one of them renders the story; and this might not even be too significant. What we hereby argue, is that because they show such stereotypical masculine behavior, they in many ways merge into one person and become difficult to distinguish from one another. The masculine stereotype becomes one unitary identity for them in this regard.

In a different manner, the male main character of “Invisible Fences” is dysfunctional, as he has clearly chosen to disregard his wife's emotions, or maybe he is not even able to detect them, and he has pushed her into a situation she is clearly not comfortable with. Moreover, the first emotion he is able to conjure when his son clings to him is annoyance: “As if to disprove this assertion, Bucky intercepts me on the front step and attaches himself to my leg, and it takes a good ten minutes to get him settled down again” (McInerney 84). This reaffirms the idea that he is more concerned about getting on with his night than about anything else, and, as a result, all of his relations suffer. One speculation might need to be added at this point, however, and that is the fact that all the harm he causes his family might be, whether justifiable or not, caused by the fact that he has been deeply betrayed by his wife.

In *The Last Bachelor,* dysfunction is often portrayed through the unfaithfulness between the spouses, and with the exceptions of “Invisible Fences” and “Everything Is Lost”, this is depicted as male behavior. McSweeney first has one affair that lasts for a considerable amount of time, and then a string of short relations, and another dysfunction is added as he begins to rationalize and blame Blythe for his actions: “Whatever the rationalizations for my affair, it would hardly have been possible if Blythe hadn’t grown increasingly withdrawn, frequently sending me off into the night on my own while she stayed in the apartment with Dylan and Sweetheart and her needlepoint” (McInerney 19). Whether or not his considerations are justifiable can be discussed,

but under all circumstances the testimony serves to display the growing discomfort and unhealthy relationship between husband and wife. Similar debilitation is found in “I Love You, Honey”, where Liam is unable to break off his affair: “Liam was mortified at his own infidelity and brimming with the resolve to honor his marriage vows forever more… but somehow he hadn’t managed to break it off with Sasha” (McInerney 32), and in “Putting Daisy Down”: “In his muddled state, he couldn’t quite separate out the different components of the guilt that was oppressing him – about the affair, about Daisy’s murderous habits, about having overindulged the previous night” (McInerney 171), where Bryce is clearly ridden by guilt, but unable to take any action.

As previously mentioned, violent masculinity comes to resemble a mostly unitary identity for the three brothers in “The Madonna of Turkey Season” and in relation to this, we can consider Whitehead's claim; that there is a tendency for scholars to consider both men and women unitary identities (9). In broad perspective, it cannot be said that all of the men and all of the women in *the Last Bachelor* portray two unitary possibilities of identities, as they are also different from each other in many ways. One general tendency, however, seems to be that relations between the two sexes are ruined because the respective partners are not faithful. On those terms, there is an overall unitarity in the actions of the characters and also in the consequences this has on the relations described.

As the two sexes cannot be considered unitary identities from the way they men and women are portrayed in *The Last Bachelor,* we might also consider that the collection of short stories presents a move away from gender stereotypes. But applying the idea of gender identities being rooted in dualisms “such as passive/assertive, strong/weak, irrational/rational, gentle/forceful, emotional/distant” (Whitehead 10) can still provide us with interesting insight into how masculinity is portrayed within each of the narratives – overall, there are many intriguing instances to consider. One evident example is found in “The Madonna of Turkey Season”, where the boys are forceful, while their female counterparts are gentle and try to keep peace. Another very simple example can be found in “The Waiter”, where Seth and Cara are posed as each other's opposite since her family has money and his has none. In this case, the fact that he is making a career for himself does not matter, as the only thing that truly counts is inherited money – all of which, in Seth's own words, “made me feel like a bumpkin” (McInerney 135).

In other of the short stories, the dualisms between the men and women are not quite as straightforward. “I Love You, Honey” presents Liam who feels guilty about having an affair, but also about not being strong enough to stop the affair (McInerney 32), and this displays his general lack of self-control: “one night she’d kissed him and he’d been unable to resist” (McInerney 44). His failing determination is clearly not a one-off event, as he confesses how “it had happened again several times since” (McInerney 45). The sum of this is that Liam is presented as a person completely devoid of will-power, and as someone who is afraid of Lora’s actions: “but in the succeeding days he seemed unwilling to confront her about her motives, as if he were afraid their marriage couldn’t survive the revelation of certain facts (McInerney 42). In this way, Liam continuously suppresses reality, while Lora becomes his dual opposite by displaying cold determination – most evidently shown by the fact that she arranges an abortion for herself in spite of Liam's wishes (McInerney 47).

“Sleeping with Pigs” presents a dualism between McSweeney and Blythe that appears to last throughout the entire short story, as it seems that she is the dominant force in their marriage, while he is more indulgent. Blythe's determined nature is clearly seen in the way she expresses her motto: “‘Don’t look back’” (McInerney 27-28), from how she keeps forcing a wide variety of pets on her household (McInerney 12), and from how she never apologizes for her actions or the actions of the pig (McInerney 14). McSweeney, on the other hand, comes to resemble a mere observer of these actions – he is unable to make changes to their life, and ultimately unable even to choose between the women he is seeing (McInerney 21). Another tangible dualism between the two is the fact that she prefers life outside the city, while he mostly seems attached to life in New York (McInerney 19).

A strange dynamic is also at play between the couple introduced to us in “Everything Is Lost”, where Kyle is distant and unable to register details, and his female counterpart, Sabrina, to an increasing degree feels the emotional impact of this; eventually leading to her having an affair, and consequently the destruction of their relationship: “As it turned out, he did eventually ask about the hickey on her collarbone, but by then it was too late” (McInerney 77). Sabrina takes action against the neglect imposed on her, while Susan, the wife in “Invisible Fences”, seems to have silently accepted her faith. Susan generally seems subdued by her husband. After a long day, she does not want to go out: “I’m a little tired” (McInerney 85), she says, but Dean's only solution

is to provide her with drugs to alter her mood (McInerney 85). Dean is thereby seen as the dominant one in the marriage, and he tries to convince her of the validity of the life they lead: "You love getting fucked by strange men. And you really love getting fucked by strange black men" (McInerney 94). Throughout most of the narrative, he even seems to have her persuaded, because she appears to doubt her own emotions: "I don't know. I guess I've gotten used to it" (McInerney 94).

The final short story we are going to consider in terms of dualisms between men and women is "Putting Daisy Down". In this narrative, Bryce, the husband, at first appears the manliest of men (McInerney 165), and in addition to this he, like most of the other men, has both a wife, and a mistress. However, as the narrative progresses, it becomes evident that he is subdued when it comes to direct confrontations with Carly, his wife. This is depicted in the way he contemplates their decision to leave the city: "Moving to the suburbs was, as he saw it, the latest attempt to make her happy" (McInerney 173). What is difficult to determine in the short story is, however, if Bryce's main motivation is to appease his wife, or if he merely strives to avoid conflicts: "The problem then became how to get through the rest of the day without a confrontation" (McInerney 173). Under all circumstances, Carly is posed as his dual counterpart, as she, even through all her pouting, is pure determination in wanting to put Daisy down as revenge for his infidelity (McInerney 177). Towards the end of the narrative, an interesting change happens within Bryce: "For years… Bryce had lived in fear of his wife's dark moods, but now he found himself losing patience with her complaints and her piques" (McInerney 177), and he reevaluates his life by recommencing his affairs (McInerney 178).

After discussing the most interesting dualisms between the men and women in *The Last Bachelor,* one element distinguishes itself as prevalent. Intriguingly enough, it appears that almost all the short stories pose men as dominant to women at the beginning of the narratives, while they all present a shift and end with the destruction of their relationships. This mirrors our findings in *Slaves of New York*, where we also discovered that the women end up being the dominant ones.

Whitehead continues his argumentation by stating that men dominate the families, the private domain, because they are considered the breadwinners, while they also occupy the public domain by having the most favorable jobs (113). In *The Last Bachelor,* we see some elements

which confirm this theory, but we also have some instances which seem to disprove it. Blythe does not, as mentioned, want to marry McSweeney before he has made a career for himself, but this is not generally the case in the short stories. Because of her inherited wealth and her family name, she is more of a provider than him. In "Invisible Fences", Dean manages a bookstore, while Susan is a lawyer (McInerney 79), so, they are equal if in fact she is not better educated than him. The only narrative that poses a polar opposite is "Summary Judgement", where Alysha clearly needs a man to provide for her. Otherwise, most of the couples seem to go back and forth on who is the dominant one depending on the circumstance, and they can hereby mostly be considered equals – although hardly in healthy relationships. Masculine behavior is thereby not distinguishable in clear domination displayed by the male characters.

If we search for an explanation for why this is, we might turn to Kimmel, who argues that

> Manhood is less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us, having power or control over us. Throughout the American history American men have been afraid that others will see us as less than manly, as weak, timid, frightened. And men have been afraid of not measuring up to some vaguely defined notions of what it means to be a man, afraid of failure (7).

In "Sleeping with Pigs", McSweeney is not really afraid of the way Blythe organizes and thereby dominates their lives, but the fact that he cheats on her might be his rebellion against her control. The same rebellion is visible in *Lunar Park*, where we found that Bret cheats on Jayne because she emasculates him. In "The Madonna of Turkey Season", each of the brothers want to be the best – to dominate – and this might be a result of them being afraid of failure. What then becomes especially interesting, is that this tendency to want to exert dominant behavior becomes more pronounced in the relations between men than in the relation between men and women. Based on what we have analyzed so far, it can be argued that all the men we encounter seem more afraid of losing their respective women than they are of being dominated by them. As a possible conclusion to this conundrum, we might once more turn to Kimmel, who also argues that "In large part, it's other men who are important to American men; American men define their masculinity, not as much in relation to women, but in relation to each other. Masculinity is largely a

homosocial enactment" (7), and on those terms, the men presented in *The Last Bachelor* really care more about how they are perceived by other men, than how they are regarded by women.

The overall impression of masculinity drawn by McInerney in *The Last Bachelor* does not appear to be one of domination or control. This does not mean, however, that the collection of short stories does not adhere to other stereotypical depictions of the masculine. Penner suggests that literary depictions of masculinity often are hyperbolic in their essence (21). In "Sleeping with Pigs", we see how McSweeney sleeps with a lot of women, and in the context of Penner's argument, this can be seen as an exaggerated attempt to assert his manhood – the more women he is able to conquer, the more of a man he is. In an even more obvious manner, we can look at the character of Brian in "The Madonna of Turkey Season". Throughout the narrative, Brian boasts of his accomplishments, his abilities to speak French, and his supposed close relationship with the deceased mother – to great frustration of everyone around him. Only the close friend, Foster, attempts to explain the actions by stating that: "Every artist interprets the world through the prism of his own narcissism" (McInerney 52), and when the father contemplates the essence of his son further, he comes to the following conclusion: "Of course he'd long known Brian was massively self-absorbed, prone to exaggeration and outright mendacity" (McInerney 53). Especially with these examples of Brian's behavior, it becomes visible how hyperbolic behavior in men in literature is excused as a naturally occurring element of their masculinity and thereby their personality.

In many ways, the argument above is relatable to Kimmel's argument of manhood being a constant quest to prove oneself (4). Based on what we have so far determined, we can relate the hyperbolic behavior displayed by the men to them having a general need to prove themselves. Furthermore, it seems that they all strive to prove themselves in terms of careers, and that they are doing quite well for themselves in this area. In fact, *The Last Bachelor* might be the only one of all the novels we work with, where education is truly valued.

On that note, we are at the end of our assessment and analysis of masculinities and masculine behavior in *The Last Bachelor*. What seems evident is the fact that there are definitely many forms of masculinity at play in the short stories; the men are not generally considered the breadwinners of the families, and they generally do not dominate the relationships they are in. In fact, their female counterparts are often the ones to take control – either by manipulation or by

brute force. Moreover, we see a blatant display of sexual drives which in an almost infantile manner exposes the males as driven by basic desires rather than rational thoughts. The men are thereby displayed as inferior to the women in many ways, all of which makes the dualisms presented between the two sexes all the more intriguing – because the sexes are presented as two very clear oppositions throughout all the short stories. Adding an extra perspective to this is how McInerney also chooses to display the sometimes complicated nature of the dynamics between the men; a dynamic which reaches from "fraternal compassion" (McInerney 166) in "Putting Daisy Down" to downright competition in "The Madonna of Turkey Season".

Masculinity is evidently a prevailing theme in *The Last Bachelor* - to a degree which consumerism never reaches. However, this is interesting since this is a deviation from the previous works we have analyzed. Therefore, we will now analyze what consumerism then represents in McInerney's novel.

4.4.3. Consumerism in *The Last Bachelor*

Before we truly begin the analysis of consumerism in *The Last Bachelor*, we need to make it clear that this analysis will not be as considerable as the one conducted on the two novels and the other collection of short stories. This is, quite simply, due to the fact that consumerism and consumerist behavior is not as blatantly put on display here.

We begin by taking Mathur's idea of the super-rich (3) into consideration. This collection of short stories shows a wide variety of people – both people with a lot of money, and people with less, however, none of them can be considered part of the super-rich. Blythe might be one of the wealthiest people we encounter, and because of her family and inherited money, certain things come easier to her (McInerney 15). Even though McSweeney is the one whose career is increasing in prominence, it is her notability which ensures them an apartment in Manhattan's Upper East Side, or, as McSweeney expresses it: one of the "Snootier co-op apartment buildings on the Upper East Side" (McInerney 15). What this serves to convey to the reader is not only the fact that they have money, but it also encloses how some things require more than money to buy – wealth is more than a figure on your bank account. However, the couple clearly wants for nothing when it comes to material goods: they frequent such prominent places as "Barneys, Bergdorf, Chanel, Armani" (McInerney 18), and when contemplating the conditions they are living under,

McSweeney ends up concluding that “If we lacked anything at all, it was hard for me to imagine what it might be” (McInerney 11). Still, the couple is far from content or happy, which, once again, displays how wealth is not an automatic ticket to bliss.

The financial security described here is not the case for all of the narratives; in fact, we are far from it in some stories. “Putting Daisy Down” introduces a couple who appears to just be embarking on a journey of considerable wealth. They are able to acquire Marc Jacobs clothes (McInerney 172), but before they moved to the suburbs, they lived in a one-bedroom on Columbus (McInerney 172), and it is only as this story sets off that they are joining a country club (McInerney 165). The couple in “I love you, Honey” live in the city in a small apartment at Waverly Place (McInerney 30), which might not display great wealth in itself, but, at the same time, he has his own office in TriBeCa (McInerney 30), and they are able to acquire a house in Brooklyn (McInerney 43). In “Invisible Fences”, the couple also live in the suburbs and show only a few signs of pronounced wealth – which even makes Dean state that: “I consider myself a pretty normal guy” (McInerney 79), and at the other end of the spectrum, we find Seth from “The Waiter”, who has absolutely no financial means compared to Cara: “her watch and jewelry probably cost more than my tuition for the next year, with plenty left over for room and board.” (McInerney 135).

Mathur continues his line of argumentation by stating that the interest in consumer culture is rooted in a “cultural fascination with wealth” (16). For the most part, it seems that it is not so much wealth in itself as it is getting an education and making a name for yourself that is important. As already mentioned, this is the only one of the narratives we analyze that shows a true appreciation and understanding of the value of an education. We will go into further detail with this in the analysis of cultural capital, but right now, we will turn our focus to Alysha, who seems to be the only, or at least the most noteworthy, exception. Alysha, frankly and without remorse, discloses that she is “determined to be the wife of a wealthy and powerful man” (McInerney 113). After she has once “been blinded by love, not to mention the estates and the jet and the jewels” (McInerney 122), she is determined not to suffer the same faith again. This last of the quotes is actually especially interesting as she mentions being in love, but really it is doubtful, whether her 'love' last beyond the jet and jewels: at least she only seems fascinated by men with money from the moment we encounter her. The interesting conclusion to stress on the basis of

this is that consumerism is more pronounced here than in the other short stories in *The Last Bachelor*.

Again, "The Waiter" proposes an interesting opposition, as Sean does not seem as fascinated with wealth as he is with Cara as a person. In her presence, he is tongue-tied, but it is because of her beauty and her personality, however, the differences between the perceptions the two have continues to grow until it breaks them up. Seth realizes the clash between the two later than Cara, as is evident from the following passage: "At any rate, I knew I wasn't going to be a waiter for the rest of my life, and it didn't really occur to me to be insulted until I saw Cara blushing" (McInerney 142). Seth even seems surprised that the people around him are so firmly rooted in perceptions of class differences, and he comes to the rationalization that: "I realized something that I'd only intuited up to that point, that there is a class system in America, even if some of us bottom-dwellers didn't realize it" (McInerney 142). What stands out from this is the fact that consumerism, represented by ideas of those who have and those who do not, is much more pronounced amongst wealthy people – the more you own, the more aware of money you are in this narrative.

Continuing the discussion on consumerism, Miller claims that consumers have a tendency to get so attached to commodities that they come to consider these parts of themselves or an extension of the self, and that these consumers thereby become what they own (D. 180). Considering this in relation to *The Last Bachelor*, this seems most true for Alysha de Sante who, even on the verge of financial ruin, is unable to part with any of her possessions. For her these objects represent all that she is, and all her power and position is in the things she has acquired. She has been willing to go through great lengths, scheming and marrying men she does not love or even really care for, to get them (McInerney 114). Previously, we have stated how McSweeney prefers life in New York, while his wife stays in the countryside, but if we look further into the final lines of this narrative, we can also come to view the short story as an opposition to "Summary Judgment", as the couple actually seem to like the simple life in Alabama and the sunsets more than the hectic life in New York (McInerney 25). In fact, if we look into the details of "Sleeping with Pigs", the short story offers a lot of symbolism, which can serve as comments on consumer culture; the most forceful and forthcoming example being that they carry pig droppings in designer bags (McInerney 18). By placing feces in bags with names of some of the most expensive

designer brands, McInerney manages to draw a direct analogy between the two, and thereby also make a clear comment on the usual content of these bags. He vividly depicts this as “a beautiful woman carrying a bag of pig shit out to Park Avenue” (McInerney 19). A similar comment is seen in *Glamorama*, where the supermodel-terrorists carry their bombs in designer bags as well.

Miller's line of argumentation is followed by him stating that if possessions are held to such high regard, the loss of any of these can be regarded as “loss or lessening of self” (D. 186), and in order to analyze this, we need to consider, what we have just argued above. As Alysha de Sante is the only one who truly defines herself in terms of what she owns, she is also the only person to suffer this loss. However, we might consider that one of the reasons why the men are so afraid of the retaliations of their spouses, is the fact that this could put them in a position, where they would lose most of their possessions.

The final part of the analysis of consumerism in *The Last Bachelor* will focus on Bourdieu's ideas of the complex perceptions of capital. As mentioned, Bourdieu argues that capital is a result of accumulated labor (*Handbook* 15). Because there, as mentioned, is such high regard for the value of education in this collection of short stories, we truly see the effects of accumulated labor at play. The characters we encounter have generally established stable lives with good careers; presumably as a result of years of accumulated labor. We do, however, need to take into consideration a few instances where there appears to be a slight difference between inherited wealth and money earned by working hard; namely “Sleeping with pigs”, “The waiter”, and “Summary Judgment”. In “Sleeping with Pigs” Blythe's family name provides them with opportunities that mere money is not able to, and in “The Waiter” Seth is disregarded by Cara because of his lack of fortune. Alysha is, once again, singled out because she is the only one who never works to accumulate money – unless deceiving men is considered work.

This opens the discussion of how economic capital is represented in the collection of short stories. Because they all seem to have relatively well-established lives, money is rarely a problem in any of the narratives. At this point, we need to keep in mind, however, that the characters presented are not part of the super-rich, and it is more of a mediocre wealth that is displayed; some of them own small apartments, and there are no descriptions of extreme consumerism. As some of the characters, such as Seth in “The Waiter”, even seem to be of lesser means, we are

presented with more of a social critique of class differences than a glorification of economic wealth.

In terms of cultural capital, we have already established how high esteem education is given, and this really distinguishes *The Last Bachelor* from any of the other narratives we have analyzed. This is also the most recurring and, thereby, most prominent representation of cultural capital in this collection of short stories. This does not mean, however, that there are no other. In "Sleeping with Pigs", the pig tears off a table cloth and breaks an incredible amount of family heirlooms (McInerney 14), and even if it is mortgaged, Alysha de Sante has a large collection of art and antiques (McInerney 123). The fact that all these consumer goods are basically deprived of value by being broken of mortgaged, serves as another sharp critique of consumer culture.

The final of Bourdieu's distinctions of capital to be discussed is social capital, and in *The Last Bachelor* social capital is generally undergoing dire times as human relations crumble throughout all of the stories presented in this collection of narratives. All of the relationships in these short stories are dysfunctional – and mostly the stories circle around changing dynamics of adultery and revenge. But at this point we also need to reaffirm how social capital in some instances becomes a valid currency; most vividly displayed in "Sleeping with pigs" where the use of a known and well-respected family name becomes a ticket to moving up in the world: "During our New York sojourns, we lived in one of the snottier co-op apartment buildings on the Upper East Side, where capital was only the most obvious of the entry requirements, and I certainly wouldn't have passed the co-op board if not for Blythe's venerable family name" (McInerney 15).

After the analysis of consumerism in *The Last Bachelor*, it needs to be reaffirmed, however, that even though we are able to pinpoint examples where consumerist behavior is important in the narratives, consumption never becomes a defining or leading element in either of the narratives – perhaps with the exception of "Summary Judgment", where the excessive need to consume is criticized by resulting in the downfall of the main character. In the other narratives we have analyzed, we have seen how massive consumption in one way or another leads to a place where people are difficult to distinguish from one another – the introduction of the mass individual (Lury 59) – but because consumerism is not a prominent feature in *The Last Bachelor*, we do not see this tendency here. Instead we are able to detect a more prominent display of masculine behavioral patterns. This narrative might, therefore, represent a change in the focus in

McInerney's writing, as we see him move away from blatant displays of youth, money, and consumerism. Even though he still depicts misuses of drugs and a distorted relation to sexual relations, he now appears to focus on adults in dysfunctional relationships. With this being the last part of the analysis of masculinity and consumerism in the four works, we will now discuss their relation to the formation of identity within the literary characters.

5.0 Discussion of Identity

In the following, we will combine our findings from the previous analyses of how consumerism and masculinity are portrayed in *Slaves of New York, Glamorama, Lunar Park,* and *The Last Bachelor* with additional theory in order to disclose how identity is portrayed in the respective narratives. On an overall note, Lasch, in the following quote, sets up premises for what will turn out to be a general tendency in the discussion of identity within the narratives; namely the fact that one person's identity and the establishment hereof cannot be separated from the culture in which these people live:

> Every society reproduces its culture – its norms, its underlying assumptions, its modes of organizing experience – in the individual, in the form of personality. As Durkheim said, personality is the individual socialized. The process of socialization, carried out by the family and secondarily by the school and other agencies of character formation, modifies human nature to conform to the prevailing norms. Each society tries to solve the universal crises of childhood – the trauma of separation from the mother, the fear of abandonment, the pain of competing with others for the mother's love – in its own way, and the manner in which it deals with these psychic events produces a characteristic form of personality, a characteristic form of psychological deformation, by means of which the individual reconciles himself to instinctual deprivation and submits to the requirements of social existence. Freud's insistence on the continuity between psychic health and psychic sickness makes it possible to see neuroses and psychoses as in some sense the characteristic expression of a given culture (34)

Lasch begins *The Culture of Narcissism* with a foreword stating that the general American society is changing and that, as a result, a cultural narcissism is rising; seen in the way people display a

preoccupation with the self (xv). From what the analyses have shown, there are evident signs of such a culture of narcissism in these works of literature; most evidently, Marley, Victor from *Glamorama*, and Bret in particular all display a narcissistic preoccupation with the self. Bret actually goes as far as to explaining that: "I was diagnosed with something called 'acquired situational narcissism" (Ellis *Lunar Park* 35), and Victor is clearly occupied with nothing but himself and his looks as he works out (Ellis *Glamorama* 54).

From Lasch's perspective, this narcissism is closely linked to perceptions of masculinity, as he argues that "Economic man himself has given way to the psychological man of our times – the final product of bourgeois individualism. The new narcissist is haunted not by guilt but by anxiety. He seeks not to inflict his own certainties on others but to find meaning in life" (xvi). In *Lunar Park*, Bret seeks to reestablish meaning in life by moving in with Jayne, but the move does not bring him the peace of mind he had expected, and he instead continues to feel haunted by guilt and ridden by anxiety and fear – in fact, it becomes much of his driving force throughout the narrative. A similar fear is tangible in *Slaves of New York*, as the characters generally have anxious expectations about the future. Many of them worry about what the future will hold, maybe because they seemingly are unable to change the status quo. An example is seen in Eleanor who does not leave Stash, because she does not know where she would live then, but a more universal feeling of anxiety in all these characters is seen in the fear of not having property – which equals meaning of life to them. In *The Last Bachelor,* fear and anxiety are mostly seen in the way the men all dread the reciprocation of their spouses. The most clear contrast to these three narratives is the beginning of *Glamorama*, where Victor feels neither guilt nor anxiety; as he is completely dense, he is unable to really consider the consequences of his actions or anything that goes on around him. As the action of the novel unfolds, however, Victor begins to experience anxiety, and desperately tries to get out of the situation he is in.

From this point on, Lasch provides further insight into the new narcissist as he claims that "Liberated from the superstitions of the past, he doubts even the reality of his own existence. Superficially relaxed and tolerant, he finds little use for dogmas of racial and ethnic purity but at the same time forfeits the security of group loyalties and regards everyone as a rival for the favors conferred by a paternalistic state" (xvi), and this can be used to provide further insight into the identities of the characters of interest to us. Overall, we find that loyalties and stable personal

relations are not valued in any of the narratives, they are more or less about furthering your own causes. Why the ability to develop stronger personal relations is not a more valued character trait is partially explained by the following:

> When personal relations are conducted with no other object than psychic survival, 'privatism' no longer provides a haven from a heartless world. On the contrary, private life takes on the very qualities of the anarchic social order from which it is supposed to provide a refuge. It is the devastation of personal life, not the retreat into privatism, that needs to be criticized and condemned. The trouble with the consciousness movement is not that it addresses trivial or unreal issues but that it provides self-defeating solutions. Arising out of a pervasive dissatisfaction with the quality of personal relations, it advises people not to make too large an investment in love and friendship, to avoid excessive dependence on others, and to live for the moment – the very conditions that created the crisis of personal relations in the first place (Lasch 27).

This is accentuated by the extensive consumerism displayed in most of the works – the characters are not occupied by such things as politics or racial or ethnic issues; they are more concerned with instant gratification of their own needs. This is seen particularly in Ellis' novels, where Victor epitomizes superficiality, and where the confusion between real and imagined is constantly emphasized. More tendencies of explicit narcissistic nature are seen in Ellis' characters, as the new narcissist supposedly "extols cooperation and teamwork while harboring deeply antisocial impulses. He praises respect for rules and regulations in the secret belief that they do not apply to himself" (Lasch xvi). Victor works for Damien, and attempts to comply with him, while he really wants to open his own club and is sleeping with his girlfriend, and Victor feels entitled to this behavior because of the high regard he holds himself in. We have also analyzed the way Bret, in the first chapter of *Lunar Park,* describes how he defies publishers by showing up to book signings or other events strung out on drugs and alcohol – he does not care that he damages his career or alienates the people around him. At this point, we must also bear in mind that we generally only found social capital in the novels and short stories, when this could further the causes of the individual character: this could serve to stress the narcissistic preoccupation with the self.

Furthermore, the tendencies of the narcissist are also defined as “Acquisitive in the sense that his cravings have no limits, he does not accumulate goods and provisions against the future, in the manner of the acquisitive individualist of nineteenth-century political economy, but demands immediate gratification and lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire” (Lasch xvi), which complies with the idea that we have generally analyzed consumerism as signifying an immediate gratification of needs, but that people often do not value the products for long after they have been acquired – a new desire is constantly created. Relatable to this is also the argument that “In a narcissistic society – a society that gives increasing prominence and encouragement to narcissistic traits – the cultural devaluation of the past reflects not only the poverty of the prevailing ideologies, which have lost their grip on reality and abandoned the attempt to master it, but the poverty of the narcissist’s inner life” (Lasch xvii). On those terms, it is not only the characters we analyze whose identities are narcissistic at core, but they can be construed as a product of a mostly narcissist society. In such a society, consumerism furthers a devaluation of everything that is not brand new, and in a broader perspective this, according to Lasch, can be interpreted as a devaluation of the past. The characters generally seem to have 'poor inner lives' because they are unable to look past societal expectations and consumerism and make a true identity tangible; even to themselves.

With the past in disregard in this manner, the characters would need to look to the future, but Lasch claims that “The narcissist has no interest in the future because, in part, he has so little interest in the past. He finds it difficult to internalize happy associations or to create a store of loving memories with which to face the latter part of his life, which under the best of conditions always brings sadness and pain” (xvi-xvii). For the characters we have analyzed, this is generally a recognizable tendency, but there are a few instances that defy the norm. In *Lunar Park*, we see how Bret begins to change and care about his past, especially his father, and in *Slaves of New York,* Marley, in spite of his obvious preoccupation with his own self, is also able to care about his sister. However, the tendencies of mustering interest in other people are fleeting if present in most of the characters, and what is mostly reinforced throughout the analyses of both consumerism and masculinity is that there are no strong relations displayed in any of the narratives. Instead, the characters seem to handle people in the same manner as they handle commodities.

All of the above, according to Lasch, has consequences for the identity formation for each individual:

> The prevailing attitude, so cheerful and forward-looking on the surface, derives from a narcissistic impoverishment of the psyche and also from an inability to ground our needs in the experience of satisfaction and contentment. Instead of drawing on our own experience, we allow experts to define our needs for us and then wonder why those needs never seem to be satisfied (xviii).

And we can furthermore add that based on what we have analyzed, we can recognize it as a result of a consumerist culture: that needs are never truly satisfied – new needs are just created instead. 'Allowing experts to define our needs for us' can be explained as how a character such as Victor in *Glamorama* blindly follows what he sees in commercials. In *Lunar Park,* commercials are also often introduced and used to define a need of money, yet Bret does not respond. On those terms, his identity is under no circumstances defined by as many narcissistic traits as Victor's.

With these initial traits of the identity of the persons Lasch classifies as new narcissists in place and in part related to the four works of literature, we investigate, we have come to a point, where we can make further distinctions about what an identity generally is. One angle to doing this is to clarify that there is a distinction between what is considered subjectivity and what an identity is. Hall specifies that

> one's identity can be thought of as a particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that, in short- or long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being, while subjectivity implies always a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity, at the same time allowing a myriad of limitations and often unknowable, unavoidable constraints on our ability to fully comprehend identity (3).

In *Slaves of New York,* the most consistent traits we have analyzed about the characters are that they all aspire to be artists, and that they disregard higher education in order to pursue creative ambitions – it seems that artistic exploits are the only character trait that is truly given value, but

at the same time, only very few of the characters are able to live off of their art. This presents an interesting dualism: they need their art in order to unfold their identities, but at the same time, this makes them seem under-appreciated and inhibited. In addition, they are all in one way or another socially dysfunctional, and all personal relations end up ruined at the end of the respective narratives within *Slaves of New York*.

In *Glamorama,* Victor's most consistent personality trait is his obsession with his looks and with material possessions. Throughout the novel, this makes Victor seem superficial, dense, and generally void of content. In the same manner as in *Slaves of New York*, his most dominant character traits make him unable to have close relations to people around him. In the case of Victor, this is because all he worries about is how he can use other people to further his own image and rising celebrity. Moreover, it can be argued that Victor is constrained by these character traits, but at the same time, he is so superficial that he hardly seems to be able to realize or be affected by this. He therefore generally does not appear as unhappy as the characters in *Slaves of New York*.

In *Lunar Park*, we follow Bret who might be the one character out of all the characters we have analyzed who undergoes significant change in identity throughout the narrative. He undergoes this change because he experiences a significant crisis of identity as the story unfolds, and he is pressured to reevaluate the traits that define his personality when his way of life comes to threaten his family. In a way, he realizes that these people are more important to him than what he has so far valued. Still, Bret is only able to act upon this too late, and loses his family anyway.

Lastly, in *The Last Bachelor*, we see the same tendency for all personal relations to end up ruined as a result of the lifestyles portrayed or due to the identity traits of the individual characters. We see a difference from the other narratives as the characters in *The Last Bachelor* generally seem to really value education, and some of the narratives propose a retrospect storyline, which makes the characters seem more pensive about the way they have lived – McSweeney in “Sleeping with Pigs” is the best example of this, as he recounts his life to a psychologist. Similar tendencies are seen in the first chapter of *Lunar Park*, where Bret explains all the events leading up to the final demise. One last thing can be mentioned on this subject; namely the unreliable narrators we encounter: Marley, Bret, and Victor. One explanation for their

unreliability can be construed as them not being able to establish consistent personalities and identities – as the identity is not stable, the characters are also not able to appear reliable.

Hall furthermore argues that all of the tendencies mentioned above are due to the changing society, we live in, and because we live under the pressure of being expected to make something of ourselves (1). In different ways, most of the characters we analyze have not been able to make something of themselves in this manner. Economic capital is generally non-existent for the struggling artists in *Slaves of New York*, and the same goes for Victor in *Glamorama*. Bret is the only one who has been able to really accumulate a considerable amount of economic capital, but he squanders it all away. Social capital is, as mentioned, not appreciated and therefore also not really existent. To explain the lack of social capital in all of the novels, we might consider the following quote

> People nowadays complain of an inability to feel … Twentieth-century people have erected so many psychological barriers against strong emotions, and have invested those defenses with so much of the energy derived from forbidden impulse, that they can no longer remember what it feels like to be inundated by desire. They tend, rather, to be consumed with rage, which derives from defenses against desire and gives rise in turn to new defenses against rage itself. Outwardly bland, submissive, and sociable, they seethe with an inner anger for which a dense, overpopulated, bureaucratic society can devise few legitimate outlets (Lasch 11)

What is stated and what is recognizable within our characters is a general inability to feel or really show empathy for other people, and instead, as a reflex, they shy away from any strong emotions. Once more, the idea that a preoccupation with oneself is easier to engage with than feelings towards others – which would help constitute a complete identity. In addition, Bret also appears to struggle with an unidentifiable inner rage throughout the narrative in *Lunar Park*; most visibly seen in the way *American Psycho* and all its violent content is explained as a product of his subconsciousness.

Instead, Hall would suggest that there is no such thing as a stable identity because

> we live in an era in which we are commonly asked to rethink, express and explain our identities … We are widely led to believe that we have the freedom and ability to create and re-create our 'selves' at will, if we have the will, but at the same time are presented with a suspiciously narrow range of options and avenues that will allow us to fit comfortably into society and our particular gendered, regional, ethnic, sexual subset of it (1).

On those terms, there ought to be a strange dichotomy at play between thinking we are free to make any choice we want, while society still poses constraints, and this dichotomy is tangible in several instances in the works we analyze. The characters believe they can lead the lives they want, but in reality they are given only a few options to choose from. This might be seen the most clearly in the collections of short stories, where we have different narratives that still show a wide range of characters who follow the same behavioral patterns. However, Victor in *Glamorama* might also be an example of such behavior, as he just follows the latest trend rather than exploring what might be desirable for him on a personal level – he is all image with no deeper personality. Also, we found in all of the analyses that all characters strive to be something which they are not – in that sense they have not reached the prefered identity yet.

At the same time as these societal constraints are posed, Hall also argues that people supposedly are more freed from social roles and expectations than they have ever been (2), and this notion is supported by Lash and Friedman, who argue that according to anthropology, the identity of a person was somewhat fixed in traditional societies. In other words, you became what you were born to be because the possibilities for change were small if not non-existent (141). These theories are most readily tested and proved in the collections of short stories, where we see, as mentioned, see different characters end up following the same behavioral patterns; leading to the same dire conclusions in most of the narratives. However, we also have to take into consideration how many of them occupy themselves by doing things that are clearly displeasing to their parents – Victor in *Glamorama* and Bret in *Lunar Park* both, in a particularly resentful way, defy their fathers – so in terms of determining your own faith and identity, they have at least moved away from the idea from traditional societies that you follow in the footsteps of your parents.

Added to the above is also the fact that with modernity came the passing of past forms of life and identities – the requirement of modernity is therefore still a constant need for update, innovation and novelty: “One's identity may become out of date, or superfluous, or no longer socially validated. One may thus experience anomie, a condition of extreme alienation in which one is no longer at home in the world” (Mathur 172), and a person can also experience feeling entrapment by one's own identity – your identity begins to bore you, but you feel trapped by social norms and conventions to stay on the path already chosen (Lash and Friedman 142). Again, we have reached a point where it seems that identity is closely linked to what we have analyzed the presence of consumer culture to be in the narratives, as we see how the quest for identity is linked to constant update and innovation in the same manner as the quest for new commodities is. In attempting to be up to date with the environments they each live in exemplified by commodification, we can argue that the characters are afraid of their identities – and thereby their whole essence – becoming superfluous. On those terms, being socially validated becomes more important than really exploring what identity traits you might truly want and need to make you happy. We also find examples of how the characters begin to feel entrapped by the lives they live: Bret lives in the suburbs, but frequently does drugs, and the couple in “Invisible Fences” seeks out sexually deviant behavior.

Lash and Friedman propose more ways in which the identity is seen as something fleeting or temporary rather than a stable fixture, as they argue that certain people have a tendency to take on different identification traits depending on the company they are keeping, and by doing so, they run the risk of feeling like they have no true core identity (143). In the works of literature we have analyzed, the characters all generally tend to attempt to assimilate with the people around them. Thereby, it is made evident that being part of a group is important. Maybe even more important than exploring who you yourself want to be, and as a result, most of the characters we encounter are unhappy. Again, this is most visible in the two narratives by Ellis, where we see how Bret seems insincere since he acts differently depending on who he is around, and how Victor is always ready to take on any ascribed role. By the end of this discussion of the presence of identity in narratives by the Literary Brat Pack, all of these arguments will be closely linked to Bourdieu's ideas of habitus. For the moment, however, we will return to further

arguments on what Lasch considers identities to consist of in coherence with ideas of the culture of narcissism.

Lasch claims that “Impending disaster has become an everyday concern, so commonplace and familiar that nobody any longer gives much thought to how disaster might be averted. People busy themselves instead with survival strategies, measures designed to prolong their own lives or programs guaranteed to ensure good health and peace of mind” (4). This would mean that the characters we encounter would generally be categorized as self-absorbed as they live in the moment without much concern for other people and the day tomorrow – an argument which is in harmony with our previous clarification of the characters showing a strong preoccupation with the self. As we do claim to detect at least elements of change or a willingness to change in some of the characters, it might be argued that the narratives also represent a quest for personal growth. Throughout *Lunar Park*, Bret gains new insight and some levels of personal growth, and the couple in “Invisible Fences” are able to reach the mutual conclusion that they are not happy. The couple in “Sleeping with Pigs” find new peace together after their marriage has ended, and Eleanor finds herself able to live on her own, which proposes some signs of growth, but she still avidly seeks a man in her life.

From what we have so far discussed, it seems evident that the presence or absence of an identity formation is under all circumstances closely linked to the society inhabited by the people in question, and this notion is further reinforced in the following: “The contemporary climate is therapeutic, not religious. People today hunger not for personal salvation, let alone for the restoration of an earlier golden age, but for the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health, and psychic security” (Lasch 7). The element of what the characters hunger for is interesting to focus on, as we see different displays of this in the four works of literature. In *Slaves of New* York, all of the characters hunger for an apartment, as they all seem to interpret real-estate as equaling well-being, health, and security, and in opposition to this, Bret in *Lunar Park* hungers for personal salvation, as he believes that a reconciliation with the past will restore security for him. Lasch further connects the narcissist to the society surrounding him by declaring that

> Today Americans are overcome not by the sense of endless possibility but by the banality of the social order they have erected against it. Having internalized the social restraints by means of which they formerly sought to keep possibility within civilized limits, they feel themselves overwhelmed by an annihilating boredom, like animals whose instincts have withered in captivity (11).

Generally, it does not seem that boredom is dominating and annihilating in the manner that Lasch would here suggest, but we do see a few instances of behavior which might be motivated by boredom. Until all the uncanny events begin to appear, Bret's frequent abuse of drugs might be ascribed to the less than enthralling life in the suburbs, for example. This lack of behavior motivated by boredom is in stark contrast to such previous novels as *Bright Lights, Big City* and *Less Than Zero*, where much of the behavior of the young people is motivated by boredom.

When they do not show boredom, the narratives do, however, show other traits typical of narcissistic behavior. This becomes visible as Lasch argues that

> Narcissism represents the psychological dimension of this dependence. Notwithstanding his occasional illusions of omnipotence, the narcissist depends on others to validate his self-esteem. He cannot live without an admiring audience. His apparent freedom from family ties and institutional constraints does not free him to stand alone or to glory in his individuality. On the contrary, it contributes to his insecurity, which he can overcome only by seeing his 'grandiose self' reflected in the attentions of others, or by attaching himself to those who radiate celebrity, power, and charisma. For the narcissist, the world is a mirror, whereas the rugged individualist saw it as an empty wilderness to be shaped to his own design (10).

Without doubt, Victor in *Glamorama* wants to be a celebrity; he feels a need to be admired and seeks all the attention he can get. When Victor does not gain this recognition himself, he surrounds himself with celebrities to feel some of the same admiration, and Lasch explains this character trait by stating that "In his emptiness and insignificance, the man of ordinary abilities tries to warm himself in the stars' reflected glow" (22). The same is generally the case for the

aspiring artists in *Slaves of New York*. Bret in *Lunar Park* is again posed as somewhat of an opposite, as he has experienced this fame and is now more or less drawing back from the consequences of it. Lasch also discusses identity traits he links to what he calls the 'psychological man', and says that for this person, “Therapists… become his principal allies in the struggle for composure” (13). We have already discussed how both Bret (Ellis *Lunar Park* 123) and McSweeney (McInerney 1) both see therapists, while many of the other men do not, and we have been able to conclude that the men who do see therapists generally are able to reflect more over the lives they lead.

Throughout the discussion, we have so far made on the portrayals of identity in the four narratives we analyze, we have been able to make a lot of connections between consumer culture and a lack of identity, and it is therefore not surprising that Lasch makes this connection himself:

> The mass media, with their cult of celebrity and their attempt to surround it with glamour and excitement, have made Americans a nation of fans, moviegoers. The media give substance to and thus intensify narcissistic dreams of fame and glory, encourage the common man to identify himself with the stars and to hate the ‘herd’, and make it more and more difficult for him to accept the banality of everyday existence (21).

What we can use this argument to is to stress the fact that as the characters are unable to really explore their inner selves and find a true essence, they instead fill the void in their personalities with consumerist behavior – ranging from a need to purchase, to naming celebrities as commodities, to drug abuse. And Lasch furthermore explains why this behavior is common and conducted without remorse:

> The modern propaganda of commodities and the good life has sanctioned impulse gratification and made it unnecessary for the id to apologize for its wishes or disguise their grandiose proportions. But this same propaganda has made failure and loss unsupportable. When it finally occurs to the new Narcissus that he can ‘live not only without fame but without self, live and die without ever having had one’s fellows conscious of the

> microscopic space one occupies upon the planet,' he experiences this discovery not merely as a disappointment but as a shattering blow to his sense of selfhood (22).

In all of his arguments, Lasch refers to Freud and his discoveries, for example by stating that: "These discoveries in turn made possible an understanding of the role of object relations in the development of narcissism, thereby revealing narcissism as essentially a defense against aggressive impulses rather than self-love" (32). On those terms, the narcissistic behavior that we are able to detect in all of the narratives, should be viewed as a way for the characters to protect themselves, and not so much a way for them to further own interests, as it might seem at first glance. The narcissist and his personality is further explained by considering him in relation to depression – "Depression in narcissistic patients takes the form not of mourning with its admixture of guilt… but of impotent rage and 'feelings of defeat by external forces'" (Lasch 39). Signs of depression are most visible within Bret, and these define a lot of his character; there is no doubt he has a lot of demons and guilt to battle. Again, it is important to mention that these traits are more visible in Bret maybe because he simply reflects more about his own situation than many of the other more self-absorbed people, we have analyzed. In other words, Bret might be one of the only characters who opens himself up to a pain the others are able to ignore.

The thought introduced here is confirmed by Lasch when he stresses that "Although the narcissist can function in the everyday world and often charms other people (not least with his 'pseudo-insight into his personality'), his devaluation of others, together with his lack of curiosity about them, impoverishes his personal life and reinforces the 'subjective experiences of emptiness'" (40). On those terms, Bret would be a character showing more real insight into himself as the story of *Lunar Park* progresses compared to many of the other characters we encounter, who generally lack insight into themselves and are unable to show curiosity towards others.

Victor in *Glamorama* is a perfect example of this, as he is sure that he is the biggest star around – in instances he seems completely oblivious how overlooked he really is. From another perspective, Marley also displays behavior indicating pseudo-insight in the manner indicated by Lasch, in the way he does not care about his friends; when one of them is diagnosed with aids,

Marley is unable to stop thinking about his looks. According to Lasch, the lack of insight the narcissist displays is often accompanied by a lack of intellectualism:

> Lacking any real intellectual engagement with the world – notwithstanding a frequently inflated estimate of his own intellectual abilities – he has little capacity for sublimation. He therefore depends on others for constant infusions of approval and admiration. He 'must attach [himself] to someone, living an almost parasitic' existence. At the same time, his fear of emotional dependence, together with his manipulative, exploitive approach to personal relations, makes these relations bland, superficial, and deeply unsatisfying (40)

We, as mentioned, see this tendency in three of the four narratives, and once again it is reinforced how *The Last Bachelor* distinguishes itself from the other works we analyze, as the characters displayed here are intellectuals, with a few exceptions. Another aspect from the quotation is interesting to consider; namely the fact that the lack of social capital does not prevent the narcissist from needing other people. This might be one explanation as to why infidelity is so prevalent in all of the works of literature: the narcissistic character needs other people to stroke his ego, but he is unable to maintain the relation by giving anything in return, or by taking into consideration how his actions have the potential to harm others. Instead of personal relations, the narcissist enjoys success in terms of career, according to Lasch:

> For all his inner suffering, the narcissist has many traits that make for success in bureaucratic institutions, which put a premium on the manipulation of interpersonal relations, discourage the formation of deep personal attachments, and at the same time provide the narcissist with the approval he needs in order to validate his self-esteem. Although he may resort to therapies that promise to give meaning to life and to overcome his sense of emptiness, in his professional career the narcissist often enjoys considerable success (44).

This, however, can only really be considered true in terms of the relatively successful characters we encounter in *The Last Bachelor* and maybe Bret in *Lunar Park* – in *Slaves of New York* and

Glamorama, the characters instead struggle. One explanation for this might be found by considering the qualities Lasch connects to the self-made man: “The self-made man, archetypical embodiment of the American Dream, owed his advancement to habits of industry, sobriety, moderation, self-discipline, and avoidance of debt” (53), and these qualities are not really visible in any of the narratives. There is no sobriety as many of the characters avidly turn to abuse of both alcohol and drugs, and there is no avoidance of debt, Marley and Victor are even on the verge of being evicted – all of which show a blatant lack of moderation and self-discipline.

In addition to 'the psychological man', Lasch also discusses a personality he calls the 'the new man'. It is argued that: “his eagerness to get along well with others; his need to organize even his private life in accordance with the requirements of large organizations; his attempt to sell himself as if his own personality were a commodity with an assignable market value; his neurotic need for affection, reassurance, and oral gratification; the corruptibility of his values” (Lasch 63-64), and maybe this is what is tangible in *The Last Bachelor*, where the men are very eager to please their wives. Lastly, Lasch also discusses 'the performing self' by stating that “To the performing self, the only reality is the identity he can construct out of materials furnished by advertising and mass culture, themes of popular film and fiction, and fragments torn from a vast range of cultural traditions, all of them equally contemporaneous to the contemporary mind” (91). In *Slaves of New York* and in *Glamorama,* we see this by a critique of consumption made by hyperbolic glorification hereof. In *Lunar Park* and *The Last Bachelor*, consumerism is also discouraged, but here this is done by heavy criticism.

Having discussed how identity is portrayed in the four works in this manner, all that remains is to link the previous discussion to Bourdieu's concept of habitus. In the same manner as his concept of capital, the essence of Bourdieu's notion of habitus is about sociological power relations. The concept is founded in the notion that the world is a scene, life a performance, and “practices are seen as no more than the acting-out of roles, the playing of scores or the implementation of plans” (Bourdieu “Structures” 277). The idea of considering the world a stage leads us into a universe where fact and fiction are closely linked and maybe not so distinguishable – all of which provides us with further justification for considering and analyzing the characters in question as actual people, in the way we mainly do throughout the thesis.

On a very basic level, habitus is explainable as

> The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transportable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu "Structures" 278),

and what this means is that people throughout their lives have experiences, they carry with them, and which continues to constitute ways in which they are predisposed to react in certain situations. Bourdieu furthermore states that "Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor" ("Structures" 278). Those are the basic premises of the habitus, but on a more concrete level, "The practical world that is constituted in the relationship with the habitus, acting as a system of cognitive and motivating structures, is a world of already realized ends – procedures to follow, paths to take" (Bourdieu "Structures" 278), and on those terms, habitus can be considered patterns of actions we have learned that we can take based on what we have already experienced. This also means that we have certain anticipations – or "practical hypotheses based on past experience" – with regard to how we think other people are going to react in given situations (Bourdieu "Structures" 279). What this means for our discussion of identity in *Slaves of New York, Glamorama, Lunar Park,* and *The Last Bachelor* is the addition of an interesting perspective. We find that all of the characters display narcissistic behavioral traits; some more blatantly than others, and based on what Bourdieu here proposes on habitus, the characters would more or less be predisposed to display such behavior based on the society they inhabit. This would coincide with the fact that we often find the behavior of the characters in question closely linked to their surroundings; especially the consumerist aspects of it. Here, Bret in *Lunar Park* stands out the most, as he avidly attempts to remove himself from the way of life he has led so far, and *The Last Bachelor* as a whole is also different as the focus on consumerism is generally much more vague here. Generally though, we, as discussed, see that

many of the characters conjured by the Literary Brat Pack act in the same manner; thereby displaying signs of the same kind of habitus and followingly also similar identity traits.

6.0 Comparison of All Works by Janowitz, McInerney and Ellis

Having reached this far in our project, we will now relate our findings of consumerism, masculinity and identity in *Slaves of New York, Glamorama, Lunar Park,* and *The Last Bachelor* to the remaining fictional works written by respectively Janowitz, McInerney and Ellis. We will mainly make use of other people's reviews, analyses, and conclusions.

6.1 The Works of Tama Janowitz

Janowitz' debut novel was *American Dad*, which by Young is deemed a "traditional coming-of-age novel concerning the transformation of a character" (151). The novel presents a male character named Earl Przepasnick, and the main theme is "the lives of children whose parents were caught up in the turbulent cross-currents of the sixties. Such parents, vulnerable and more like children themselves, were unable to bequeath to their offspring the illusions of stability and order that had sustained earlier generations" (Young 152). Young elaborates that "For the children in *American Dad,* however, the question is whether they will be able to survive at all or reach maturity in anything other than a psychologically fragmented state" (152). The lack of parental stability mirrors the distant family relations in both *Glamorama* and *Lunar Park,* were we, particularly in the latter, also found that guilt in relation to Bret's father is the reason why he is haunted. *American Dad* seems to deal in an overt way with masculinity and gender, particularly because of the male narrator. Young interprets that "Janowitz's choice of narrator is brave and seems like a quiet plea for a more humanist, less divisive socio-sexual agenda" (152). This plea for a less divisive socio-sexual agenda was also present in *Slaves of New York,* as we found that both men and women occupy the same roles, and therefore gender differences are not presented.

What is interesting is that *American Dad* does not focus much on consumerism compared to *Slaves of New York.* This focus, however, reemerges in *A Cannibal in Manhattan*. The novel presents the male character Mgunug, "an uncivilized savage from, of all places, 'New Burnt Norton'" (Young 163), and explores a "theme of the innocent abroad, misled by greedy, shifty New Yorkers and their lawyers" (Young 163). As in *Slaves of New York,* we encounter relationships that are not genuine, but instead build on greed and personal gain.

In *The Male Cross-Dresser Support Group*, Janowitz once again returns to exploring the division between men and women. The main character, Pamela Trowel, "a typical Janowitz female, which is to say that she is single, lives in an appalling Manhattan apartment, has a demeaning job (selling advertising for Hunter's World magazine) and has to remember to wear her makeup or else face 'public contempt" (Plunket). Plunket stresses how one of the themes presented in this novel is sexual confusion: "On the surface, she may be writing about present-day Manhattan, but in reality she is trying to explain the difference between men and women, neither of whom get very high marks. Women are awful, particularly to one another, but men are even worse and still they get all the breaks" ("Hello, Cruel World"). Pamela disguises herself as a man – hence the title – and hereby Janowitz cements that "Men and women just aren't that different from each other, except by popular consensus" (Heeger), while once again blurring the lines between gender differences as visible also in both *Slaves of New York* and *American Dad*.

Four years later, with the publishing of *By the Shores of Gitchee Gumee*, the focus seems to shift to consumerism yet again. Bolotin notes that the novel "is a picaresque satire of 20th-century America. The heroine, Maud Slivenowicz, 19, is one of five children living in a decrepit trailer near the now-polluted Gitchee Gumee" ("Hiawatha Goes Hollywood"). Maud's younger brothers "fill their time fixing cars and dreaming of Hollywood stardom (the eldest), writing bad poetry and music (the next), and cooking (the youngest)" (Bolotin). In this way, Janowitz mocks consumerism, but also more generally the idea of the American Dream, which mirrors *Slaves of New York,* as we conclude that Eleonore is deceived by the very same notion.

The search for money and stardom is tangible in *A Certain Age* as well, as "The novel follows the misadventures of one Florence Collins, a blonde 32-year-old auction-house assistant director, on her hunt for a rich husband over a summer in the city and the Hamptons" (Grigoriadis). Thus replicating the plot of McInerney's short story about Alysha de Sante in *The Last Bachelor*, Janowitz emphasizes how the short cut to money and fame is preferred. Grigoriadis concludes that the "characters are propelled by status, greed, and fear" ("Tama Janowitz, Unchained"), which we also found evident not only in *Slaves of New York,* but also *Glamorama, Lunar Park,* and *The Last Bachelor.*

Manhatten is a recurring scenery in Janowitz' writing, and *Peyton Amberg* is no exception. This novel presents the main character "Peyton Amberg, [who] runs amok in Manhattan and is

destroyed" (Weldon). The plot features Peyton as a girl who "has everything she is meant to want, everything the culture will offer" (Weldon). However, marrying a dentist, having a good home, children, and leisure is not enough for Peyton; she craves "sex, excitement, some sense of the significance of life" (Weldon), and this turns out to be Peyton's downfall: "Janowitz allows her heroine no mercy, as the girl … descends from the fantasy of happiness to the depths of degradation. This is the fate of the American Dream, the American beauty in pursuit of sexual pleasure, deceived as to her prospects in life, cheated of dignity" (Weldon). Weldon's statement reveals another recurring theme in Janowitz' works: the deception of the American Dream, which we also found in *By the Shores of Gitchee Gumee* and *Slaves of New York.*

Janowitz' last novel, *They is Us*, seems to mark a shift in style in Janowitz' works: here we turn to the genre of "futuristic dystopian literature" (Briscoe). The plot reveals a "story of one broken family semi-surviving in an imploding world of pollution, genetic engineering, technology and uncontrolled commercialization" (Briscoe). Pollution was mentioned in *By the Shores of Gitchee Gumee*, yet not as pronounced as in *They is Us*, and this might be linked to the increased contextual focus on the very same. This novel also appears to mock class differences, in particularity the upper class, which Briscoe explains this way: "Home is in a suburban ghetto of chemicals and radioactive substances beside a petrochemical swamp. While the hoi polloi suffers in this toxic pit, the rich minority live in a kind of gated community sealed from pollution" ("Future imperfect"). Demeaning the upper class is yet another way to mock consumerism and money in general, as we have seen several times throughout Janowitz' works.

The overall conclusion on the works of Janowitz is that they always present dysfunctional characters often in a metropolic environment. Further, these characters have no close relations, as they are often focused on exploitation. Janowitz' most evident thematic concern, however, is the differences between men and women, or more specifically, how there are no such differences. At the same time, consumerism is also always present to some degree. It becomes clear, though, that it is always mocked as she continuously demeans upper class, and presents characters that are deceived by of the notion of the American Dream.

6.2 The Works of Jay McInerney

Bright Lights, Big City, the appraised debut of McInerney, revolves around an unnamed narrator who is surrounded by drugs, consumerism, and girls – elements that are present in *The Last Bachelor*, but in a more similar way in *Glamorama* and *Lunar Park*. The drug abuse, or more generally the life of excess in the big city, results in a torn narrator who continuously has a "conflict between the narrator's image of himself and his quest to displace this with a new one" (Caveney 50), revealing how his identity is not fixed.

The main character is completely indifferent about everything in life except his family, and this is a massive difference from Janowitz' works, but also from *The Last Bachelor.* In this way, *Bright Lights, Big City* presents a main character who actually has a genuine connection to his mother, and further, his father and brother care about him (Caveney 53). Caveney elaborates that "*Bright Lights, Big City*, with its insistence on how the individual self is constructed through the other (be that family or fiction), suggests the impossibility of separating the psyche from its domestic context. Whoever and wherever we *are* can only be negotiated through the people and the places we have come *from"* (55).

Set in a different country, McInerney's second novel, *Ransom*, features a "sense of abandoned aimlessness and the subsequent desire for spiritual depth" (Caveney 55), thus mirroring the protagonist from *Bright Lights, Big City,* who also struggled to find himself. In this novel lies a critique of America, as the main character Ransom "has turned to the mystical promise of Japan in his flight from rootless, affectless America. There he hopes to find the enlightenment denied him by his native land" (Caveney 55). Like Janowitz, McInerney here mocks the idea of the American Dream. To Ransom, Japan stands for "tradition/refinement/beauty/civilization versus Western commercialism/vulgarity/brashness/degeneration" (Caveney 56). However, McInerney complicates the plot, as "the Japan of *Ransom* is shown to aspire to that very America that its hero is attempting to leave behind" (Caveney 57); revealing how Ransom in the end will find no solace in this country, as it aspires to be like America. As in *Bright Lights, Big City*, the main character in *Ransom* is torn: "Ransom's dilemma throughout the novel is that of the decentered ego, a self divided against itself in unfulfilled desire and in its alienation from the fractured familiarity of Japan" (Caveney 58). What in the end mends his torn identity is a girl - a damsel in distress that he turns to help (Caveney 58), hereby revealing dominant masculine behavior. Caveney further

stresses that: “she is a person in whom Ransom’s ego and ideals can be re-united by a supreme act of self-sacrifice” (58).

The torn identity is further investigated in *Story of My Life*, a novel that “is a kind of extended monologue, a journey through twenty-something aimlessness as filtered through the consciousness of its 1st person narrator – Alison Poole” (Caveney 63). Caveney explains that “Alison is a self-professed ‘postmodern girl’ – the product of MTV disposability and answering machine anomie. She comes from a broken home, aspires to be an actress but succeeds only in being a major fuck-up” (Caveney 63). What this quote reveals, is that like *The Last Bachelor,* consumerism is present, however, in this novel it seems predominant in contrast to *The Last Bachelor*, which Caveney also accentuates as he states that “McInerney’s project then is to create a fictional paradigm which suggests the inseparability of commerce and self, of money and emotion” (68). The previous quote further reveals how Alison is not able to fulfill her ideals and dreams – once again criticizing the notion of the American Dream.

As in *Bright Lights, Big City,* conversations *Story of my Life* are blank and seem “to revolve around nothing except clothes, cocaine and the size of men’s cocks” (Caveney 63). Sex is important in *The Last Bachelor* based on the many affairs, however, in *Story of my Life,* “power relations of capital are themselves sexually driven” (Caveney 66), meaning that being dominant in the sexual act equals capital power. What is remarkable here is that it is Alison who is dominant, and thus, men are degraded to being submissive. This resembles our findings in *The Last Bachelor*, as we found that the women almost always end up being in possession of power.

Brightness Falls is the first in a trilogy about Russell and Corinne Calloway. Caveney notes that “The novel traces Russell’s attempts to take over the publishing house at which he is employed, and the consequent effects of this on both his marriage to the stock-broking Corinne and on the tenuous connections between the worlds of writing and Wall Street, friendship and finance” (71). In the end, the marriage falls apart, “as he channels all his energy into overtaking company” (Caveney 72), which Caveney interprets as McInerney suggesting “that the change in emphasis from marriage to the market-place is part of our overall sense of psychic and social estrangement” (72). As in *The Last Bachelor,* we find marriages that are dysfunctional and not prioritized: Russel desires the publishing house more than his wife. Caveney elaborates that “In his gradual separation from his wife, Russel represents the absence, lack and foredoomed nature of

desire itself" (72). In this way, "Desire – always after what it cannot have – thus becomes the dynamic through which McInerney presents his critique of American society" (Caveney 72): a critique which once again is linked to the American Dream like McInerney's previous works, but also those of Janowitz.

The Last of the Savages does not appear to be concerned about consumerism compared to the previous works. In the novel, we follow the friendship of Patrick Keane and Will Savage through almost 30 years. Thompson elaborates that "In *The Last of the Savages*, McInerney relates the rise to power, and the eventual decay, of Will Savage, an idealistic, mercurial southerner bent on creating an empire in the name of an oppressed people - in this case, the ceaselessly exploited black blues musicians of the South" ("Robert Penn McInerney"). This is the first time McInerney writes about racial segregation, and in this lies a massive social critique. Further, it marks a change in McInerney's plot focus.

This focus however, returns to the spoiled, rich narcissist in *Model Behavior*. The story is once again set in "Manhattan [where] real estate prices spiral past all rationality, and the city's restaurants are full of 25-year-olds flush with new money and old-fashioned liquor, decked out in little black dresses and yellow silk neckties" (Scott). The plot echoes that of *Bright Lights, Big City,* but also the life of McInerney himself, as it features Connor McKnight "a youngish fellow who works for a glossy magazine, gets dumped by a fashion model and searches for moral bearings in a world of decadent glamour" (Scott). The search for identity and meaning in a life of excess is once again humorously present in this novel.

With his first collection of shorts stories, *How it Ended*, McInerney explores the plot structure of *The Last Bachelor*, not only in genre, but also thematically: "Donald Prout, 'rhymes with trout', the narrator of the title story in Jay McInerney's *How It Ended*, muses that 'as a matrimonial lawyer I deal exclusively with endings" (Carey). And endings are indeed the focal point of this collection: "If something hasn't just ended, then certainly the end is somewhere in sight" (Carey). Endings inevitably equal loss, and Carey notes how these characters suffer from broken relationships, and "try with a hurt honesty to face up to their misfortunes (Carey), and this is where the similarities to *The Last Bachelor* are most profound, as we found that all of the relationships suffer under adultery. Carey stresses that "there is a terrible loneliness about many

of McInerney's characters" ("Don't give up smoking") which we have found in almost all of the works mentioned so far.

In *The Good Life*, we return to the dysfunctional couple: Russell and Corinne. Russel is still working at the publishing company, while Corinne has left "her job as a prosecutor in the Manhattan district attorney's office to bear children" (Gray). At the same time, she "looks down on her husband for earning peanuts in a 'city of zillionaires'" (Gray), revealing an unsatisfied woman on several accounts, both in terms of money and gender roles. Mars-Jones elaborates that the novel reveals an "obeisance to the glamour of money" ("Still dazzled by bright lights"), adding consumerism once again to the list of recurring themes in the works of McInerney. However, Gray reveals that the real subject of this novel is "an oddly listless and unappealing adulterous affair" ("Collateral Damage"), as Corinne, fed up with dissatisfaction, initiates an affair with Luke McGavock. Once again, McInerney explores dysfunctional relationships and adultery as was evident in *The Last Bachelor.*

McInerney's latest book, *Bright, Precious Days*, returns to the universe of the Calloways: this time the couple has reached midlife. Russell is dissatisfied with his life as he "bitterly resents that the Calloways have not prospered the way friends in their investment-banker circles have" (Maslin). Hereby, McInerney continues the theme of consumerism as the predominant factor in the lives of his characters. However, as in the previous novels about the Calloways, adultery is still the dominant theme, as Luke, the guy whom Corinne had an affair with in *The Good Life*, returns and courts her once again (Maslin). At the same time, "Russell is almost seduced at the book's start by a hot, brassy admirer of his friend Jeff, the dead artist… But by the time she appears for the finale, Russell is both more comfortable with Corrine and more comfortable with this newer, more aggressive generation" (Maslin), which might reveal a hope for Corinne and Russell.

Conclusively, it is evident that the overshadowing theme in McInerney's works is dysfunctional relationships, often with adultery as a result. In this relation, he presents sex as an unemotional act, sometimes to the extreme extend where it functions as power capital. However, consumerism and in this relation a critique of America and the idea of the American Dream is also identifiable, yet, it is interesting that it does not seem to be as pervading as in the works of Janowitz. This mirrors our analysis, which revealed that consumerism in *The Last Bachelor* is not as pronounced as in the other works. Lastly, identity, and more specifically torn identity, is a theme

commonly explored by McInerney, and he presents it as a result of both adultery and consumerism.

6.3 The Works of Bret Easton Ellis

With his debut novel, *Less Than Zero,* Ellis "paints a pessimistic portrait of American life in the 1980s, constructing a vision of a seemingly corrupt and meaningless society" (Annesley *Blank* 85). Clay, a young, spoiled brat, reveals in an indifferent way, how "It's not the purchase that is relevant, it's the point of purchase, the origin. The only important thing is that it's bought in a store with a name" (Annesley *Blank* 93). Further, the novel portrays a social fragmentation; especially with the repeated sentence 'people are afraid to merge' (Annesley *Blank* 89). As in *Glamorama* and *Lunar Park*, image and consumerism are important as they are ways of exposing one's identity, while social relations are not valued. Annesley interprets this, as he states that "*Less Than Zero* is read as a text that offers a satirical commentary on the lives of these privileged teenagers and the society that has nurtured them. This satirical project is fueled by an implicit hostility towards contemporary culture and an anxiety about conditions in the late twentieth century" (*Blank* 86). As with *Glamorama,* that mocks the obsession with brands, and *Lunar Park,* that portrays consumer goods as evil, consumer culture is once again critiqued.

In *Rules of Attraction,* Ellis elaborates on this theme. The novel stars Sean, Paul, and Lauren, "three rich, idle students" (Annesley *Blank* 115) - the same type of characters as in *Less Than Zero*, but also to some degree in *Glamorama*. The plot revolves around a tangled relationship between the three, and their "three-way affair is set against a background of East Coast American college life and offers a shifting portrait of privilege, indolence, sexual mores and lazy indulgence" (Annesley *Blank* 115). As with *Less Than Zero*, the characters "sleep with each other, take drugs, drink and spend their substantial allowances without seeming to pay any attention to the academic demands of college life" (Annesley *Blank* 115). These abuses are also massively present in *Lunar Park*. Annesley further states that *The Rules of Attraction* is

> a narrative that is littered with references to commodities and propelled by textual strategies that mimic the processes of commodification. *The Rules of Attraction*'s repeated emphasis on the relationship between its decadent themes and commercialism appears to

> represent a type of decadence that seems particularly well-suited to the late capitalist period, one in which the tensions between autonomous pleasures and commodification have disappeared, leaving only consumer based pleasures in their place (*Blank* 117).

Once again, consumerism is dominant, and more generally it is mocked, since it is portrayed in a hyperbolic way as the only thing that matters in life.

The theme of consumerism continues in *American Psycho,* only this time it has reached even more grotesque levels. "*American Psycho* is narrated by Patrick Bateman, a twenty-six-year-old Wall Street broker, New York socialite and serial killer" (Annesley *Blank* 13), and this is the first time that Ellis presents a murderer as main character. The novel however, serves to create moral indignation: "Ellis establishes powerful links between the society of mass consumption and Bateman's brutality. In the terms laid down by Ellis, Patrick Bateman's murders are crimes for which an increasingly commercial and materialistic society must take responsibility" (Annesley *Blank* 13). Transferred into a contextual perspective, "the novel's alignment of mass murder with serial consumption served as an indictment of the excess of capitalism in Reagan's America" (Mandel 16). The obsession with consumerism is even more hyperbolic in this novel than in his previous works, as "Bateman is a consumer with unlimited desires and as such he is unable to distinguish between purchasing a camera and purchasing a woman. The violent treatment of his predominantly female victims is this tied to his vision of a world in which everything has been commodified" (Annesley *Blank* 14). People have become commodities, and the fact that especially women are seen this way presents a hegemonic masculinity with Bateman as the oppressor – something we have not found in any of the novels we have analyzed. This is interesting, as it presents *American Psycho* as the most extreme novel of all of Ellis' works, but also compared to Janowitz and McInerney. This is accentuated by the fact that the consumerism portrayed in *American Psycho* is linked to identity in general: wealth and identity are presented as the same thing as "People are measured by the amount they earn, the clothes they wear and the places they eat" (Annesley *Blank* 14). This, however, was something we also found valid in *Slaves of New York, Glamorama,* and *Lunar Park.*

With *The Informers,* Ellis strayed from the murderous universe, and recommenced the style of *Rules of Attraction* as it "offers a series of loosely connected stories centered around the

lives of a familiar cast of rich-kids" (Annesley *Blank* 89). Thematically, it echoes the indifferent tone of *Less Than Zero*, as the characters "go to the beach, to parties, sit by the pool, watch videos and drone on about visits to their psychiatrists" (Helen), while phatic conversations, commercials, and brands pervade their surroundings. As in *Glamorama* and *Lunar Park*, but also the previously mentioned novels, image is everything to these characters, and it is achieved by wearing and using the right brands (Annesley "Blank" 89). The atmosphere is dystopic, as the novel portrays "LA as hell, hell as America's obsession with surfaces that reflect themselves back to themselves (Helen).

Ellis' last novel so far, *Imperial Bedrooms*, returns to Clay from *Less Than Zero.* Clay is still a rich brat, who narrates his "encounters with sex, drugs and violence in an affectless present-tense" (Lawson). However, a change has occurred in the years between the two novels: Clay has lost the little sense of moral that was visible in *Less Than Zero*, and is now exploiting everyone either sexually, morally or financially. In *Glamorama* and *Lunar Park,* we found that both characters have some morality, and this reveals a development in Ellis' works. It can be argued though, that Patrick Bateman is just as merciless as Clay in *Imperial Bedrooms.* Lawson stresses how the novel is "teeming with sharp details of a narcissistic generation" ("Imperial Bedrooms by Bret Easton Ellis"), and this goes for the characters in all of Ellis' works.

With this in mind, it is also possible to conclude that Ellis' most explored theme is consumerism, and more specifically a critique of the very same. This critique becomes visible as all of his works present dysfunctional characters that appear to have no meaning in life beyond obsession with labels and consumption. This is emphasized as neither of them have any close relations, or seem capable of having any.

7.0 Conclusion

Having reached the end of this Master's thesis, it is now possible to conclude several things concerning to which degree it is possible to compare the works of the Literary Brat Pack in terms of the portrayal of masculinity and consumerism and their relation to identity formation in *Slaves of New York*, *Glamorama*, *Lunar Park*, and *The Last Bachelor*.

In the analysis of consumerism, we found that all of the novels and short stories contain consumerism yet in varying ways and degrees. In this way, *The Last Bachelor* appears as the odd one out, since consumerism is less distinct here in comparison to the three other works. However, we still found similarities as all four works mostly present characters that have no economical

capital, but still strive to gain it. At the same time, cultural capital in the institutionalized state is not valued, as the characters prefer the short cut to money and fame. Again, *The Last Bachelor* seems to differ, since the characters generally value education.

Commodities are central to all of the characters as they are ways to create an image and/or personality. Yet, each literary work presents different commodities as important: in *Lunar Park*, drugs are the number one commodity for Bret, while apartments are the main commodity in *Slaves of New York*. Victor from *Glamorama*, on the other hand, prefers clothes and designer brands as his favorite commodities. There is also a difference in how these novels and short stories present the commodities: in *Lunar Park*, commodities, that are not drugs, are portrayed as something undesirable that symbolize evil and guilt, while commodities in *Glamorama* and *Slaves of New York* are hyperbolically glorified. Despite the differences, though, we found that all four works mock consumerism, and in *Slaves of New York* and *Lunar Park* we even conclude that there is a critique of the American Dream.

As mentioned, consumerism is not as distinct in *The Last Bachelor*, as in the three other works, instead, relationships are central in these narratives. This however, is present in all of the works, as they all portray crumbling social relations that are ruined by infidelity, and- or self-absorption. In this way, all of the works portray relations that are reduced to the status of commodities: the characters are shopping human relations.

In the analysis of masculinity, we found that the four works mostly do not portray hegemonic masculine behavior, since there ultimately is no male domination of women. Instead, we found that it is mostly the women that have the power to dominate the men. This is particularly evident in *The Last Bachelor*, as the men are more afraid of being left by their wives than they are of being dominated. What this also entails, is that there are dualisms between men and women presented in all of the literary works; yet none of the dualisms are specifically connected to a certain gender. Further, we found that the men do not adhere to masculine stereotypes, as the men for the most part do not have capitalist work, and they are not presented as a strong, silent type. We conclude that the men are not portrayed hyperbolically in relation to masculinity, however, in *Slaves of New York* and *Glamorama* we concluded that Marley and Victor have hyperbolic perceptions of their masculinity. We also found that the characters' – often bad – behavior is presented hyperbolically: epitomizing how all of these men are dysfunctional

characters with failing masculinities, despite the fact that masculinity seems more pronounced in *The Last Bachelor*. In fact, the only man we consider to have a glimpse of hope is Bret, as he begins to show real concern for his family in the end of the novel. All of the other men are static characters with no hope of change.

As we gathered our findings from the analysis of consumerism and masculinity in a discussion of identity, we discovered that many of the characters show a distinct preoccupation with the self, and thereby also narcissistic tendencies; most pronounced with Victor from *Glamorama*, Marley and to some extent Bret. We also found that all of the characters are unhappy: they experience anxiety in their quest to find meaning in life. However, Victor from *Glamorama* seems to differ, as he is too dense and superficial to register exactly what is going on around him.

We found that, generally, the characters have not been able to make something of themselves, and in this way, they defy masculinity by not living up to social expectations; giving the characters a feeling of failure by also not living up to their ideal self. Instead, we revealed that in these novels and short stories, identity is closely linked to consumer culture: in the same manner as consumerism requires constant new desires, the identity also requires constant update in order to not become superfluous. Generally, the characters seem to be unhappy because they are unable to look past societal expectations and consumerism and make a true identity tangible. This is accentuated by the massive number of unreliable narrators we encounter in these novels and short stories: they are not able to construct consistent personalities and identities, since their identity is not stable.

In this way, the characters fill the incompleteness in their personalities with consumerist behavior. The characters are generally more concerned with gratification of their own needs than they are about other people. As a result, social capital is only determinable in the sense that the characters use other people to network and further own causes, and since we find that the characters generally act in this way, we find it plausible to conclude that they are products of a narcissistic society. Yet, there are some deviations: *The Last Bachelor* stands out, since the characters displayed here are intellectuals in comparison to the characters from the other works; in this way, they have more content than the other characters. Bret also stands out, as he is the only one who undergoes a change.

Overall, it seems that in relation to the portrayal of consumerism, masculinity and identity, Ellis, Janowitz and McInerney can be compared as they all have the same intention to mock consumerism, display crumbling relationships, men in deep masculinity crisis, and confused identities; yet, they do it differently, as there are small differences in how they portray respectively consumerism, masculinity and identity. In this way, it is impossible to regard them completely alike. The different focuses of the three, mirror our findings in the comparison of all the works: even though they engage in many of the same themes, their main focuses vary. In this way, we found that Janowitz often focuses on the differences between men and women, or more specifically how there are no such differences, while also criticizing consumerism and the American Dream. Ellis' main focus, on the other hand, appears exclusively to be a critique of consumerism, and the inevitably crumbling social relations it brings. McInerney also focuses on dysfunctional relationships, often with adultery as a result, but like Janowitz he also critiques consumerism and the American Dream.

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