

The Dualism of the Narrator and his alter ego, Tyler Durden, in Fight Club by Chuck Palahniuk

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Abstract—This paper discusses the dualism of the nameless narrator and his alter ego, Tyler Durden, in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*. An unnamed narrator with a conformist life plagued by insomnia finds in himself his alter ego in Tyler—who has nothing to do with conformity—and manipulates others to the point where even their identities were taken from them. The plot unfolds as the narrator understands that he and Tyler are really the same person, which makes him realize his psychological conflict. It analyses the difference between the climax of the book and movie versions highlighting the frustration of the narrator with his work that dissatisfied him to be compelled compulsively buy things he doesn't need. Upon the advice of a doctor to join groups of any type, the narrator struggled with crying, which he felt were characteristics he had not reached being a man. Because of Tyler, the narrator quit his job, and with toxic masculinity, Tyler manipulated other followers of the Fight Club to take part in Project Mayhem. This paper argues that physical violence in *Fight Club* is a means of retrieving masculinity, which brings into question societal norms and the destructive nature of toxic masculinity. Such an analysis will be used in this paper to explore the complex interaction between identity, conformity, and masculinity in *Fight Club*.

Index Terms—Conformist, Weak masculinity, Project Mayhem, Non-Conformist, Toxic masculinity, Physical violence

I. INTRODUCTION

Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996) is an interesting, avant-garde novel, which reflects the problems of disillusionment and frustration with the identification and conceptions of the modern man in terms of conformity, identity, masculinity, and the longing to break free from the fetters of society—the meaningful searches within a meaningless world. While this is also a story of an anonymous hero and his sometimes-known self—Tyler Durden—the de rigueur telling of the

fight club phenomenon, also grotesque journey into madness as the hero occasionally finds himself, it garnered an international following. 1999 Starring Brad Pitt, Edward Norton, and Helena Bonham Carter. David Fincher managed to faithfully transform Palahniuk's novel to the film in that he took an extremely detailed adaptation of the novel at large while generally straying from it.

This paper will undertake a comparative analysis of the characters in Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, the narrator and his doppelganger, Tyler Durden, with a contrast and comparison between the novel and the film. In so doing, it will be an attempt to delve deeper into the source material as well as its adaptation. Through the process, it also helps bring forth the problems and opportunities in translating a literary work to the medium of cinema. Tyler's *Fight Club* and Project Mayhem embodies a denial of culture, but in that process also reveals the risk of changing one form of conformity for another. The mutation of *Fight Club* into Project Mayhem is telling in itself how the radical movements devolve into structures of authority to accurately reproduce almost to the letter the same systems it purported to overthrow.

It is central to this film to establish the idea of toxic masculinity as a cinematic tool working through Tyler's influence and the actions of *Fight Club*. Here, Tyler becomes an advocate of violence over the body, emotional repression, and detachment as a symbol for proper masculinity. Ironically, while espousing these ideas against traditional ones, they actually lay bare the malignant character of such ideals. This article will discuss how, embracing violence and aggression through *Fight Club*, it is a misdirected attempt at masculinity and identity regaining and ultimately shows in reverse the toxic ideal of masculinity.

The paper will critically examine those themes to point out how much depth exists in the critique of how *Fight*

Club relates intersections of conformity and non-conformity and masculinity. This paper was written to express the more profound implications based on the themes developed through examination of film characters, symbolism, and societal commentary.

“First rule of Fight Club is you do not talk about Fight Club”

II. CONFORMIST

Person who follows the rules in the society also the laws Not by thinking ourself. Narrator was a Conformist, they typically seek acceptance and avoid standing out, the film’s nameless narrator (Edward Norton) he couldn’t sleep well as an effect of his solitude and isolation equally at work and in his personal life (Wartenberg, 2011), often stick to trends or expectations Set by Society. In Fight Club, Narrator the best example of conformist. The Narrator’s real name is never revealed, which adds to its everyman persona He works a Monotonous white- Collar job, The utmost open theme in Fight Club is the work of customer capitalism. Chuck Palahniuk tries to bring a message in Fight Club, that the consumerism behaviour of society nowadays has become worse than ever. (Moreland, 2017) The consumerism behaviour in Fight Club can be found in the narrator’s life before he met Tyler Durden for the first time (Nugroho, 2016). Our narrator lives a ‘minute life’ of dullness, working a job he dislikes. In the movie, the appearance of the Narrator looks half-asleep, his eyes are dull, staring absence of mind, unable to sleep and unable feel anything. While the Narrator is a passive, disillusioned office worker, One scene in movie, narrator tells us, *“When you have insomnia, you’re never really asleep, and you’re never really awake.”* (Fincher, 1999) as he watches an advertisement on TV while signifying that he’s not only half-awake because of insomnia (Gold, 2003), which stores in his mind, also consumerism. He describes himself only as an effective means of holding and arranging things. Narrator says *“I’d like to order the Erika Pekkari dust ruffles.”* (Fincher, 1999) which is costly and he doesn’t need that, for his pleasure he buys the things which he really don’t want. The vague narrator of Fight Club, stumbles in his atrophic, professional job which he doesn’t like and shells in his fashionable, IKEA-furnished apartment even he enters a bathroom with an IKEA furniture magazine. (Palahniuk, 1996, p. 43) He travels all the

time, classification accidents and mortalities as a recall coordinator for a major car company—in a very literal way, Jack’s comfortable lifestyle is made possible by the tragic losses of other. (Bishop, 2006) Fight Club shows us that productivity has its weaknesses, especially in a world where “efficient” means “efficiently consuming to the point where, as Tyler Durden says *“The things you own, end up owning you.”* (Fincher, 1999). Which was a powerful statement but Tyler Durden, he describes how people becoming addiction to the commercial products. It becomes the consumer, consumed. Since the anti-humanity Nietzsche "suggested much earlier" decrease in the human spirit of a society set on materialism, the market, and things pursued, in the words that best epitomize what was being fought by that great philosopher, "What I fight is the economic optimism: as if the increasing expenditure of everybody must necessarily involve the increasing well-being of everybody".-And this to me seems just the opposite total spending by everyone seems to be just a loss: people are tethered down-so one ceases to see for what purpose he has been going through this huge undertaking.” (Heffernan, 2016) . The narrator labels everything as being a *“copy of a copy of a copy.”* (Palahniuk, 1996, p. 31)Infront of a printing machine in film, which tells us, Consumer goods, and consumers, are alike. To really determination the point home the director of Fight Club, David Fincher even achieved to right a Starbucks cup into nearly every shot of the movie, Narrator’s desk, during apartment get fired, during office. Just as the imaginary unit I (root of -1) represents something abstract and intangible in mathematics, Tyler Durden in "Fight Club" symbolizes an alter ego, embodying the darker, chaotic aspects of the narrator's psyche. Both I and Tyler Durden exist beyond the realm of conventional reality, challenging norms and pushing boundaries. Without I, many mathematical theories would be incomplete, just as the narrator's life lacks wholeness without confronting his own inner Tyler. They're both reflections of the unseen forces that influence greater structures and identities. For thinkers Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, this sameness of supplies is the very result of rationalization. "Everything that has the form of a thing," they wrote, "comes from a consistent 'menu' of constructs, all intended to be money-making enough to sell to the greatest number at the least cost like Narrator went to

bathroom with a IKEA catalogue, while creating illusions of pseudo-differences.. (Moreland, 2017) .In few words, if we are not working, then we are purchasing stuff that is manufactured in a mass factory to make us feel glad that we have to go to work again the following day. "I'd flip through catalogues and wonder, what kind of dining set defines me as a person." (Fincher, 1999) We end up having the fat removed from our bodies, a consequence of our indulgent life. *"We were selling rich women their own fat asses back to them"* (01:04:42) (Fincher, 1999) The narrator's way of coping is still just an extension of living as a consumer in a rationalized world. *"I had it all, I had a stereo that was very decent, a wardrobe that was getting very respectable, I was close to being complete..."* (Fincher, 1999)

Philosopher, Adorno made it so extreme that he was saying this sort of mass consumption was almost like fascism. He said the process of rationality, which brings people to numbly throw money at the giant corporations, like Starbucks, is the same mechanism throwing people against ideas about fascism. (Moreland, 2017) Adorno and Durden both, too, accuse commercials of turning people mentally ill, all companies lied to us, you will get beautiful, you will get taller, you will get stronger, meanwhile cigarette companies, you will get lung cancer, Loyalty attracts loyal customers and their loyalty kills those loyal customers. Tyler yells; *"Advertising has these people chasing cars and clothes they don't need"* (ÖRMECİ, 2017)". Just as citizens of a fascist state assemble under a dictatorial, current society has prepared under the dictates of capitalism. People buy things not for their need but for the inner pleasure without their knowledge, trying to impress others but how long will it take for people to realize that constantly wanting more and buying things we don't need is a sign of inner emptiness, manifesting as a need for validation? If you crave something, ask yourself: Why do I want this? Will it truly improve my life or help others? Or is it just my ego speaking? Some good marketing makes the thing we purchase seems different from each other but, in fact, they are pretty much the same-copies of the copies of the copies there are so many examples such as asking a question from people like, drink which in black colour Coke, Pepsi toothpaste means Colgate and Pepsodent, chips mean so many people think about lays and even noodles mean everyone in India thinks about Maggie. And so, everything is

commodified and life becomes really dreary, not to say a little fascist. For Horkheimer and Adorno, and-. Life, for the characters of Fight Club, in a rationalized world can be absolutely demeaning, dehumanizing, turning a whole people into lonely, alienated drones. (Moreland, 2017). Living at the order of consumer capitalism — in short, a life of just doing what others ask: this is the conformity. You should do whatever you want to do yes, 100%. When a person is happy with what they do, that's great. These messages are meant for self-awareness, especially for those who feel inner emptiness. They're happening all the time everywhere in little shots in-between shots you notice and shots you don't and whether they register or not the effect starts to accumulate in your mind all the sudden Fincher's reality is your reality in Fight Club narrator says your voice in mind 2:10:58 "your voice in my head" Tyler replies- "you're a voice in mind!". He travels around the country through flight as a business trip, also he explains how loneliness is the mark of such a 'single-serving' lifestyle (Palahniuk, 1996, p. 31). Everything is minor and throwaway. Even the people he meets. *"The people I meet on each flight -- they're single-serving friends (20:09)* (Fincher, 1999). *Between take-off and landing, we have our time together, and that's all we get."* once Narrator travelling in flight there, he met Tyler Durden for the first time and he is full of information, his Idealizes was impressed by him later Tyler gave his Phone number to him later Narrator's apartment got fired he calls Tyler. After getting in a car accident, the twist styles things start to fall apart, namely in the shot in which Tyler, crash a car with two 'space monkeys' in the back to make the narrator feel more alive. (lucyvhayauthor). He reflects on the soulless nature of his own work and expresses his thoughts, "I'd never had been in a car accident. Apparently, must be how these people feel before my message concentrated them in numbers. The narrative tells us, "It's called transformation. Movies continue. And no one in the audience has any ideas." (Palahniuk, 1996, p. 28)Once again, this shift is linked to the knowledge of cinematic forecast, a flicker of the subconscious where we - the audience - oblivious to the tracks, continue to be immersed in the narrative without realizing it has happened (Elizabeth Kinder, 2014). The narrator's Insomnia is a significant aspect of his character, Insomnia can be caused by various factors for example stress, mental health issues, physical health issues,

usage of substances, here narrator due to his work he has to travels in flight. The irregular sleep schedule made him to sleep somewhere and wakeup somewhere. His doctor advises him to visit a testicular cancer support group to see real pain, and our Narrator blurring the lines between reality and hallucination his Creation of Tyler Durden is manifestation of his mental struggled, representing his desire to break Norms. Narrator goes to social group and cry in between the BOB 'Chest in order to sleep well but only for a while until he meets Marla at social group, which shows the weak masculinity of the narrator.

III. WEAK MASCULINITY

Hugging and Sobbing is very feminine activity but here Narrator did this and he is not that much weak masculinity person whereas to feel pain and to get good sleep, doctor asks him to go to the support group. He was wimpy and would often go to support groups, hug people and cry. The view in Fight Club is that men are losing their masculinity and becoming more like women, showing traits that are considered feminine. They castrate themselves with their work. The Narrator is therefore the epitome of a castrated consumer. Some of them literally get emasculated at the testicular cancer support group. This theme almost literally comes to the movie through the character of Bob-he is the symbolism for weak masculinity in Fight Club. Narrator met him in a testicular support group. Where he shared his sufferings and cried on his shoulder. Bob was a former bodybuilder but lost his testicles to testicular cancer and grew them back due to hormone replacement therapy. After that incident, Bob made Narrator cry and usually attends all of those support groups that made him to sleep well, even he goes to a cancer group where he met Marla singer she was a liar also a fake like Narrator, she enters the group with a cigarette in mouth, after she reaches again Narrator unable to sleep well, Narrator asked Marla to stop coming into the support group but won't she did, they exchanged numbers but he doesn't mention his name on it, there after that apartment of the narrator was burnt.

IV. PROJECT MAYHEM

Project Mayhem is the ultimate example of conformity, The group is supposed to rebel against,

modified it, and sold it to his Project Mayhem feeds. Project mayhem was made by Tyler and for him it is going to save the world like a cultural ice age. The followers of fight club only become imitations of imitations of themselves. They shave their heads, wears black dress and more importantly they do not talk about it blindly they have to follow the ideology of Tyler Durden which tells as the people becoming conformist. Tyler's kiss formalizes this process, marking the scar badges of Mayhem project's adherents equally so that all of them are able to prove their devotion to him. (Brock, Cliffsnotes, 2022). They call each other "maggots," they even lose their names. *"In project mayhem we have no names."* And they have to obey the rules of Project Mayhem made by Tyler *"No questions, No questions. No excuses and no lies."* (Palahniuk, 1996, p. 125) the people who are in the project mayhem must shave their head and wear same black dress equally and forgot their name and called as "Space Monkeys". Tyler says *"The first soap was made from hero's ashes, like the first monkey got into space"* (Fincher, 1999). Even the narrator went to social group by hiding his identity and gives a fake name. Fight Club's most loyal followers are subjected to intense intimidation to become part of the subversive plan. Associate followers must stand outside the Paper Street mansion without food or shelter for three days, while being subjective to verbal and physical abuse. Only accepting these things only they can be a member of Fight Club. (Moreland, 2017) Tyler orders Project Mayhem to detonate several buildings - all of which are owned by major credit card companies (Aleisha Brown Published, 2023). Tough it out, and they let you in the house. Now they are part of a well-oiled machine that does whatever it wants Members of Project Mayhem destroy computer stores, target politicians, and force corporate leaders into coffee shops. As Tyler's movement grows, it changes from a small group activity into a dangerous cult, which isn't much better than the capitalism they oppose. Tyler degrades them by scolding also telling them by your not great, you are weak, Tyler uses to control them by his words also he made them to make Tyler's kiss on their hands as sign or symbolism of the Fight Club. Project Mayhem is very systematic and has strict rules. They cannot discuss the efficiency of the project or system or even use the assets to function smoothly. They raise money by making and selling soap taken from liposuction. The variance is that

instead of reporting to corporate leaders, members now report to patriarchal authoritarian influential. (Moreland, 2017): Narrator - *"Sooner or later we all became what Tyler wanted us to be."* Narrator telling as we becoming conformist. *"Like a monkey ready to be shot into space ready to sacrifices himself for the greater good."* (Fincher, 1999) It is like, rejecting one set of social rules and started following another set of rules thinking that we are non- conformist but following another set of rules become a conformist.

V. NON-CONFORMIST

A non-conformist is someone who does not follow established customs, rules, or norms. They often challenge traditional ideas and prefer to think and act independently. Tyler Durden is a non-conformist; he doesn't care about society and is free from social norms. At the beginning of the movie, he wears a red jacket which symbolizes danger, and dominance, he is different from others that's why narrator admires him. He rejects consumerism and materialism, believing that true freedom comes from breaking away from societal expectations. One of the best marketing strategies is through celebrities, like Disha Patani, who become role models and trendsetters. If any celebrity wears this lingerie, then all the followers would. Marketers take full advantage of this social influence by printing out their brand name like Calvin Klein on this innerwear that celebrities use for photoshoots. They know exactly how to attract people by putting up photoshoots with celebrities. But even true art gets less likes than a girl's bikini photo shoot. People might think they should imitate celebrities and the celebrities' decisions, so people are likely to buy something that they associate a celebrity of their choice. It may be because they wish to be affiliated with their heroes, or just to be in fashion or become trendy. In a nutshell, it is using the desire of mankind to be part of societal expectations to raise brand and product awareness. One would probably see this as the kind of social engineering on the individual or group that acts in a certain way. Tyler's actions and philosophy inspire others to question their own lives and the world around them. Diogenes of Sinope lives a very poor life, he loves freedom and he says, people are away from nature, and he is not following the rules in the society he chooses to live like that, To Diogenes, human beings lead an artificial and hypocritical life, and

should learn to be freer and more themselves. This thinker believed that human beings must not be slaves to society, and in this, they will find happiness and wisdom. He practiced what he preached by living a very simple life, even he thinks that wearing clothes is also slavery, so he doesn't wear clothes. His famous quotes "All slaves if you want a leader buy me" (Lewis., 2023). We dedicate ourselves to live in the society, according to the rules and laws of the society, so without caring others, not obeying the rules and laws and follows our own rules or choosing a right person as a leader or choosing a right goals, Tyler says; *"I am smart, capable and most importantly, I'm free in all the ways that you are not"* (Fincher, 1999) After meeting Tyler, narrator conveys the things that he lost in the fire accident (furniture wardroom) Tyler replies in sarcastic "we are byproducts of lifestyle obsession. Murder, crime poverty. These are not of our interest. What bothers me are celebrity magazines, television with 500 channels. Some guy's name on my underwear. Rogaine, Viagra, olestra". Consumer goods like TV, Dress, Cosmetics, weight loss tablets. These are the major affairs in the new society. Tyler hate Artificial things he thought these things spoils the human nature these thoughts were slightly same with the Sinope philosopher Diogenes of Sinope "Modern civilized life destroys human nature" Diogenes "often thundered that the gods had provided for men to live, but this people had lost sight of it, inasmuch as we demand honey cakes, perfumes, and the like." (G. M. Trujillo, 2018) . Narrator after turned Tyler he fired his own apartment that makes him detached from the modern civilization Tyler rejects civilization especially material possessions. It isn't until his flat strangely blows up that the narrator finds a new way to fight rationalization. (Moreland, 2017)After losing all of his costly things which in his apartment, he only has two choices one is Marla another one is Tyler he chooses Tyler. He trades in isolating capitalism for a place in Tyler Durden's decaying mansion on Paper Street.

VI. PAPER STREET

Paper streets are roads or streets that appear on maps but do not actually exist. Through the use of titles, the film reinforces the idea that the house on Paper Street doesn't actually exist, it's just a physical representation of the narrator's thoughts. (Symbol Identification:

Fight Club) It is the complete opposite of his former apartment. Paper Street is too big, chaotic and dirty and a perfect place for dealing drugs. There is no proper electricity, even there is no neighbours. If the apartment of Tyler makes any sense, then Paper Street cannot. There, in his new home, he found like-minded people who fought against consumer culture. Tyler Durden is the delightful and charming leader of Fight Club, a club that unites against oppressive consumerism and provides the narrator with an outlet and a means to reclaim his identity. But what does get rid of the rationalization have to do with punching someone in the face? Taylor's level of resistance runs much deeper than most attacks on capitalism. He portrays consumerism as an attack on masculinity. (Moreland, 2017)

VII. TOXIC MASCULINITY

Throughout the film, we see Tyler's disregard for anything he feels is occupying too much of his headspace, He made Narrator to quit his job, burn his apartment. Tyler recruits more members to grow his cult but always makes the Narrator responsible for training them. Tyler manipulates the situation, making it seem fun and exciting. He is a terrifying and iconic villain because what he offers is attractive and not totally wrong. However, as we look deeper, we see the high costs of his desires. Additionally, Tyler's personality and influential nature make it easy for people to follow him, even when his actions lead to chaos and destruction. That his brand of faith is entirely in line with what he rallied us against an entity who manipulated lonely people into feeling like they belong all so they could further their own wants. When Tyler Durden and The Narrator talk about imaginary celebrity fights, they want to organize, they mention Abraham Lincoln, which seems like a good match, and Gandhi, which seems unfair because he was against violence. They also include some other random names. (Peeke, 2020). Even though Tyler Durden is a fictional image of who the Narrator wished he were, he created Tyler for him to alter his life; to be everything he wanted that he thought masculinity was. The Narrator was able to rectify this by slipping back into himself. He's overly fond of Marla but rejected her for the simple reason that Tyler told him she was no good and that he didn't want another woman in his life. This is a perfect example of how toxic masculinity can damage

relationships and help no one, not even the victim. (Lewis, 2023). The Narrator mentions that sometimes Tyler spoke on his behalf. After their first fight, the Narrator went to the hospital and explained this to us in the film. Tyler even starts an organization of terrorism (the space monkeys), "Project Mayhem" from "Fight Club". Therefore, it introduces the concept that toxic masculinity is dangerous and harmful. Project Mayhem, from Fight Club. So, it brings into the concept that toxic masculinity is dangerous and harms not only those around it, but itself also. Tyler says; "why? I don't know why. I don't know – never been in a fight. You? " Narrator replies "No, but that-that's a good thing". Tyler said "No it is not". How much do you know about yourself if you have never been in a fight? (Fincher, 1999) Toxic masculinity is a social script that tells men and boys that the right way to be a man is physical abuse, emotional inadequacy, sexual aggression, and more. The film's depiction of postwar masculinity returns again and again to the idea of "violent reproduction" that Richard Slotkin places at the centre of American culture. (Clark, 2001).

VIII. PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Fight Club isn't about winning or losing Fights, Fight Club isn't about words Fighting and getting the pain is a role play of fight club Tyler says; "*I want you to hit me as hard as you can*" (Palahniuk, 1996, p. 52).

The reason for asking the narrator (Steven N. Gold, 2004), "*no. but that's a good thing you can't know yourself if you haven't I don't wanna die without any scars*" (Palahniuk, 1996, p. 52) . After fighting each other both of them feels good and planned to do this every day narrator says; we should do this again sometime. They fought in parking area, that makes others to involuntary to do participate in fight that made into fight club by voluntary accepting some pain, scars and bruises are the visible signs of the secret second-lives of the fight club members it makes ourself strong in our worst period of our life (Brock, Fight Club Symbols, 2022). It's also to be a reason for participating in fight club, like narrator said, "*After fighting, everything else in life got the volume turned down*" (39:13), fight club is like a metaphor, choosing our pain and accepting it, physical fight with violence aggression it mixed up with ourself in classic generation.

IX. CONCLUSION

Fight Club presents a complex exploration of conformity and rebellion, highlighting the challenges of navigating a rationalized, consumer-driven society. The Narrator's transformation from a conformist to a radical participant in Tyler Durden's movement underscores the difficulties of escaping societal norms and the paradoxes inherent in rebellion. Through its portrayal of consumerism, and toxic masculinity, the film invites viewers to reflect on the nature of identity, freedom, and the consequences of rejecting one form of conformity only to embrace another.

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