**Clinical Assessment and Case Conceptualization:**

**Patrick Bateman from *American Psycho***

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**Meet Patrick Bateman**

For those who have never seen the 2000 psychological horror film, *American Psycho,* starring Christian Bale, based on the 1991 novel by Brett Easton Ellis, it is all about Patrick Bateman, a wealthy sociopath who darkly inhabits the uber-superficial high society of 1987 Manhattan (Harron, 2000). A Harvard graduate who comes from wealthy parents, Patrick Bateman is a vane, highly narcissistic, self-obsessed and solipsistic high-level Wall Street investment banker, the prototypical NYC Yuppie on steroids, metaphorically speaking. But perhaps literally (although this is pure speculation). Bateman is proudly obsessed with his compulsive daily routine of manly self-beautification and top-shelf men’s care product application; his super-rigorous exercise regimen; his high-end designer clothes, furniture, high-tech electronic devices and other postmodern accouterments; along with impressing his gorgeous socialite fiancée (Reese Witherspoon) and his shallow circle of Yuppie peers, most of whom he secretly despises. Patrick is reportedly a neighbor of film superstar Tom Cruise. Interestingly, Bateman idolizes New York real estate mogul, Donald Trump (Ellis, 1991).

Bateman enjoys watching video horror (*Texas Chain Saw Massacre, 1974*) compulsively as he works out with an Uber-human vigor; frequently discusses serial killers in casual conversation; and openly admits to killing people, which his vapid friends take as an ongoing joke from wacky Patrick. As the insightful and often graphic narrative unfolds, it becomes soon apparent that Patrick is an unabashed sociopath (well aware of his own cognitive distortions, and mostly in touch with reality), yet everyone around him, including his almost-equally self-absorbed fiancée, is completely ignorant of and oblivious to the fact. Also, within his elite, Uber high-class, exclusive circle of privileged “friends,” and work colleagues, narcissistic Patrick appears to be intent on if not obsessed with being the most well-informed, refined and witty individual in the room. His shallow identity inexorably fused to the plastic world of blatant consumerism and gratuitous wealth he exists in, Patrick constantly “parrots the language of marketing,” advertising and mass media (Robinson, 2006, p. 26). Throughout the film he compulsively analyzes the equally shallow lyrics of 80’s pop music and postulates upon music reviews and other inane pop culture trivia, usually while indulging in some manner of gratuitous abuse perpetrated upon unsuspecting strangers, bar servers or sex workers; or amidst his frequent phantasmagoria of grotesquely bloody and intricately detailed rape, torture and murder fantasies.

But are they fantasies, really?

**The Plot Sickens**

Amidst yet another mundane business meeting, Bateman becomes quietly enraged by what he perceives to be the finer quality of the handsome business card presented by a rival stockbroker, Paul (Jared Leto), who had also usurped a coveted account from Bateman. Afterwards, to vent his frustrations, Bateman, after mockingly insulting a homeless man, stabs him and his dog to death in a dark, steamy alley. (Or imagines doing so?) At a Christmas party, Paul further agitates Bateman by mistaking him for another colleague as Bateman’s furious envy is further fueled by Paul’s maddening ease at securing a coveted reservation at the exclusive restaurant Patrick is unable to get into. Bateman shortly extracts his revenge, getting Paul drunk and luring him back to Bateman’s apartment.

In perhaps the most pivotal scene in the film, carelessly grooving to the sounds of Huey Lewis’s “Hip To Be Square,” which he greatly admires, Patrick proceeds to murder Paul with an ax, clearly an act of unbridled premeditation in which the almost-vampiric Bateman has drawn a great, sadistic satisfaction. Rarely one to leave a mess, the obsessive-compulsive Patrick disposes of the body in the basement furnace of his apartment building. He then breaks into his victim’s apartment and promptly leaves a phony message on the man’s answering machine, informing his callers that Paul has taken an extensive business trip to London.

Later on, Patrick is once again driven to a murderous rage by the presentation of another co-worker’s more attractive business card. Patrick attempts to strangle the man in a restaurant bathroom but when his next would-be victim mistakes the attack for a homosexual come-on, Patrick flees in a panic, and later murders a model. After a pair of suspenseful meetings with a detective (Willem Dafoe) regarding Paul Allen’s disappearance, the detective reveals he received a report that Allen was actually spotted in London. Although his later proves to be false information, even better, the detective informs Patrick he has an alibi, a dinner party with his high society friends. This revelation temporarily takes him off the hook but only serves to confuse Patrick even further. During a rendezvous with one of his regular prostitutes, Christie, and another sex pal Elizabeth, in Paul Allen’s apartment, Patrick drugs, rapes and murders Elizabeth before chasing Christie, who ends up discovering a stash of female corpses. In his bloody, naked pursuit of Christie, Patrick drops a chainsaw on her as she flees down a staircase

The mayhem in Bateman’s life continues to escalate, becoming more farcical and ultra-violent. Patrick sees a cat while using an ATM, and imagines it instructing him to feed it a cat. As he attempts to shoot the cat, he is confronted by a woman whom he shoots before killing several cops pursuing him and blowing up their police car. He stumbles into a random office, killing a security guard and janitor to cover his tracks and ends up hiding under his desk evading (imaginary?) police helicopters. And around this point in the narrative, it appears that these bizarre events must be a complex of wild murder fantasies and/or homicidal hallucinations as the line between fantasy and reality is blurred beyond recognition for both Patrick and the movie viewer.

**Differential Diagnosis**

Eventually, a confused and exhausted Bateman confesses to his oblivious attorney that he has killed as many as 20 to 40 people. (Bateman’s attorney, who is as equally confused about the identities of others as nearly everyone else in the film’s solipsistic world, claims to have dined with the alleged victim just the other night). After his attorney laughs off Patrick’s confession as a morbid joke, even the cathartic punishment Patrick deeply desires evades him. Later. Bateman declares somberly that even *his confession has meant nothing*. The dark and deeply troubled character Patrick Bateman, an unabashed nihilist and sociopath, clearly suffers from myriad personality disorders.

In diagnosing an individual, a clinician must rely on a set of highly verifiable facts—observations, reports, assessments and other evidence of a person’s dysfunctional behavior, i.e., distress and other symptoms, either positive or negative, representing behaviors either added to or taking away from a subject’s baseline functioning (Pomeroy, 2015). When dealing with a fictional character one may have to rely on certain presumptions. In the case of Patrick Bateman, it is safe to presume that the majority of his myriad symptoms have been present for at least six months, but probably a year or even much longer. A significant question to consider is whether Patrick suffers from hallucinations, which he most likely does, all things considered. But if so, which of his experiences are real and which are only imagined? Here, we can only speculate. But for the sake of this analysis it is safe to presume that Bateman: 1) experiences intense fantasies of extreme violence, sexual perversity and murder; 2) suffers from intermittent visual hallucinations; and 3) has actually raped, tortured and killed numerous people.

Early on in the narrative, Bateman confesses to experiencing, like normal humans, minor episodes of mundane, everyday anxiety, for instance at the video store where there are “too many (effing) movies to choose from” (Ellis, p. 112). On the subject of videos and a brief diagnostic side note, Bateman may fit the criteria for a diagnosis of addiction with moderate severity, considering his admittedly voracious appetite for pornography and video horror. While working out in his apartment, which he does compulsively, Patrick indulges in horror movies, most notably, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974),* and admitted to having watched the film *Body Double (1984)* at least 37 times. Bateman even confesses to using the excuse of having to return his movies to the video store in order to leave work or avoid certain social situations. “I gotta return some videotapes,” in fact becomes Patrick’s trademark catch phrase (Harron, 2000). However, the DSM does not currently provide a formal diagnosis for addictions to sex, pornography or video-watching. Both Goodman (1990) and Irons and Schneider (1996) have proposed criteria for these conditions in line with DSM-5 criteria for alcohol and other substance addictions. Highly relevant in this case it seems, Dr. Victor Cline (1996) presents a four-stage progressive model for pornography addiction as follows: Addiction, Escalation, Desensitization, and Acting Out (Sexually).

Presuming that Bateman does experience visual hallucinations, he does fit Criteria A for schizophrenia, in addition displaying the positive symptoms of disorganized thinking and behavior, as well as delusions of grandeur and persecution (American Psychological Association, 2013). While Bateman does experience mild anxiety and a significant degree of existential distress and despair, mainly in the form of inner angst, dissatisfaction and ennui, for the most part he is essentially functional within his overly vapid and materialistic world, thus failing to meet Criterion B. (At least relatively functional, until things go quite bad, whether in his own mind or in so-called reality, at least temporarily.)

The normally mild-mannered Bateman likewise displays intermittent symptoms of both mania and depression, yet it seems unlikely he presents with pervasive depressed mood despite the presence of intermittent diminished interest or pleasure, thus eliminating schizoaffective disorder. According to DSM-5, schizoaffective requires that a major depressive or manic episode occur concurrently with the active-phase symptoms and mood symptoms must be present for a majority of the total duration of the active periods (APA, 2013). Furthermore, delusions and hallucinations must occur exclusively during a major depressive or manic episode for a diagnosis of bipolar disorder with psychotic episodes, which is difficult to argue in Bateman’s case (APA, 2013).

However, initially, a more appropriate primary diagnosis for Bateman is likely schizotypal personality disorder. DSM-5 describes schizotypal personality disorder as displaying a pervasive pattern of social and interpersonal deficits, including diminished capacity for forming close relationships; presenting cognitive and perceptual distortions; presenting eccentricities of behavior, usually forming in childhood or adolescence but also may not present until early adulthood (APA, 2013). As DSM-5 describes: “Characteristic difficulties with this disorder present as apparent in identity, self-direction, empathy, and/or intimacy, along with specific maladaptive traits in the domains of Psychoticism and Detachment” (APA, 2013, Schizotypal Personality Disorder). From the Ellis novel (1991), Bateman remarks, “pornography is much less complicated than actual sex and . . . so much more enjoyable” (p. 254). While Patrick can be functionally sociable at times, he is only faking it, and eventually reveals himself to be socially inappropriate, nihilistic, misogynistic, racist and increasingly psychotic. Regarding the tentative diagnosis of schizotypal personality disorder as applied to Patrick Bateman, it may also be questionable whether Bateman can distinguish between his own distorted cognition and reality, particularly at the denouement of the film. And in his defense, he did manage to martial the social skills to land a fetching but aloof and finicky fiancée, until he breaks up with her in the midst of Patrick’s escalating existential crisis and psychotic breakdown. (He did suspect her of cheating on him, a fact which seems to be confirmed in the novel.)

In this case a more appropriate primary diagnosis may be Unspecified Schizophrenia Spectrum and Other Psychotic Disorder (APA, 2013). If, theoretically, a clinician were to encounter such a character as Bateman as a patient in the ER, or in the vicinity of a crime scene, for instance, with little to no documentation of the subject’s history, this would be the most appropriate diagnosis, all things considered (Marco and Vaughn, 2005).

In addition, the predatory Patrick meets partial criteria for both narcissistic personality disorder and anti-social personality disorder, as it is understood that most sociopaths/psychopaths are clinical narcissists but most narcissists do not necessarily meet the criteria for anti-social personality disorder. According to DSM-5, “individuals with antisocial personality disorder and narcissistic personality disorder share a tendency to be tough-minded, glib, superficial, exploitative, and lack empathy. However, narcissistic personality disorder does not include characteristics of impulsivity, aggression, and deceit” (APA, 2013, Anti-social Personality Disorder.) The symptoms of anti-social personality disorder include a pervasive pattern of disregard for and a blatant violation of the rights of others including but not limited to deceit, manipulation, impulsivity, hostility and aggression (APA, 2013). The DSM-5 reports that anti-social personalities are more likely to be irresponsible and exploitive in their relationships and less likely to be monogamous.

These callous-unemotional traits quite evident in the character of Patrick Bateman, individuals considered psychopathic are also prone to display an inflated self-opinion and arrogance, and to experience frequent boredom, addictions, related anxiety disorders, and depressed mood (APA, 2013). Throughout the film there appears to be evidence that Bateman has actually tortured and/or killed people, i.e., the bloody sheets we see at the dry cleaners and the suspecting real estate agent who had discovered the bodies stashed in the luxurious apartment of the missing Paul Allen. (But presumably chose to let it go as re-leasing the apartment was a greater priority). At one point Bateman’s young, beautiful and faithful secretary (who may be in love with him) discovers her capricious boss’s private notebook which happens to be full of grotesque, profane epithets and murderous drawings, further evidence of Patrick’s extreme psychosis, at the very least. One night at his apartment, he briefly considers braining lovely secretary Jean with a nail gun (unbeknownst to her) but evidently retained some semblance of humanity in deciding not to destroy such a defenseless, beautiful creature. And the length and detail of dialogue in the scene in which he murdered the homeless man lends some credence to the argument that this was an actual event, not imagined. However, a diagnosis of anti-social personality disorder requires symptoms of conduct disorder present by the age of 15 and clearly not enough historical information is available via the film. Nevertheless, it is easy enough to imagine Patrick Bateman’s childhood as something akin to *Lord of the Flies (1954 novel; film version, 1963 and 1990)* in the Hamptons or a less supernatural version of cinematic anti-Christ Damien Thorn from classic horror film, *The Omen* *(1976).* It is interesting to note thatin Leistedt and Linkowski’s (2014) prolific study reviewing 126 psychopathic characters from 400 films, the researchers along with senior forensic psychiatrists and cinema critics categorized Patrick Bateman as a primary psychopath of the classic/idiopathic typology, but evidently did not investigate additional diagnoses for Bateman.

If in fact, hypothetically, this character is guilty of these apparent heinous crimes including various felonious counts of assault with a deadly weapon, sexual assault, torture, multiple murders and cannibalism, he would rightfully be categorized as the penultimate psychopath and a prolific serial killer. Following his theoretical apprehension, fair trial under the law and presumed sentencing to a maximum-security penitentiary landing in the same wing as Hannibal Lecter *(Silence of the Lambs, 1991)* Bateman should ideally be provided the appropriate treatment interventions including to but not limited to pharmacological anti-psychotics, Cognitive Behavior and Solution-Focused Therapy and regular group therapy. Perhaps a bit of long-overdue Jungian shadow work for wacky Patrick as well. Finally, a weekly support group for recovering pornography and horror film addicts might also be just what the prison doctor called for, if you will.

**Conclusion**

For a purposefully shallow character, the sociopath Patrick Bateman proves to be rather complex and quite darkly so. In Bateman’s final monologue, he states, “my pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact, I want my pain to be inflicted on others . . .” (Harron, 2000). A psychoanalyst who initially encountered Patrick Bateman could reasonably apply the diagnoses of schizotypal personality disorder, as well as possibly schizoaffective or bipolar disorder with psychotic features, although certainly arguable, the latter two would probably be misdiagnoses. As the DSM-5 describes, it can be extremely difficult to differentiate between schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder with psychotic features and schizophrenia (APA, 2013).

The character of Patrick Bateman at various times presents clear symptoms of myriad personality disorders with at least partial criteria met for each schizophrenia (or some form of disorder in the schizophrenic spectrum), narcissistic personality disorder and anti-social personality disorder and full criteria met for both schizotypal personality disorder, and unspecified schizophrenia spectrum and other psychotic disorder. As the chaotic narrative of Patrick Bateman progresses, the character is revealed to be devolving more and more towards greater psychosis and clinical schizophrenic tendencies. It is interesting to note that Bateman’s wealthy mother, following an unknown illness, was sent to reside in a mental health facility (Ellis, 1991). And entertaining further analysis, it is certainly no stretch to imagine the troubled childhood or adolescence of Patrick Bateman fraught with enough malfeasance to constitute clinical conduct disorder. This missing information is all that prevents a full-blown diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder for Mr. Patrick Bateman—*sociopath, psychopath or just plain misunderstood NYC nihilist?*

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