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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

**Exploring Existential Angst and the Loss of Individual Identity in Willy Loman from *Death of a Salesman* and Jay Gatsby from *The Great Gatsby***

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| ABSTRACT

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* are two of the literary works that masterfully delineate the existential anxiety of their protagonists: Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby. This paper attempts to delve deep into the characters- Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby with a view to exploring the existential angst that Willy Loman of *Death of a Salesman* and Jay Gatsby of *The Great Gatsby* goes through. Existential angst refers to a profound feeling of anxiety, fear, or unease that stems from reflecting on the meaning or purpose of life, one's existence, and the unavoidable nature of death. Both Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby grapple with the relentless worship of the American Dream and the pursuit of success, ultimately leading to the decay of their true selves. Primary data for conducting this research have been collected from the texts- *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*, whereas secondary data have been collected from different articles, research papers, and different online sources. The content analysis method is used to analyze the data collected from different sources. Willy Loman, a traveling salesman, seems obsessed with achieving his version of the American dream, but unfortunately, he can never fulfill his dream. Jay Gatsby, on the other hand, is a wealthy, ambitious, and idealistic man. Although Gatsby had always desired wealth, his primary motivation for amassing his fortune was his love for Daisy Buchanan, whom he met as a young military officer in 1917 before leaving to fight in World War I. Both the men appear to be awfully lost in the anxiety of their existence. This paper seeks to unearth the unstable mental condition, the loss of individual identity, and the deep rooted existential anxiety of the two characters, Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby.

| KEYWORDS

Existentialism, anxiety, angst, unstable, unearth, individuality, American Dream

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**1. Introduction**

Art is inspired by life. Life is the cornerstone on which the construction of art is raised. A skillful artist always has his base in reality. He sketches his own characters and narrates his own events based on his experience of real incidents. Arthur Miller and F. Scott Fitzgerald are, in every respect, realists. Realism is the defining characteristic of their work. While both reflect the real theme, they do so differently. One such theme that recurrently appears in both writers' writing is the concept of the American Dream. This particular concept can mirror the past, present, and even future of American lives—as well as the lives of ordinary people around the world. The concept of individual identity, hence, plays a very crucial role due to the fact that it discovers the complexities and struggles faced by individuals in their strive to achieve the American dream. The protagonists, i.e., Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* and Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*, strive throughout their lives to achieve their versions of the American Dream, which ultimately makes them go through a sharp pang of existential angst. This study aims at conducting a

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comparative analysis between two of the most iconic characters in American literature, i.e., Willy Loman from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Jay Gatsby from Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, with the main focus on exploring the existential angst that these two characters go through. Both characters grapple with the loss of their individual identity as they navigate the frivolous nature of the American Dream and the societal pressures of success.

### 1.1. Problem statement

Existential angst is the feeling of anxiety or fear that originates from reflecting on the meaning and purpose of life. On the other hand, the loss of individual identity indicates a character's gradual or abrupt detachment from their personal beliefs, desires, or personality. These two concepts seem to be interconnected. In order to find out the nature and reasons for existential angst and the loss of individual identity, this paper will analyze the two protagonists, i.e., Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby, with the help of Existentialism theory. Many scholars have conducted their research on different issues, but no comparative analysis has been conducted on Willy Loman from *Death of a Salesman* and Jay Gatsby from *The Great Gatsby*. So, this research is essential to fill the gap.

## 2. Literature Review

"A Study on Identity Crisis in the Arthur Miller Plays" is a relevant work by P. Anjaneyulu (2013), which concentrates on the reality of modern society, problems with identity, communication, and the significance of spirituality. In this article, P. Anjaneyulu opines:

It is true that Miller's plays mirror the present materialistic society in which men (like his characters) are facing the problem of identity. Every character of his plays is from the real world of common man. It is a journey from physical world to spiritual world where an individual under different unsatisfactory circumstances states having conflicts with his existing 'Self'... (p. 278)

In her article "Men Are Also Victims at the Hand of Patriarchy: A Study of Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*, and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*", Rifat Binte Joynal (2023) observes that *Death of a Salesman* addresses Willy's "loss of identity and inability to survive in a typical society." (p. 298) Rifat writes:

Willy's despair results from his failure to achieve his American definition of success. At one point, Willy was a moderately successful salesman and model father to his sons opening new territory in New England. As Willy grows older, making sales is more difficult for him, so he attempts to draw on past success by reliving old memories. He gradually loses the ability to distinguish reality from fantasy, and this behavior alienates him from others, thereby diminishing his ability to survive in the present. (p. 298)

Sarah Churchwell (2014) addresses Gatsby's reinvention not only replicates the American myth of self-making but also discloses its boundaries by noting that "Gatsby's entire existence is a performance, one designed to erase the self he was born with and replace it with a self-worthy of Daisy and of the American Dream" (p. 94). Gatsby's identity can be, therefore, marked as a fiction that is prudently built yet essentially mingled instability. His ideology of restructuring his past identity and the urge to mold his future in a new shell divulge deep discontinuation from reality. Gatsby's version of gaining the uttermost point of the American dream could have been proven successful if he had secured his own existence in the chaotic world. His dreams serve as the spirit of touching the skies, but he has lost his own existence as a result of his personal entanglement with destiny. Matthew J. Bruccoli (2002) pointed out the profound possibility in Gatsby's determination and stated, "Gatsby is great because of the magnitude of his dream and the incorruptibility of his commitment to it" (p. 125). Therefore, Bruccoli perceives Gatsby's potentiality in his untiring faith in possibility. His dream is not faulty; hereafter, the devotion to it elevates him further. But his perplexed relations and social anxiety lead him towards the downfall.

It is evident that scholars have tried to find out different kinds of research problems and have written numerous research papers on these two protagonists, i.e., Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby. Yet, none have focused on the existential angst and the loss of individual identity of these two characters in a single piece of writing so far, which is the gap in this research.

## **2.1 Research questions**

The project aims to address and provide some level of clarification for the following questions:

1. How do Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby lose their individual identity and thereby suffer from existential angst?
2. How does the loss of individual identity and existential angst affect the lives of these two characters?

## **2.2 Research objectives**

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the characters Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby in relation to their pursue of the American dream to find out the reasons for the loss of individual identity and the feeling of existential angst.
2. To find out the impact of the loss of individual identity and existential angst on these two characters.

## **2.3 Theoretical framework**

This paper explores existential angst and the loss of individual identity, drawing upon the theory of existentialism. Existentialism is a literary term that emphasizes individual existence, freedom, and choice. The major aim of existentialism is to concentrate on human existence in order to solve it. It is a revolt against the impersonal nature of the modern industrial and technological era, which has replaced humans with machines. The advent of unbridled commercialism and materialism that comes to co-exist with the rising influence of advanced technology tends to impair human responses. Existentialism provides a lens through which characters' existential dilemmas and their search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent world can be examined.

In his book *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, J.A. Cuddon (1999) has mentioned a somewhat detailed interpretation of existentialism.

Jean-Paul Sartre is the hierophant of modern existentialism and his version, expressed through his novels, plays and philosophical writings, is the one that has caught on and been the most widely influential. In Sartre's vision man is born into a kind of void (*le neant*), a mud (*le visqueux*). He has the liberty to remain in this mud and thus lead a passive, supine, acquiescent existence (like Oblomov and Samuel Beckett's sad tatterdemalions) in a 'semi-conscious' state and in which he is scarcely aware of himself. However, he may come out of his subjective, passive situation (in which case he would 'stand out from'), become increasingly aware of himself and, conceivably, experience *angoisse* (a species of metaphysical and moral anguish). If so, he would then have a sense of the absurdity of his predicament and suffer despair. The energy deriving from this awareness would enable him to 'drag himself out of the mud', and begin to exist. By exercising his power of choice he can give meaning to existence and the universe. Thus, in brief, the human being is obliged to make himself what he is, and has to be what he is. (p. 295)

From the onset of the drama, Willy Loman grapples with his own existence and identity, highlighting the human tendency to question one's purpose and authenticity of his life. Willy Loman's identity loss is firmly tied to his chasing of the American Dream, which eventually leads to his disillusionment and self-destruction. Throughout the play, Willy tries relentlessly to achieve his version of the American Dream. To him, achieving the American Dream is equal to achieving prosperity through sheer charisma. He believes that any man who is manly, good-looking, and well-liked deserves success and will ultimately achieve it. Hard work and innovation do not hold importance for a man to succeed in life, according to Willy.

## **3. Methodology**

This paper is qualitative research in nature. Its main purpose is to analyze the main characters, Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby, to explore existential angst and the loss of individual identity in these two characters. Qualitative research focuses on the intensive study and the interpretation of the text itself. The researcher takes *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby* as the primary sources of data and makes an elaborate analysis of the relevant incidents of the

texts. Secondary data are collected from different articles, research papers, and online sources. The content analysis method is used to analyze the data collected from different sources.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

##### 4.1 Existential angst and the loss of individual identity in *Willy Loman*

*Death of a Salesman* is an exceptional piece of writing by Arthur Miller that depicts the agonizing hardship within one family. Along with that, the play exhibits the struggles of the national values of America. The play was written during the mid-1940s, after the Second World War. It was the time when many states of America were facing numerous domestic tensions as well as inconsistencies. All of these things presented the idea of a prevalent materialism that incessantly led people in the pursuit of more wealth, even at the cost of their honesty and morality. During that time, in the quest for their American Dream, many people began to sacrifice their sense of personal honor and morality. The play was written more than eighty years ago; still, it is considered a powerful drama on the basis of its insightful subject matter.

Willy Loman, a traditional salesperson, dreams of the American Dream all through the play but fails to achieve it. A traveling salesman, Willy Loman is in his early sixties. After thirty-five years of service at the same firm, he is dismissed from work with no pension and compensation. He has two sons from whom he is supposed to expect some financial and mental help in his old age. Unfortunately, they are failures in their own lives, and hence, they are useless to him. Willy owns nothing, and he achieves nothing. He appears to the reader as someone who lacks a sense of accomplishment and responsibility. More importantly, he seems exhausted all through the play. When he enters his house at the very beginning of the play, his exhaustion becomes very apparent to the readers. The Loman house, which once had a pleasant rural acceptance, has now turned out to be a lifeless apartment. His caring and encouraging wife has turned grey, old, and careworn. Willy himself is tormented by two devastating lost opportunities. One of these is his rejection of going with his brother, Ben, to Alaska in search of better fortune, and the other one is his elder son's rejection of any kind of future for him. Willy's sons, Biff and Happy, are temporarily residing at their parents' house. Biff was a good athlete in high school. But he was not a good student. He was never as attentive to his studies as he was to sport. As a result, he failed in math and did not get his graduation. Happy has always lived in the shadow of his brother, Biff. Happy represents Willy's sense of self-importance and ambition, but he appears to be engaged in unethical behavior in his work as an assistant to an assistant buyer. Time and again, Willy motivates his sons to be well-liked and popular. For example, when his son, Biff, imitates his math teacher's lisp, Willy becomes more interested in the classmates' reaction rather than in the morality of Biff's action:

Biff: ... I crossed my eyes and talked with a lisp.

Willy (laughing): You did? The kids like it?

Biff: They nearly died laughing!

Willy: Yeah? What'd you do? (Miller 1977, p. 93)

Needless to say, Willy's version of the romantic American Dream never works out. Eventually, he turns out to be a victim of the illusive American Dream. He falls victim to the commercial society. He falls victim to his own ideas of success and failure. Willy's conversation with his boss Howard when he pleads with him for a change in his job-sphere and the latter's rejection of Willy's proposal indicates how helpless and lost Willy is in this modern commercial world: "I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away- a man is not a piece of fruit!" (Miller 1977, p. 64). Willy's feeling of existential angst becomes acute with this aforementioned statement.

Willy Loman experiences existential angst through his profound perception of meaninglessness, his loss of self-identity beyond being a salesman, and his desperate attachment to the illusion of the American Dream. These struggles lead him to profound hopelessness and a torturous questioning of his self-worth in a world that prioritizes superficial success over authentic human connection. Willy says to his employer, Howard, in a dejected tone, "Willy: ... in those days there was a personality in it, Howard. There was respect, comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today, it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear – or personality. You see what I mean? They

don't know me anymore." (Miller 1977, p. 63-64). These lines draw a painful picture of Willy's current condition. All through his life, he has cherished a false conception of success. Though he was never a successful salesman, he is used to boasting about his sales abilities and face value in the business world. According to him, being well-liked wins the day. He believes in the American Dream of easy success and wealth, but eventually can never achieve it. He had been chasing some kind of mirage all through his life. Now, when his illusion gives way to disillusionment, he realizes that existence is a predicament for him. "Willy [moving to the right]: Funny, y'know? After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive." (Miller 1977, p. 77). Likewise, he is deeply anxious about his existence and the future of his sons.

Throughout his life, Willy has faced multiple difficulties in maintaining his self-image. He participates in a number of arguments to protect his sense of identity. For example, he engages himself in an argument with his boss, Howard. He even had to be involved in an argument with his son Biff about not being a worthless man. "I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman." (Miller 1977, p. 105). This is what Willy says to his son Biff in an unrestrained outburst to prove his worth as an extraordinary salesman in front of his son.

Once a moderately successful salesman, Willy now seems to be sinking into oblivion. He cannot keep pace with the modern changing world. At the beginning of the drama, he seems deeply frustrated at the massive urbanization that was going on fast due to industrialization and with the help of modern technology.

Willy: The street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighbourhood. The grass don't grow any more, you cannot raise a carrot in the backyard. They should've had a law against apartment houses. Remember those two beautiful elm trees out there? When I and Biff hung the swing between them? (Miller 1977, p. 12)

This remark of Willy elucidates how deeply he is concerned about the changing world. His existence in the transforming world seems to be in deep danger. It seems to the reader that either he is a mismatch or time itself is a mismatch for him. Either way, it becomes evident that he is suffering from a deep sense of existential anxiety.

In order to make it more concise, some key points can be mentioned highlighting the existential angst and the loss of individual identity in Willy Loman:

**The disillusionment with the American dream:** Willy adheres desperately to the American Dream- his belief that popularity and charm guarantee success. However, as he grows older and his sales declines, he realizes that his dream is an illusion, which leaves him devastated by his lack of success.

**Poor self-awareness:** Willy often deceives himself about his success and relationships, ignoring the truth of his own failures, which only sharpens his anxiety about where he belongs in the world.

**Detachment from his sons:** Willy's fascination with his sons' success, largely Biff's, creates a tense relationship in which he ignores their true needs and aspirations, eventually leaving him isolated and frustrated.

**Fear of worthlessness:** Willy's constant desire for acceptance from others, particularly his boss and clients, exposes his deep fear of becoming worthless and forgotten once his sales career ends.

**Reflecting on past memories:** Willy's recurrent slips into daydreams and flashbacks demonstrate his inability to completely associate with the present and his struggle to combine his past with his present situation.

**Self-deception:** He often makes up stories and overlooks harsh realities in order to preserve a positive self-image, even when it is obviously untrue.

**Frantic efforts to connect:** Willy's attempts to connect with his sons, despite the tension between them, uncovers his deep thirst for meaningful relationships and a true sense of belonging.

#### 4.2 Existential angst and the loss of individual identity in *Jay Gatsby*

*The Great Gatsby*, first published in 1925, is considered a trailblazing of hope and disillusion by Francis Scott Fitzgerald. Throughout the play, the portrayal of a romantic imagination, along with the anguish and bravery entailed in the pursuit of an unattainable dream of the 'American Jazz Age', can be figured out. It was a period of economic prosperity and liberal social activity along with extravagant lifestyle, innovative music, and general euphoria. *The Great Gatsby* mainly enunciates a catastrophic tale of a young man of this era, James Gatz, who changed his name to 'Jay Gatsby' after meeting a prosperous mining prospector named Dan Cody. Gatsby is a representative persona of American Jazz Age who seems to be entangled within the circle of achieving fame and prosperity by chasing his dream of making money and love under the notion of American Dream, during which, he misplaces his ethical sense and ultimately becomes disillusioned and gets devastated by own faults.

At a young age, poverty stricken Gatsby falls in love with Daisy Buchanan; the First World War broke out, and he was sent to the war. Five years later, he returned to Daisy, but Daisy was married to highborn Tom Buchanan. Gatsby constructs a lavish mansion where Daisy's house can be seen, and he often throws grand parties in order to attract Daisy to his destination because of his love for Daisy. Gatsby's attires, carriages, mansion, and parties- all prove him as afresh rich with a sense of superiority embedded not only in Tom Buchanan's but also in Nick Carraway's eyes. Gatsby's perspective was shaped by the ideology that only earning money can enable him to gain Daisy's love and help him shape his identity. This thought commended Gatsby on gaining wealth even through bootlegging wine and other illicit businesses, but it could not relieve him from the existential angst.

The narrator, Nick, tries to recognize Gatsby's state, but his loneliness is evident when all his companions leave the party. No one except Nick knows the motif of Gatsby's continuous arranging of parties and the elaborative display of his wealth, with the unrealistic hope that Daisy will somehow appear at one of his parties and wish to recommence her bond with him. He waits for Daisy's call until his demise, whereas Daisy does not give Gatsby any hint of her culpability for hitting Myrtle Wilson. While Daisy's family goes to Europe for an excursion to escape their accountability in the car accident, Gatsby's existential crisis and devastated self lead him to take the blame for the murder. However, Gatsby's funeral also exposes the ultimate alienation of human beings even after attaining success through materialistic prosperity. People enjoyed Gatsby's parties and contentment based on his extravagant and substantial outbursts. But following his death, nobody cared for him, and they seemed to be unwilling to attend his funeral, though Nick tried to call many people. Human beings' affiliations were so estranged and evaporated during Gatsby's funeral that it is not only an individual's misfortune but also human beings' tragedy and alienation, which shows the loss of values and empathy in the particular timeframe in America. Fitzgerald's illustration of moral decay as a prominent reason for Gatsby's alienated self is also a significant issue in scholarly readings. Lionel Trilling (1950) proclaims that the novel reviews the "moral apathy of the upper class, particularly through characters like Tom and Daisy Buchanan, who destroy lives and retreat into their wealth without consequence" (p. 16). In contrast, Gatsby, despite his criminal background, arouses a sense of sympathy in the readers as he is tragically out of place in a world governed by superficiality and materialistic greed. On the last page of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick understands the amalgamation of Gatsby's dream and apparent catastrophe with the aspirations of the historic American Dream, which shows the psychological part that brings him to a state of tragic helplessness-

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eludes us then, but that's no matter- tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning- So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (Fitzgerald, 2011, p. 184)

The 'green light' implies Gatsby's romanticized dreams and hope, which remain perpetually out of reach even after attaining the fragile version of those for a transient period of time. This highlights the unreachable aspect of his self-constructed identity. He has achieved material wealth through his hard work and persistent determination, though he has chosen illegal means throughout several years for the purpose of building his existence. When he feels confident enough to marry Daisy, he soon finds that his dream is shattered, as Daisy marries Tom Buchanan soon after Gatsby leaves. Gatsby falls into the shadow of the distorted love towards Daisy until he is killed in the swimming pool by Wilson, Daisy's husband's lover's husband. Existentialism can give some explanation for his tragic demise. For Gatsby, the world stands as absurd, and his life ends on a painful note after achieving his own desired

milestones. Gatsby's life experience evidenced the world as absurd, and therefore, it assures the existential angst of his life.

Gatsby's wealth does not provide him happiness, nor does it lead him to his ultimate destination, Daisy. Gatsby seems to be extremely devoted to his affection for Daisy, and when she runs over her husband's mistress, he takes the blame. It is that last act of indecisiveness due to alienated self that costs him his life. Apart from being an aspiring youth and an upholder of the American Dream, Gatsby loses his individual identity due to entangling his own self into the absurd notion of self-estrangement. Gatsby's character here precisely showcases Seeman's concept of alienation of self. In 1959, Melvin Seeman identified five types of subjective alienation: powerlessness, self-estrangement, social isolation, normlessness, and meaninglessness. All these traits are visible in the portrayal of Gatsby's character, which leads him to his existential dilemma. Alienation and self-estrangement are multifarious features that can significantly impact mental well-being and quality of life. However, these can be figured out as the prime reasons for Gatsby's lost identity, existential anxiety, and dissatisfactory and unfulfilled goals in life. Though by understanding the grounds and indications of these phenomena, individuals can take proactive steps to resolve those, Gatsby could not come out of the cycle of his estranged circle of self-anguish. When Gatsby gets reunified with Daisy, beneath the transitory span of passionate bliss, it hastily turns into self-alienation, and he starts to lose his aspiring individualism. He apprehends that reality might not reach his desired goal that he has run after for five years. Gatsby's demise is the eventual symbol of his estrangement and alienation. After all the efforts of engaging their own self in manufacturing a new life and self, he dies alone and is left abandoned by the society where he tried to hold an influential status. In this regard, Pearson (1971) scrutinizes that Gatsby's adversity lies in his false promise of self-creation and states, "The illusion of identity control fails him when confronted with the unchangeable past and the rigid social boundaries of his world" (p. 640). Gatsby's lost identity and existential angst are not merely personal; they reflect Fitzgerald's larger vision of the American Dream and the culture of the Jazz Age.

Gatsby's pursuit of attaining the American dream leads him to change his name, deposit wealth through questionable means, and own the lavish mansion in West Egg to cure his identical loss. Thus, his muse with Daisy becomes a symbol of his desire for a better life, and he believes that by recreating his past, he can regain his lost identity. However, his unrestrained parties and ritzy possessions serve as a concealment for his true self, isolating him from natural bonds and real identity. Gatsby's transformation from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby is not merely a superficial thing; it is symbolic of the abjuration of his past memories.

James Gatz- that was really or at least legally, his name. He had changed it at the age of seventeen and at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career- when he saw Dan Cody's yacht drop anchor over the most insidious flat on Lake Superior. (Fitzgerald, 2011, p. 101)

By declining his birth name, Gatsby tries to wipe away his underprivileged self Midwestern ancestries and aims at fabricating a new identity that aligns with prosperity, charisma, and cachet. Ironically, however, he never becomes successful in gaining the fabricated version of himself. "The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself." (Fitzgerald, 2011, p. 101). This remark directly signals Gatsby's identity as a self-made deception. Scholars have interpreted this as a symbol of a profound identity crisis, where the self seems to get estranged between foundation and ambition. Furthermore, Trilling (1950) detects that Gatsby's moral and emotional segregation stems from his negation of engaging with the world, stating as-, "His greatness lies in his capacity for hope, but it also dooms him, for he insists on seeing the world as he wishes it to be rather than as it is" (p. 16). Gatsby is not just isolated from society in the race to achieve materialistic possessions, but he also gets detached from his true self. His newly constructed identity is fragile and builds an awful discontinuation between who he actually is and who he pretends to be.

When Tom Buchanan exposes Gatsby's background and questions his acceptability, Gatsby is forced to confront the vulnerability of his constructed identity. In Gatsby's persona, the existence of 'anomie' can be traced clearly, which

can be considered as a reason for his tormented self. Emile Durkheim's *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) introduces the concept of 'anomie', which refers to a state of normlessness or social deregulation in any individual. He states that speedy social change, such as industrialization or urbanization, can cause a collapse in social norms and values by leaving people tangled and disoriented. In the mid-twentieth century, Robert K. Merton also prolonged this concept by introducing the strain theory in his seminal work, *Social Structure and Anomie* (1938), which holds that societal structures may burden individuals to commit acts of nonconformity when they are unable to achieve culturally prescribed goals through appropriate means. Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby also delineates this concept through his aspiration to reach his dreams as he struggles to get normalized with the regulations of society by aiming at boundless ambition. Ultimately, he becomes self-estranged and puzzled within his constructed identity by misplacing his own identity in the particular society.

## 5. Conclusion

The existential dilemma is a prominent theme in both Willy Loman from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Jay Gatsby from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* as both of them experience a sense of disenchantment and run after success, which finally leads to their identities becoming intertwined with their ambitions. These are iconic characters from American literature dealing with existential angst, while the nature of their crisis, along with their perception of going toward the American Dream, is quite dissimilar. Willy Loman's obsession with the American Dream and his desire for validation exhausts his sense of self, while Jay Gatsby's continuous chase for the love of Daisy Buchanan causes him to lose the essence of his real identity. Both of the characters meet their tragic fate in their search for validation, and they gain transient success by sacrificing their true selves. Willy's calamity curtails from getting aged by several professional failures by enhancing the realization that he is not as recognized or potential as his imagined perception. He gets haunted by the belief that being "well-liked" is enough to be successful. His existential dilemma is grounded in the downfall of that illusionary boundary. However, Gatsby's predicament is engrained in rebuilding his own self as he invents a whole new persona to gain the lost attachment of his beloved one. His existential struggle is about the vainness of recollecting the past and a trial of creating a temporary meaning of his own identity through materialistic success. To determine, the comparative analysis of Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby discloses how societal pressure, unobtainable dreams, and the chase of attaining success can lead to the continuous decay of individual identity and serve as cautionary examples, highlighting the importance of maintaining a strong sense of self amidst external influence and personal ambitions. Both of them get detached from their true selves and meet a catastrophic ending by losing the essence of their real identity. Their version of perceiving the American Dream and the ways of achieving it are not alike, but their disastrous downfalls delineate their lost identities amidst the twittering of success and fame.

### 5.1 Limitations of the research

This research finds limitations in secondary sources. Only a few research papers have been published in this field.

### 5.2 Suggestions for future research

This research can uncover a number of grounds. For example,

1. The illusion and disillusionment of the American Dream
2. Gatsby as a modern tragic hero
3. Comparative study between *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*
4. The father-son dynamic in *Death of a Salesman*

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