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Masculine Mayhem

Exploring The Formation of Abnormal Masculinities and The Reproduction of Violence In Chuck Palahniuk's Fight Club

Dissertation submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of *Master* in literature.

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Declaration of originality

The undersigned hereby confirms that this submission is the outcome of my independent original work. All of the sources from which the ideas and extracts that were obtained have been properly acknowledged. The project is free from any plagiarism, and has not been submitted elsewhere for publication.

Signed 20/06/2021

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Henry', written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dedication

- The researcher wishes to express his gratitude to all the special people who helped and assisted for the success of this project:
- My beautiful parents that gave me the necessary tools, values and knowledge that made the man I am today.
- My lovely siblings Raïda and Bouchra who always made me smile through tough times with their high vibrations, motivating energy and love.
- To all my wonderful friends and colleagues;Ishac, ikram , Ali, Mohamed and
- Thank you all for the support throughout the process. I will always appreciate all you have done for me.

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- Special thanks go to the members of this committee for their unfailing help and dedication to this project.

Abstract

The primary goal of this study is to examine and evaluate how Chuck Palahniuk depicts an aberrant masculine crisis in his bestselling novel *Fight Club*, as well as how his portrayal of masculinity frequently entails the deconstruction of such terms. This work highlights how Palahniuk deals with various aspects of masculinity in cultural context, particularly the dichotomous relationship between masculinity/gender and violence. Throughout this study, we will be discussing the overlapping features of masculine identity that affect its construction, including Materiality, homosocial enactment, and fatherhood. To support this study we will be drawing on the theorization and studies from several sources including sociologist and Masculinity theorists such as Michael Kauffman, Michel Kimmel, and R.W Connell. The analysis of the novel will focus on the main characters; depicting their actions towards achieving both physical and mental enlightenment.

Keywords: Gender, Fight club, Masculine crisis, Masculinity, Violence.

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1. Introduction

“A harmless man is not a good man. A good man is a very dangerous man who has that under voluntary control” Jordan Peterson.

As a male being, living in the 21st century modern society one has many liberties. The liberty to attain a desirable life by having a secure job and making income, liberty of communicating and expressing oneself and the liberty to help mold the society we live in .

Nevertheless, when these liberties are violated by other individuals, the system, or the other sex we stand up for ourselves, by protesting or choosing violence to reclaim things that are perceived to be lost.

Gender and violence research is potentially one of the most divisive subjects in academic research. The issue that undoubtedly will be posted within these two inflammatory subjects is whether it is genetically determined, whatever it may be. There seems to be some social angst around ideas that challenge whether such characteristics are genetically defined and thus we will not be able to do anything about it.

Despite that gender theory and violence is a correlated subject that is inherently difficult to tackle, authors like Chuck Palahniuk decided to walk straight into the minefield and step on as many mines as he could through his debut novel *Fight Club*.

One of the purposes of my thesis is to pinpoint the link between masculinity crisis and the practice of violence, examining the fictional protagonist's [transgressive] behavior towards society in the postmodern transgressive fiction *Fight Club*.

This thesis consists of three chapters; first chapter is the theoretical literature, other related findings, and studies. The majority of the theoretical literature focuses on gender theory, Masculinity in particular, and violence research, discussing [hegemonic

Masculinity], identity crisis,[homosociality], and the emerging gender ideologies and their relation to violence use.

The last section of the theoretical literature focuses on defining discourse analysis critical discourse analysis and language gender theories. The second chapter of this thesis focuses on contextualizing the novel by introducing Chuck Palahniuk's authorship, books, and reception. We will also discuss the scholarly polarized critic that has arisen around his work despite of it being tightly limited. The final subchapter of this section will introduce the genre of transgressive fiction and explain in-depth how Palahniuk used narrative style and literary devices to express his thoughts and ideas in *Fight Club*. In the third and final chapter of my thesis, we detailed the theoretical literature to analyze the selected novel.

Research question

1. What is Palahniuk's intent behind taking the presented masculinities to the extreme?
2. How does Chuck Palahniuk present transgression and male violence in the novel?
3. Does Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* critic or celebrate the extreme violence of men?

The aim of this research:

1. To discuss and evaluate our current understanding of the concept of Masculinity and its categories (hegemonic and non-hegemonic) and to show the destructive nature of naturalizing some of these concepts.
2. To expose the manifestation of violence and transgression in the novel, to break with gendered stereotypes related to Masculinity and the male body.
3. To pinpoint the link between masculinity crisis and the practice of violence.

Hypotheses

1. The abnormal masculinities represented in Fight club (hegemonic and non-hegemonic) are taken to the extreme with the intention, as I discuss to break with their traditionalism and find new ways of a gendered identity.
2. Palahniuk introduces generational violence in the novel as a means to help these masculinities to reclaim their power; through destruction and taking other innovative options.
3. The narrator's lost of his masculine identity and general confusion resulted in a resurgence of classical masculine ideals, embodied by his split personality is not the solution to this modern "Male crisis",

Chapter One

Theoretical Background: “Masculine Crisis”

1.1. Introduction

This part of my dissertation is concerned with the theoretical literature, other related findings, and studies. The majority of the theoretical literature focuses on gender theory, Masculinity in particular, and violence research, discussing [hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity], identity crisis, homosociality, and the emerging gender ideologies and their relation to violence use. The last part of this chapter is devoted to the methodology, mainly the approach and sources that we used to analyze our corpus i.e. ‘‘Fight Club’’

1.2. Gender and Masculinity Studies

When searching for the meaning of Gender in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English the following explanation is presented: "the fact of being male or female, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences, not differences in biology issues of class, race, and gender traditional concepts of gender differences/relations/roles compare sex." (Oxford English dictionary), however the western cultural view on gender actively strives to differentiate between internally inconsistent gender groups and in turn make these groups universal, which uses political and legal means to eliminate this differentiation through the identification of social constructions.

These constructions are investigated through gender studies that examine the fundamental category of an individual's identity as well as a method of categorizing human beings that determines basic structures in community. Gender is both a determinant in how an individual develops his or her identity and a social stratification principle. People of various genders have varying levels of access to resources and are seen to have varying roles and obligations. Gender research also entails investigating how and why the world

around us is gendered: how and why specific aspects of the environment are connected with masculinity and femininity.

Gender studies are an interdisciplinary area that draws on the theories and methodologies of other disciplines. It does not only examine the underlying physical and biological differences between men and women but also considers how these differences play out in a socio-cultural framework. Gender studies vary in diversity and components as the sociocultural context changes throughout time and across borders. Gender studies have recently emerged as a vital discipline that cuts across cultures and nation. Gender has become a complex issue in the 21st century, challenged by the feminist movement in 1960s, and the subsequent liberation movement of gays and lesbians since it is no longer black and white, these movements complicate the problem, as the separate gender spheres in society are gradually erased, and appear outside these limited definitions.

A deviation from the norm in these binary categories of gender and gender preferences has emerged, such as bisexuals and trans-genders that contend the previous sex binary to be limited. To be precise, it is difficult to scientifically determine or prove which characteristics are male characteristics, mainly because it is still uncertain to what extent male and female characteristics are subject to social constraints and in what manner. The extent is established as physical form (gender and biological sex). Therefore, you can even ask a question whether there is masculinity in the western world.

Masculinity refers to the set of social practices and cultural representations associated with maleness. The plural masculinities are also used in recognition of the fact that the ways of man and culture vary between societies and different groupings of people within one society, historically and culturally.

From the 1980s forward, writing on masculinities exploded even if masculinity's feminist critique has a long history. According to theoretical perspective, evaluations of

masculinity and explanations of the links between masculinity/ masculinities and those people defined as 'men' vary in the masculinities literature. For example, in natural science accounts masculinity/ masculinities are the result of physiological factors such as hormones or chromosomes.

For instance, Goldberg identifies the neuro-endocrine system as the biological basis of the masculinity. Others have questioned the significance of masculinity as a concept particularly writers like Connell theorizing numerous masculinities. For Example, in masculinities' literature, MacInnes highlighted the vague confused and contradictory definition of the concept if the men are so diverse and fluid, then what makes them recognizably men.

According to MacInnes, masculinity does not exist as a property, character trait, or aspect of individuals, but rather as an ideology about what men should be like, which is developed by men and women in order to make sense of their lives (2). Indeed, in the course of gender studies discursive approaches to men, influenced by postmodernist/post-structural perspectives, have gained prominence.

R.W. Connell's masculinity scholar ideas on masculinity are that perceptions of gender are dependent on the cultural, social, and historical context. In different societies, at various points in time, diverse notions of what normal masculinity is come into being. Connell is careful to underline the relational character of masculinity. It is important here to differentiate and clarify the operating definition for masculine identity construction for the purpose of this essay. To do that properly it is necessary to relate to the definitions of masculinity in the studies of the scholar R.W Conell in which he states; "Essentialist definitions usually pick a feature that defines the core of the masculine, and hang an account of men's lives on that."(68) While "positivist social science base their ethos in

defining masculinity on facts or simply "what men actually are" (69) while the "the semiotics defines it through the symbolic difference theory as non –femininity (70).

Connell claims where multiple types of masculinities exist some masculinities will be marginalized within the hierarchy. They exist in a more desirable form to attain than others such as the "disempowered ethnic minorities" (17), an example of the more valued type of Masculinity would be the way celebrity athletes are Idolized.

These male athletes are built on the ability to adapt to ideal masculinity and embody masculinity characteristics that can attract the mass market and sign sponsorship agreements that market ordinary people. Therefore, celebrity athletes reflect an identity that others desire to become in belittling some people while venerating others, the masculinity hierarchy enhances patriarchal norms, such as oppressing minorities, women, and the ones who do not fit within the gender binary.

1.3. Crisis of Masculinity

In the late 19th century, the expansion of the West, the obvious fate, the market revolutions, the emphasis on "hard life" all indicated the possibility of security. The root of indisputable masculinity lies in market capitalism and the ideals of activity and practicality. However, by the end of this century, social and economic changes, including urbanization, the transition from entrepreneurship to corporate capitalism, the rise of bureaucratic structures, women entering the workplace, and changes in the career paths of middle-class men have all challenged this sense of security that reduces the financial independence and sense of accomplishment of many men. .

In his book "theorizing masculinities" Kaufman has stated that "the way we have set up that world of power causes immense pain, isolation, and alienation"(142) thus feeling threatened by losing notions of the traditional masculinity generating a new articulation of

masculinity that is based on adopting the ethics of power and physical strength assuming; it would counterbalance any anticipated emasculation and reclaim a secure absolute form of masculinity. According to Kaufman The acquisition of this type of masculinity is a process of suppressing emotions and need such as empathy and compassion which do not match the "power of manhood" and simply because they're "associated with femininity" rejected as a part of " the quest of masculinity"(148) to "experience a momentary sense of power and control" (150).

Kaufman concludes in "The construction of masculinity and the triad of men's violence" (1992) essays that the articulation of such power in a hegemonic competitive social milieu results in homophobic traits for men, just as Thomas Byers suggests that "anti-feminism and homophobia are reactions against progressive attempts to destabilize patriarchal heterosexual hegemony." (46).

The term "hegemonic masculinity" was coined by the major masculinity studies scholar R.W Connell which refers to a social model in which the masculine traits of the stereotype are idealized as the cultural ideals of men and the subordinate social position of women, and it is regarded as the norm at present and place.

This claim asserts contemporary concerns of the patriarchal class with the so-called "deviants" who are perceived as a threat once again by the masculine stereotype and heterosexual normalcy.

The evidence of masculine crisis is significant to the contemporary data and research suggest that Violence is very much part of the intrinsic behavior of the modern male, due to the unbalanced perception of the male idea that perhaps fosters that violent behavior.

This drastic behavior can only be the result of the male "surplus repression of sexual and emotional desires" and since masculinity involves the construction of surplus

aggressiveness" it is inevitably prone to the phenomenon of "surplus repression" (Kaufman28).

Kaufman refers to masculinity as "one half of the narrow, surplus repressive shape of the adult human psyche. He has stated that one way to combat the suspicion that Sprung from the fragile gender of masculinity is actually "violence." that is sought to be the case of fight club, the underground male institution that bond through controlled physical violence as a result of their "surplus repression".

Theorist Michael Kimmel, takes Kaufman's ideas even further by believing that homophobia is not so much the fear of homosexuals as the origin of the word seems to point out. However, it is explained as the fear of being perceived as gay," a feeling that drive men to overstate all the traditional codes of masculinity (from physical violence to emotional containment) for fear of being perceived as "soft" men, "sissies," or "faggots": "[m]asculinity has become a relentless test by which we prove to other men, to women, and ultimately to ourselves, that we have successfully mastered the part" (Kimmel 41).

Masculinity is largely the product of the homosocial enactment, of socialization between males .i.e., masculinity is socially and culturally constructed, researchers of masculinity have tried to analyze the various social processes, by which this evolution is achieved, as well as the fallacies and practices that construct it. They have identified how, exclusively male spaces like brotherhoods, sports teams, and gentlemen's clubs, male-to-male relationships scaffold masculine identity by encouraging certain behaviors and attitudes and excluding others.

Apart from gender relation to manhood, the second aspect of the male crisis that seems to affect the masculine persona is the father figure absence. Eduardo Mendieta writes:

There was a time when being a man meant having learned how to be a man from fathers, or uncles, or grandfathers, who all had their own war stories to tell. Being a

man meant going through certain rites of passage that were overseen and officiated by other men. But that time was long along. How do men become men in a culture that only projects violent male role models or commercialized and glossy versions of males?(Mendieta396).

It was the post-war ideology of failed parenting marked with the absence of fathers that pushed women and children into a dyadic relationship which is not very nurturing for the boy's [heterosexuality]. According to Freud, male children gain independence from their mothers and begin entering the outside world through the father Figure. , the father is the first to assess his son's masculine psyche, without which the boy would not be able to evolve appropriately as a man.

In fight club, chuck Palahniuk ought to pinpoint the origins of his character's masculine crisis to the father figure absence depicted as a “the generation of men raised by women” that suffered from non-existent fathers; the only institution from which men can gain their sense of masculinity.

1.4.Violence

The emergence of male violent expressions myths seems to have promoted a generation that is indoctrinated with the belief that violence is an inherent side of male behavior. The absorption of such ideas may also make them applicable to other aspects of society.

People may ask if violence is inherent in itself, is it possible that violence is an essential part of psychological regression? Therefore, men see violence as part of the past, present, and future. According to Pierre Bourdieu one of Europe's most prominent sociologists, violence is a form of social game in which violence plays a significant role. In other words, (traditional/dominant) masculinity is a socially constructed phenomenon founded on multiple bases, the most prevalent of which are physical force, violence, and

violent behavior. According to the French sociologist, Violence is one of the various masculine games of rivalry; that men learn to play as part of their socialization process. The French sociologist explains how these games help to maintain masculine hegemony in his book *masculine dominance* 2002 “(...) manliness must be validated by other men, in its reality as actual or potential violence, and certified by recognition of membership of the group real men” (Bourdieu52).

Jackson Katz, a former American football player who now works as an anti-violence activist and educator, appears to hold the same views as Bourdieu.

The Macho Paradox is one of his most well-known books. Why do some men harm women, and what can all men do to help? He claims that abuse is a core feature of conventional masculinity and in so-called "Men's rights" in the “Male’s culture “that furthers the ideological premise, disguised as common sense, that men have always been aggressive and brutal and their dominance over women is biologically based.

A large number of researchers have examined contemporary masculinity through the lens of violence, which designates the importance of violence and interaction in our assessment of hegemonic masculinity. The current hegemonic masculinity in the western world glorifies violence and aggressive behavior, as evidenced by the way the media has expressed it through their movies, video games, and violent sports. It is based on this understanding that anti-violence activists and people who work with young male identities must adapt to their work, especially when it comes to education and media promotion programs. Male violence is a pressing problem facing the world, and as young males willing to be the leaders and shapers of society in the coming years, University students are a particularly relevant case study they should seek when searching for knowledge of masculinity and finding solutions for the violent male behavior.

1.5. Masculinity in Narratives

alongside with Kimmel and Kaufman ideas that allow accounting for its narrative function—adjusting the scope of male-to-male relationships by asserting fraternal feelings of virile fellowship while condemning homoerotic feelings, particularly in historical contexts which saw the rise of discourses about the so-called "crisis of masculinity.

Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), and Mailer's *An American Dream* (1965) are popular examples of narratives that introduce protagonists who struggle with such crisis (from excessive maternal attachment, prostitution, or wife-killing) and expressing homophobic behavior. As the protagonist of *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), Jake Barnes who, like many of Hemingway's characters, lives in a world of "men without women" to refer to the title of one of the writer's collections of short stories, can only admit his incapability to manifest heroic masculinity—"it is awfully easy to be hard-boiled about everything in the daytime, but at night it is another thing" (Hemingway, 42)—by simultaneously declaring a homophobic vision of the world: "Somehow they [gay men] always made me angry. I know they are supposed to be amusing, and you should be tolerant, but I wanted to swing on one, anyone, anything to shatter that superior, simpering composure" (28).

In this perspective, literature (and fiction in particular) was considered as a determining site of production and reproduction of Masculinity. As it takes its rise in parallel with the emergence of the nation and American man, the novel in particular became the privileged vehicle of representations and fictions founders of masculinity. The American novel produces and reproduces real cultural scripts of male identity and presents the masculine performances that propagate in society and culture. It is therefore a determining site if we want to understand how certain male identities have been shaped, reinforced, or

marginalized since the birth of the Republic of the United States of America in the late 18th century. From then on, certain Romanesque genres and certain novelists were naturally the objects of all the critical attention. The hero of noir novels (hard-boiled fiction), the hero of science fiction novels, and transgressive fiction have been the subject of numerous historical analyses and psychoanalytic that mix literary objects and cinematographical objects without always adapting their analytical tools. Postcolonial literary studies have also adopted the prism of masculinity to update the issues generated from adventure novels.

When studying the portrayal of masculinity and its relation to violence, in postmodern literature, I found that there is a clear gap between the analyses and arguments of many critics; that much of the literary scholarship and discussions on masculinity arises from feminist theorists, to explain the so-called "masculine crisis". Despite the fact of using the feminist theory to analyze Masculinity and its hegemony serve an excellent purpose, however, it seems to me that discussing masculinities primarily in accordance to women is little conflicting. How about the fictional narratives that do not concern women or a feminist in any prominent way? And what can be grasped on Masculinity from fictional portrayals of men "remaining together". In my research, I intend to fill these literary scholarship gaps concerning men in relation to their social masculine environment.

Therefore I have chosen one contemporary fictional novel from the 1990s to be my case study in a way that excludes women from the discussion -a research rarely done in scholarship.

My thesis seeks to narrow down these gaps in terms of examining contemporary masculine crises and their mythic aftermath (generational violence), in this fictional novel in a way that permits us to center men amongst men relationships.

1.6. Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a research technique that examines written or spoken language in relation to its social context. It seeks to comprehend how language is used in everyday situations.

Language analysis 'beyond the sentence' is another term for discourse analysis. This is in contrast to the types of analysis more common in modern linguistics, which is primarily concerned with the study of grammar. That studies the smaller bits of language. Such as phonetics, phonology, morphology and semantics. Discourse analysts study larger chunks of language as they flow together. Some discourse analysts look at the greater discourse context to see how it influences the sentence's meaning.

1.6.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is a qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting, and explaining how discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities. CDA is based on the idea that the way we use language is deliberate, whether conscious or unconscious discursive choices are made. CDA employs a variety of approaches and methods, which are dependent on the research goals and theoretical perspectives. This methodological guide introduces a generic CDA analytic framework and shows how to use it to conduct a systematic literature review of CDA research in education. The CDA conducts research on a variety of topics.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a burgeoning multidisciplinary research movement that encompasses a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to language studies. Each has its own set of goals. Despite this variability, CDA academics generally regard language as a type of social practice, and they are interested in methodically analyzing hidden power dynamics and ideologies in discourse.

They are also interested in the social and material implications of discourse. Sharing Foucault's dialectical view of discourse, CDA researchers consider discourse to be socially molded as well as socially constitutive. They keep a clear drive to actively interfere in, or confront, the power relations or social problems they're looking at. Critical discourse analysts, like the FDA, frequently encourage researchers to actively interact with their own interests and positionality throughout the study process, as well as exercise self-critical reflexivity.

1.7. language And Gender Theories

In the 1960s and 1970s there was an advent in research on the relationship between language and gender due to the rise of the feminist movements that were convinced language was one of the tools of males' supremacy over women. This latter reflected the patriarchal established system, this emergence marked with three books; *Language and Women's Place* (Lakoff, 1975), *Male/Female Language* (Key, 1975), and *Difference and Dominance* (Thorne & Henley, 1975).

Studies in the domain of gender theories often make use of three paradigms -of dominance, difference, and that of deficit. The first is attributed to Dale Spender (1980), Pamela Fishman (1980), Don Zimmerman and Candace West (1975), the second is associated with Deborah Tannen (1984) while the third to Robin Lakoff(1975).

1.7.1 Deficit Theory

The deficit Approach originated from Robin Lakoff (1975) describes male language as stronger, more prestigious, and more desirable. She claims that women are conditioned into acting like ladies" (in language usage and in other aspects) and that keeps them in a subordinate position in terms of the other because behaving like ladies neglect to have a

powerful status in our culture. This approach sees women as unfortunate as language users, with their language conflicting from an implicit male norm...

The overall concept that emerges from Lakoff's research explained that men's speech is generally superior to women's and reflects their sense of personal and social superiority.

Lakoff describes the way women's speech style contains characteristics in a way that women sound excessively polite, "uncertain" and "trivial" (Lakoff in Mohd 124). These features include using "so" as an intensifier, rising intonation, tag questions, and hedges.

1.7.2 Difference Theory

As the title indicates, the difference theory is the idea that men and women do express thoughts differently.

Deborah Tannen a big advocate of this theory claims in her book; *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* that parents socialize differently with their girls and boys where they tend to communicate with words about feelings to girls and use more verbs to boys, that's when the difference in language acquisition and interpretation between girls and boys starts to develop. She concludes that Males and females grow up in indifferent sub-cultures and different institutions and therefore interpret and use language differently. In Her book, *You Just Don't Understand*, she claims that there are six series of differences between the ways males and females use language:

- **Status vs. Support:** Tanen claims that men use conversations to strive, while for women it's a means of support and confirmation.

- **Independence vs. Intimacy** Men is often concerned with status whilst women to think in terms of intimacy and closeness.

- **Information vs. feelings**

Men's interests were historically and culturally seen as more evident than those of women, but today this situation may be reversed so that sharing of emotions is seen as more valuable than the giving of information and brevity of speech

- Orders vs. proposals

It is believed that Men use a direct imperative when suggesting things, whereas women often suggest that people do things in indirect ways -, "why don't we?" or "wouldn't it be great, if we...?"

- Conflict vs. compromise

This situation can be observed in work situations where a management decision seems unattractive -men will often resist it vocally, while women may appear to accede, but complain subsequently. This is a broad generalization -and for every one of Deborah Tannen's oppositions, we will know of men and women who are exceptions to the norm.

Advice vs. Understanding

Men seek to solve problems while women seek comfort and sympathy.

1.7.3. Dominance Theory

This theory suggests that in the daily men-women interaction, man is more likely to interrupt more than women due to the subordinate position of women in society .this theory has been criticized by Talbot(1998) as “manifestations of a patriarchal social order” He added that this theory can be viewed along with the difference theory both of them, provided an early model for the analysis of language and gender in the social sciences.

1.8.Methodology

The short novel traces many themes, including for example; Fascism, masculinity, edipal complex, mental disorders, feminist theory, homosexuality and Marxism. Each of these

themes can be highlighted depending on what aspect of the story the reader decides to focus on, and that is also what makes "Fight Club" so complex and difficult to analyze. I think, however, that the story itself in his heart is a subject of a desperate man's struggle to find his sense of manhood in a world that emasculated him. The purpose of this essay is to try to record how the unnamed character, who on the surface seems to have a traditional normal life, finds himself in such a dysfunctional and violent environment. Why is he using violence, and what does that tell us about him? By referring to one theoretical method, we will trace back the journey of the protagonists to self-realization and analyze the dysfunctional life to which it leads. More specifically, the article attempts to understand why the protagonist uses violence as a means to recover his masculinity; the discussion will be placed in the context of masculinity and male's violence.

The so-called protagonist of Fight Club undergoes a shift in consciousness which manifests in his own personal behaviors; from a state of emasculation to misguided masculinity by displaying dominance and violence. In order to better understand the violent choices made by the characters, and their drastic means of expression, I will be examining the novel through the sociological approach of gender studies which is the objective of this study.

To support the analyses I will be drawing on the theorization and studies from several sources including sociologist and Masculinity theorists such as Michael Kaufman's "The construction of masculinity and the triad of men's violence", Michael Kimmel essays on masculinity and Robert Connell to analyze the complexities of negotiating the masculine identity of this novel's characters.

Their work is an acknowledgement of reinforcing notions of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity through certain actions whilst others may rebel against it, which will work as scaffolding for this study. However, it is important to mention that the analyses in this research discuss the novel that has been adapted into a movie which holds

the same name. Since I believe that all the views and analyses presented in this article are applicable to novels, this study will not specify whether the source of the information refers to the film or the novel. If the source of the information involves novels or movies, readers should always investigate through the “cited works”.

1.9. Conclusion

In the theoretical background section I tried identify multiple fundamental theories that justify the causes for the so called masculine crisis and the gender distortions depicted by the characters of the novel. My theories stretches beyond this point, proving trough the effeminate, the distortions in overly masculine man validate the existence of crisis of masculinity .As kimmel states that root cause of this crisis is the loss of the self made man, father figures and the result of the feminist movement that blurred lines between genders.

CHAPTER TWO

Contextualizing the Novel

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will begin with a quick overview of Chuck Palahniuk's biography, followed by a discussion of his writing, book publishing, and reception.

This chapter will talk about his writing style and some of the major issues he covers in his books, as well as the scholarly interest in his work.

There has been little scholarly study done on Palahniuk's work, yet it is a burgeoning field. In addition to that, this part will discuss the scholarly attention Palahniuk's works have gotten, as well as remark on the criticism he has received. In the last part of this chapter we will expose the narrative style and the literary devices that Palahniuk's used in the novel

2.2. Introducing Chuck Palahniuk

Introducing Chuck Palahniuk's works and his debut work *Fight Club*, has proven to be a daunting task for several reasons: Palahniuk's short career has led to a lack of meaningful critical wealth for Palahniukean literature; the mixed nature of his work (And enthusiastic) reactions can be divided into two categories: fans have given the man and his work a "cult" status in a short period time and critics who have focused on his taste for Gore and violence and considering it as "bad literature".

Fight Club was Chuck Palahniuk's debut novel published in 1996 and was later adapted into a major motion picture by David Fincher in 1999 starring Brad Pitt. The book was only became known to the audience due to the movie despite being a remarkable piece of writing with an interesting plot, a dazzling end, and strong characters. In his work *Stranger Than Fiction: True Stories* (2004), Chuck let his audience know that he owes a lot to *Fight Club*. In one of the stories he tells about his first visit to Hollywood due to the film shooting (*Almost California*), the first time he met Brad Pitt and the feedback he received from a reader who had been able to relate to some of the characters.

Fight club has interestingly influenced chuck Palahniuk literary performance in his later works, he was able to maintain many of the characteristics that attracted early readers throughout his writings. i.e, extremely dysfunctional characters, some extremely violent scenes, extreme criticism, and his ability to deliver social criticisms in extremely harsh ways, which means that most of the criticisms of Fight Club in the late 1990s and early 2000s also apply to later works.

This means that most of the criticisms of fight club in the late 1990s and early 2000s also apply to his later works. Only 3 years after the release of Fight Club Palahniuk published two books – Survivor and Invisible Monsters – which were quickly followed by Choke (2001), Lullaby (2002), Diary (2003), Haunted (2005), Rant (2007), Snuff (2008), Pygmy (2009), Tell-All (2010), Damned (2011) and Invisible Monsters. Since this is Palahniuk's first published book, and because of the tension it creates between the scholars and his readers, it is particularly worth analyzing. Although Palahniuk never intended to base his book on gender, scholars and critics tend to focus on it particularly, especially in fight club.

This is related to the background of the novel. With his work being so contemporary, the criticism of Palahniuk's work is quite limited under the academic perspective. Most of the criticism and feedback is available in newspapers, magazines, websites, and blogs mostly run by the fan base «cult". That leads to the two main issues about an academic view of Palahniuk's work: the above-mentioned fact, that there is no significant combined literary fortune to rely on, and many of the existing resources are full of passion, and more radical due to the nature of his work as Palahniuk describes it " "transgressional fiction", a genre that has not been explored yet as it is a combination of multiple genres. Available reviews require extensive external reading to get more comprehensive and specific background information. When reading the criticism of Palahniuk's debut work fight club,

there will be two main critical lenses, including the postmodernist literary movement and the sociological approach of gender studies.

Post-postmodernism interpretations read Palahniuk's work as an ironic take on contemporary American cultural and societal values. Matt Jordan has read the novel as an exploration of a situation in which contemporary culture is forced to be the cause of a crisis of male identity He writes

Although *Fight Club's* attempt to resolve this crisis by taking the protagonist approach is undoubtedly ironic, its logic implies the need to take action to deal with the impact of global capitalism. This should not be understood as severance but as dehumanization. , And the need is not limited to cultural responses (Jordan 368).

While the negative tone against Palahniuk's work has aroused from Henry Giroux arguing that *fight club* asserts the same values that he seems to denounce, he writes: to be the cause of a crisis of male identity"(5). Despite the sharp division between scholars and critics concerning the interpretations of *fight club* reading, each agrees that his work offers deep insight into the postmodern grotesque American life and the absurdity of the American individual expectations. The conjunction of these two critical lenses creates a crucial dominant theme for *fight club*; masculine crisis and violence.

Fight club presents the story of an unnamed protagonist an everyday white-middle class who becomes mentally unstable because of insomnia or as a result of the boring job he holds and the IKEA furniture that does not fill the hole in his life making him feel more emasculated thus he starts attending male support groups for people with various terminal diseases such as "Men remaining together" testicular cancer support group, to create a bond with other people and to feel less damaged by society .in one of these meetings he senses the presence of another "tourist" in the midst, Marla Singer. A loner that attends to these groups to be surrounded by death and that made her feel more alive.

After being discovered by the woman another fake like him, he felt uncomfortable and insomnia recurred. He must find another way to cope. This is when he met Tyler Durden, the character that turns out to be his counterpart that represented everything he wishes he was; courageous, charismatic, and sexy. Since the narrator's expensive apartment was blown up under highly suspicious circumstances, he and Tyler shared an abandoned house on Paper Street. This unlikely friendship paved the way to "fight club." The underground battle ring created by these two people has strict confidentiality rules as the first two rules of the club are "you do not talk about fight club". The men involved in the fighting are usually "blue-collar workers," and ordinary men with unsatisfactory lives try to release stress and bond with others through controlled physical violence .which later escalates to a much larger plan to destroy the financial system "Project Mayhem". The important plot twist to this madness is that the narrator and Tyler Durden are the same people. The narrator realizes that when he thinks he is asleep, he becomes Tyler Durden.

2.3. Transgressive Fiction

The most common definition of transgressive literature: a genre defined by alienated, anti-social often mentally ill characters, trying to break loose from the limitations, societal norms of everyday mundane.

With the emergence of American consumerism, brand culture, and the fall of socialism, this type reached its heyday at the end of the 20th century. But today, this type is still very popular; writers like Irvine Welsh Donna Tartt, Owen and Chuck Palahniuk have maintained this style a Living tradition. For the purpose of this analysis, I will define the notion of —transgressional fiction by moving beyond the definitions that describes transgressive as pure violence, shock, and societal confusion to show that is more than simply a violent narrative genre."Transgressive fiction is loosely defined as fiction in which characters misbehave and act badly, commit crimes or pranks as a way of either

feeling alive or as political acts of civil disobedience," as Chuck Palahniuk claims in a postcard from the future documentary. Fiction is not a marginal phenomenon, nor is it an imprecise method of discussing non-mainstream ideas and behaviors, but rather a more core social mechanism generated and further developed by ideology. Throughout American history, the notion that society needs to or transcend its boundaries to develop has appeared in different forms. This concept can be traced back to Michel Foucault's theories on transgressive fiction. Michael Foucault (35) claimed that transgression is not an opposition of one "thing to another" nor has a purpose of "upsetting the solidity of foundations through violence and mockery in an ethical world but it is rather a reflection of the madness in the reality that we perceive. In agreement with this definition, Palahniuk and Foucault believe that transgression is a genre of literature that approaches the undesirable tragic human experiences to alter our perception and push our limits to deal with the crisis of reality that we are not meant to discuss or reveal.

Transgression in *Fight Club* is largely embodied through the narrator's mental illness which gets progressively worse over time, which means that the language or the particular sentence structures Palahniuk has decided to utilize may reflect the narrator's mental issues, as the transgression features manifest in all the themes of the novel that extent from the gender roles particularly the masculine persona that serves as an attack of capitalist consumerist culture.

2.4. Literary devices and narrative style

2.4.1. Narrative Style

Narrator was all over the place: While Chuck Palahniuk used all three narrative perspective types in *Fight Club*: first-person, second-person, and third-person narrative, the majority of the story is written in the first-person narrative.

Palahniuk primarily used the first-person narrative to avoid having to name the main character. The main plot twist will be revealed to the reader by a character in the story. In this way, the reader does not realize that the Narrator and Tyler are the same people until the end of the novel in this context; Palahniuk also alternates between first-person and second-person narratives to create a sense of interactivity with the reader. When he does, he wants to direct the reader's attention to the story, and he employs allegory to convey a broader message about real-life issues that people undergo: "You wake up at O'Hare. You wake up at LaGuardia. You wake up at Logan" (3.4-3.6).

In this case, the change of perspective to the second-person narrative is supposed to put the readers right in the middle of the story and make them realize they can be one of the nameless space monkeys. At the same time, it also illustrates how much the Narrator is detached from reality because while he is speaking in the second person he is the one waking up at O'Hare, LaGuardia, and Logan's.

Fight Club has a non-linear plot and is told in the past and present tense. Since the novel is cyclical, the first 4-page short chapter takes the reader from the beginning to the end; everything else is simply flashbacks of flashbacks within flashbacks, taking back the reader from the beginning to even further back in time.

The novel is told by an unreliable narrator who is unsure of his own identity. As a result, the Narrator deceives the reader and keeps the facts about Tyler hidden until the novel's conclusion. The Narrator always deals with several incidents at once, so the reader gets a sense of confusion which gives the impression that the

—If she means my boss, I say, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know, the police know, everyone's looking for me to lethally inject me, already, but it was Tyler who killed my boss. Tyler and I just happen to have the same fingerprints, but no one understands. (Palahniuk 195)

The unreliable narrator phenomenon is well-represented in this section of the plot. Unlike the alter ego, Tyler Durden, who seems to hate his boss, the narrator seems to like the man.

Tyler may see the boss as a symbol of his (and thus the narrator's) repressive consumerist and domesticated lifestyle. Tyler's contempt for the man is enough to drive him to murder, but the narrator is unaware of this memory. The assassination of his boss is also a watershed moment in his life as Tyler's actions have so far been mischievous at best, it was at this point in the narrative, that both the reader and the narrator become aware of the danger that Tyler Durden represents.

The narrator in *Fight Club*, on the other hand, does not deny that Tyler Durden and the narrator are the same people. Because the narrator's transgression is caused by his dissociative identity disorder, Tyler's true identity is not revealed until later in the story. By convincing the reader of a linear story and the presence of two distinct characters within the narrative (the narrator and Tyler Durden). Thus, it makes the reader sympathize with the narrator as a victim of unusual circumstances rather than, say, a murderer of his boss.

The narrator exhibits the same level of apprehension and uncertainty about the events that have occurred as the reader, and together they begin piecing the puzzle.

In some ways, the unreliable narrator is attempting to find reliability by exposing the double life that he has been living.

2.4.2. Literary devices

2.4.2.1 Minimalism

Writing in short, a straightforward sentence is generally a common transgressive fiction technique, also applicable to the current novel.

Although Palahniuk employs minimalism techniques and primarily uses short sentences with few explanations that serves to distinguish between the narrator's many personalities, as is particularly apparent at the end of the events leading to Tyler 'death

Of course, when I pulled the trigger, I died.Liar.

And Tyler died.

...Everything in heaven is white on white.

Faker.

Everything in heaven is quiet, rubber-soled shoes.

I can sleep in heaven.¶ (Palahniuk: 206).

There are also occasions when he employs incredibly detailed descriptions, such as when Tyler describes how to create a light bulb bomb or the three ways to make napalm“*The three ways to make napalm: One, you can mix equal parts of gasoline and frozen orange juice concentrate. Two, you can mix equal parts of gasoline and diet cola. Three, you can dissolve crumbled cat litter in gasoline until the mixture is thick.*” (96).

These detailed descriptions give the main character authority and let the reader realize that they are knowledgeable of the subject.

2.4.2.2. Repetition

Repetition is another aspect that usually appears in transgressive fictional works, and that is a very frequent occurrence in *Fight Club*. Similar to minimalism, Repetition in *Fight Club* helps to show the reader the narrator's fractured mind right before the twist of the dissociative identity disorder is unveiled in the novel's final chapter.

“Everything is so far away, a copy of a copy of a copy.”(124), this example gives the reader a hint that the narrator has a split identity disorder, and Tyler is just his copy, not a real person.

Repetition also serves as a tool of emphasis for the writer, to show the reader that some idea or thought is particularly important "The first rule of fight club is you don't talk about fight club. The second rule of fight club is you don't talk about fight club."

2.4.2.3. Symbolism

Blind obedience is symbolized by space monkeys. Tyler's most devoted supporters and project Mayhem believers are referred to by this name. They don't have names because their past lives and family names aren't enough to define them. Tyler took away their work, names, and clothing. They are Tyler's mercenaries who carry out his orders without a doubt. They are the test subjects for Project Mayhem just like the space monkeys that were tested at NASA and the Soviet Union and shot into space "Think about the monkeys shot into space. Without their death, their pain, without their Sacrifice, we would have nothing" (Palahniuk 129).

In *Fight Club* both pride and shame are symbolized in scars, bruises, and similar marks as they are tokens of pride and self-respect are made on purpose and gladly from fights or Tyler's mark also known as Tyler's kiss .When Tyler burns the narrator's flesh, he escapes the pain by meditating but Tyler keeps bringing him back " This is the greatest moment of your life," Tyler says, "and you're off somewhere missing it" (Palahniuk 77). Tyler's kiss is proof of Tyler's love, that through the pain they made them feel alive and reborn.

These are the novel's most critical symbols, but since Palahniuk prefers for the reader to draw his conclusions, there are dozens of symbols in which he expresses his thoughts and ideas about humanity, existentialism, religion, and other topics.

2.4.2.4. Allusion

There are tens of allusions in *Fight Club* that refer to popular singers, actors, books and book characters, heroes, and other influential icons who are not mentioned in the text.

One of the most common allusions is to Robin Hood; members of Project Mayhem take from those that they believe have too much and give it to those in need, or simply Bomb it. Since Palahniuk compares the narrator and Project Mayhem to Robin Hood, the narrator and Project Mayhem's recruits seem to be more like good guys. In addition, Palahniuk refers to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Readers will be reminded of Carroll's novel and its relaxed, dark humor by the emergence of anarchy and the notion that not everybody follows the rules.

There are several cultural allusions in the novel like the fairy-tale character Cinderella, Picasso's most famous painting *Mona Lisa*, and Barbie the doll. In addition, pop-cultural references that were famous in the United States back in the 1970s; wildlife television program the *Wild Kingdom* or to John Prine's country song *Dear Abby*,

2.4.2.5. Irony

The novel's most prominent dramatic irony occurs when the Narrator fails to correctly interpret his situation. In this situation, the audience has a superior perception of it, because unlike the Narrator, who is unaware of his split personality, the reader is aware that Tyler lives in the narrator's head.

"We talk about everything except Tyler Durden...Every night; Marla and I walk in the garden until I'm sure that Tyler's not Coming home that night" (Palahniuk 132).

The main character induces intense tension and makes the reader excited to find out what happens next; what the Narrator's reaction is when he eventually discovers the truth.

When Palahniuk uses verbal irony, he says something that contradicts the facts they intend to express. Palahniuk wants the reader to figure out the hidden meanings based on their prior knowledge of the main characters, for instance when the narrator says "oh all those crazy bombs" The quote has underlying ironic connotations due to the common association of explosives with anarchy in the background and the novel's transgressive,

illegal nature .in addition to the term, " crazy" is linked to the narrator's mental condition which makes the statement merely an ironic utterance.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter deals with aspects of popular culture and transgressive genre contained in the novels by chuck Palahniuk, particularly *Fight Club* and development of his writing .The thesis includes a brief analysis of Palahniuk’s writing that integrate facilitating literary devices which makes *fight club* accessible to broader body of readers .As Palahniuk claimed his primary intention when starting writing was to attract young people back to reading because books are unique ,powerful and there still are many places “that only books can go”(Haunted142).

CHAPTER 3

Exploring the Link between Masculine Ideology and Violence in Chuck Palahniuk's Fight Club

Every act of creation is first an act of destruction

Pablo Picasso

3.1. Introduction

Studying Fight club in a gendered perspective, we will be looking at how Palahniuk depicts what has become of masculinity in a post modern world and what the outcome of this maybe. I will also argue that Palahniuk depicts the man in “crisis” trough the effeminate domesticated man and that the book does not represent toxic violent thoughts as has been claimed before, but rather paints the picture of what abnormal masculinities could be and the way we could elevate them.

3.2. Overcoming Emasculation and Domestication

Through the narration of *Fight Club*, Chuck Palahniuk explores multiple formations of Masculinity along the spectrum of testicular and [phallic Masculinity]. He portrays severely troubled masculinity in which the nameless protagonist experiences a Masculinity trial due to his conformity and lack of production generating a sense of emasculation. Eventually, he assembles a phallic hyper-masculine homosocial fight club to regenerate more stereotypical masculinity.

At the starting of the novel, the narrator's battle with sleep deprivation happens at the same time he battles to be a man. From the first sight of it, the narrator features an idealized life: he contains good white-collar work, a pleasant car, and a decent condo. But hiding underneath it all may be a sense of contemptible emptiness, a perfect example of a white man who lost all his power, even if he holds a respectable job at a big corporate company, he lives isolated and cannot connect healthily.

He describes his apartment "you couldn't open the windows so even with maple looming and dimmer switches, all seventeen hundred airtight feet would smell like the last meal you cooked or your last trip to the bathroom" (Palahniuk 41)

The concept of emasculation is most prominent at the start of the book before the narrator's completely immersed himself in Tyler's world. He attends group therapy sessions in the hopes of curing his insomnia. He manages to cure it for a bit, but how does he do it?

The meetings with the testicular cancer support group are probably the most revealing when describing the protagonist's feelings of feminization and lack of masculinity. He will find solace in the support group of other men who have also felt a sense of masculine loss, but the men in the group are suffering from physical emasculation, while the narrator is suffering from psychological emasculation. In the presence of men who have endured real castration, his fear of castration is alleviated.

When surrounded by men who have lost their manhood physically, the narrator regains some of his manliness because he is still physically a man. He will unwind in these groups and weep with the other members over the loss of their manhood; in these groups he can feel secure. Furthermore, the narrator's get depicted as feminized in the guided meditation, when asked to visualize their animals he states that he was a penguin. The penguin is neither powerfully nor stereotypically a masculine animal; the male penguin takes an equal turn with the female when raising their kid, a perfect avatar for someone who understands the power of his nesting instinct.

The penguin also foreshadows the narrator's eventual creation of a "nesting instinct", but he must engage in a great deal of hyper-masculine behavior before he can do so.

The narrator identifies with "Remaining Men Together" the most because it is the only party that helps him to alleviate his mental constipation by weeping, enabling him to eventually sleep.

The narrator and his masculinity problem are ideal candidates for such a group. It might be called a brotherhood, but it would be an inverted fraternity in this situation.

Their testicles were removed due to cancer, and they would work together to find out how to stay men after the loss. He introduces the situation through his bonding with Bob "Bob's big arms were closed around to hold me inside, and I was squeezed in the dark between Bob's new sweating tits that hang enormous, the way we think God's as big" (Palahniuk 16) Going to therapy sessions, allows the narrator to leave capitalism's lonely and claustrophobic womb and embrace Bob as his new mother figure.

Bob in his search for the ideal body gets testicular cancer using steroids as a professional bodybuilder, no testicles, and female "tits" bob is utterly feminized.

"Bob loves me because he thinks my testicles were removed, too." (Palahniuk, 17) The removal of a man's testicles is arguably the most literal type of emasculation and If we

look a little closer, we can see that Bob's loss of his testicles causes him to become emasculated, which is an ironic outcome of his efforts to be excessively masculine.

The Narrator and Bob meet at a testicular cancer support group called "Remaining Men Together" which is a touching term. Its name implies, paradoxically, that the last place where they can truly remain men, among men. They've been robbed of their testicles, the epitome of manhood. To work together, they must deny one of the most significant markers of masculinity to remain men.

For the next two years, the Narrator attends meetings at Remaining Men Together and other similar counseling sessions, and he can relax because the meetings provide him with an emotional outlet however when Marla a female character another "tourist" intrudes into the man remaining together, the narrator gets his insomnia back which causes him to dissociate. He claims that Marla stole the groups from him because they both recognize each other for faking their illness "I can't cry with this woman watching me" (Palahniuk 22), perhaps The fact that she is a woman is a problem, in addition to his disease that reveals that he is a man without power and control, which is a feminine attribute. The groups that provide a haven from the stresses of life for the narrator is shattered, and his fears of not being manly enough show up again, since he got exposed by someone who can see his real nature, "To Marla I'm a fake,"(Palahniuk 23) which is amplified by the fact that she is a woman. When Marla enters the masculine domain, she not only blocks The Narrator's emotional outlet with her mere presence, but she also inflicts a second layer of anger on him by attempting to reveal the illusion of masculinity that The Remaining Men Together is preserving.

Finally, Marla's ability to ruin the narrator's only successful therapy simply by being present is a strong indication of the latent fear of a new world dominated by women.

The narrator's fear of being ruled and effeminate has been resolved in the early part of the first chapter. However, as the retrospective narrative reveals, the "narrator" has always been the dominant subject in his entire adult life. It was until Taylor showed it, and it has been hinting at turning his dominance into reality, which makes the narrator realize that his conquest is correct. The narrator's whole crisis generated from his "nesting instinct" (Palahniuk 43)

Tyler emerges as the perfect manifestation of the narrator's masculine self in the middle of the narrator's crisis. He represents the narrator's idealized version of what he aspires to be as a male individual he said "I love everything about Tyler Durden, his courage, and his smarts and nerves. Tyler is funny and charming and forceful and independent, and men look up to him and expect him to change their world. Tyler is capable and free, and I am not" (Palahniuk 174).

Tyler also works as a projectionist at the movie theater in his spare time, which symbolically indicates that the narrator uses a split personality to project perfect manliness onto himself (Tyler) to become the new normative [hyperbolic] masculine.

It was soon after the narrator met Tyler that he blew his apartment, symbolic destruction for his old life and his nesting instinct also at the items in the apartment, which are symbols of domestication and a society that is effeminizing. "Everything, the lamps, the chairs, the rugs were me. The dishes in the cabinets were me. The plants were me. The television was me. It was me that blew up." (Palahniuk 111)

It was his first violent reaction without his knowing, recognizing that he is a slave to nesting instincts, "I wasn't the only slave to my nesting instinct" (Palahniuk 43) a trait that to him is effeminate and a menace to his masculinity leads him to his first violent reaction. This move facilitated him moving in with his imaginary friend and his total surrender to

the life of illusion. Spending more time with Tyler allows him to witness his first 'interpersonal' aggression, which serves as a significant turning point in the story.

It's the first of several acts of aggression, but this one is especially noteworthy because it's the first time he fights himself (Tyler).

The aggression is prefaced by the fact that in return for his housing, he must hit Tyler as hard as he can; he fights his body and its inherent weakness when he fights Tyler.

The abuse he perpetrated against his ego denotes the protagonist's understanding of his role in ratifying the philosophy that he denounces and that he sees himself as both a victim and a hero.

3.3 Paternal void

through the narrative we learn that both *Fight Clubs* and *Project Mayhem* are the product of an absent father and the subsequent, excessively strong maternal force in his life, which includes the nesting instinct. Just as Joshua Gunn and Thomas Frenzt has done exactly that following Lacan's theory based on Freud oedipal model that states that the presence of a strong father is essential for a boy to establish his sense of self and masculine heterosexuality and his relation to his mother. They argue that: the so-called masculine violence depicted by *Fight Club* reflects the protagonist's inability to establish an identity for himself as a result of a failed paternal intervention. The consequent psychosis staged by *Fight Club*, we argue, is expressive of a larger, cultural decline of the father figure."(Gunn and Frenzt 269).

The narrator's explanation of his "feather-shaped hole" is interspersed after he declares the first and second rules of *Fight Club* which are not talking about fight club" the narrator's start reminiscing over the memory of his father Me, I knew my dad for about six years, but I don't remember anything" (50). He continues to acknowledge himself and the men around him as "a generation of men raised by women" (50)

Due to a lack of male role models, an entire generation of men has been confused about gender roles in the face of society's contradictory messages about what constitutes a stereotypical man.

The Narrator despises his father for abandoning him when he was a teenager, and he aspires to be nothing like him. This becomes evident in the conversation between him and the mechanic if "you're male and you're Christian and living in America, your father is your model for God. And if you never know your father, if your father bails out or dies or is never at home, what do you believe about God? (...) What you end up doing (...) is you spend your life searching for a father and God." (Palahniuk 141).

This is mirrored in the Narrator's life and decisions, such as when he was contemplating what to do after high school. "My father never went to college," says the narrator."As a result, it was important that I attend college."(Palahniuk90)This suggests that it was not a simple and straightforward task and that he had to make a decision. Their relationship is unusual, and it reflects the grudge that they have against each other even though he is an adult.

Tyler is represented by a mystifying filter that gives him the appearance of a god-like persona, a parental figure who can be looked up to and who, unlike their biological fathers, will never fail them: a new messiah for the emasculated to remind the men of "what kind of power they still have" and to "teach each man in the project [Mayhem] that he had the power to control history " (palhniuk122)

Tyler's philosophy will assist these men in undergoing a phase of emasculation .provided by the American individualistic method and brought closer to the main source (male) body, which is supposed to carry a truer, more normal masculinity. Adult sexuality in men, according to Connell, is successfully established through the son's

admiration/rejection of the father (Masculinities 9). In an individualistic society like the one depicted in this novel, where blood ties aren't essential,

Tyler seems to have found a solution to these men's lack of courage. They are men who, among other things, in their disjointed social environment, are now attempting to combat their feelings of isolation.

They tend to attribute isolation to an issue of marginalization as a result of their socioeconomic status. As a result, Tyler gives the men of the fight club the upper hand. Tyler represents a different kind of the desired masculinity than the narrator and his comatose pals; the kind of Self-Made Man who relies on conventional conceptions of manhood like physical strength, self-control, and power that "defined their fathers' and grandfathers'" lives. (Manhood in America 218)

"We are the middle children of history, raised by television to believe that someday we'll be millionaires and movie stars and rock stars, but we won't. And we're just learning this fact," he adds «so don't fuck with us" (Palahniuk 166). Tyler converts the anger and rage resulted from absent paternal figures and empty dreams into restoring a male identity.

3.4. The Savage

The Narrator is on a steady path to reaching rock bottom, or salvation, whichever comes first, under Tyler's questionable guidance. The Narrator is now living with his imaginary friend, and the two of them are attempting to deconstruct the dominant emasculating ideology.

After its initial success, the fight club eventually evolves into a political and ideological project, with Tyler advocating self-destruction rather than self-improvement as a means of reaching rock bottom, "maybe self-destruction is the answer" (Palahniuk 49) in his opinion, is the only way to enlightenment.

As a result, fight club members stepped outside their comfort zones to seek enlightenment and liberation through destruction, intimidation, and vandalism. The narrator realizes that "something bigger" is arising from the fight club and "it was that morning, [that] Tyler invented Project Mayhem" (Palahniuk' 123).

Tyler shifts its focus from a personal fight against emasculation to a systemic battle against it through Project Mayhem. Project Mayhem's members no longer have names, these men are called "space monkeys", and they shave their heads and wear the same clothes, entering an even stronger communion. They start to look more like a para-military group than an underground fighting organization.

Project Mayhem starts because the members still lack respect from the powers that be, despite gaining their stereotypical, hyperbolic masculinity from Fight club, so they established a new social system arising from the ruins of the traditional; "Like fight club does with clerks and box boys, Project Mayhem will break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world" (Palahniuk 125).

Social scientists have all agreed;... [that] any adequate theory of men and masculinity has to have a concept of power at its center just as in *The Gender of Oppression*, Jeff Hearn suggests that what we think of as masculinity is the result of the way our power and our alienation combine. (quoted in Kaufman 150).

They created a fight club, a rallying point for men from all sorts of backgrounds who come to engage in pugilistic combat with one another and with themselves. Initially, it is simply a place where men will come to be men among other men, free of the constraint of a domesticated life to complete them. "There's nothing personal about whom you fight in [Fight Club] you fight to fight" (Palahniuk 54).

"The goal was to teach each man in the project that he had the power to control history. We, each of us, can take control of the world." (Palahniuk 49)

It becomes evident that the intention of the violence is not only to provide thrills or suspense but also to reclaim control over a life that the protagonist believes he has lost control over.

According to Kimmel (40), “[...] men’s lives are structured around relationships of power and men’s differential access to power, as well as the differential access to that power of men as a group”

The attempts develop toward the assertion of masculinity in an aggressive sense of masculinity for the narrator to experience “a momentary sense of power and control” (Kaufman 150).

Tyler's rage though, seems to be aimed at more than just the authorities in the room with him, but it was directed at absent fathers everywhere:

“ I am trash and shit and crazy to you and this whole fucking world, ’ Tyler said to the union president. ‘ You don ’ t care where I live or how I feel, or what I eat or how I feed my kids or how I pay the doctor if I get sick, and yes I am stupid and bored and weak, but I am still your responsibility ” (Palahniuk115).

After growing up without traditional role models, the members of Fight Club and project mayhem use the violent, homosocial club to break free from their feminized previous lives. They create hyper-masculine gender roles for themselves.

When the narrator square up to his boss he stated that he "Basically, said the same stuff Tyler said” (Palahniuk 115)

They now want to retaliate against their absent fathers by gaining political influence.

The most intriguing part of this is that it seems to be occurring without The Narrator's experience where Tyler is the sole person in charge of this project.

Project Mayhem leads to the location where the novel began, atop a high-rise office building. After that, the project gradually shifted its focus to broader goals, such as the

sociodicy's constructs and axioms. The Narrator learns that he and Tyler are the same person when transitioning from fight club to Project Mayhem.

The narrator opposes Tyler i.e. himself about the project, saying it is going too far, and he never imagined something like this. Tyler believes they are doing this for everyone, and that it is no longer a personal struggle of masculine domesticity, but rather a collective one. It has overshadowed The Narrator and evolved into a distinct ideology.

Project mayhem is what eventually leads to the starting point of the novel, narratively speaking, with Tyler pointing a gun The Narrator's mouth stands outside a building watching other surrounding buildings fall.

This destruction is not unintentional; Tyler's resolve to demolish the foundations of a society that has produced men who believe their spirit has been trampled by the destructive powers of an ideology that does not support their needs. His ambition to rebuild a better world outweighs his desire to help them express themselves.

Tyler's philosophy is both radical and destructive in this context, and it has the concept of death and sacrifice as its nexus, one only needs to recall Project Mayhem's request for "human sacrifices," for the society in which the subject has no worth as a person. Bob's death while working on one of the project's tasks is the best example. When he dies, a ceremony is performed in which his name is restored since "[o]nly in death do we have our names since only in death are we no longer part of the effort. In death we become heroes" (Palahniuk178) .Death, it seems, is the only factor capable of returning the subject's self under the fight club's rules something that connects with another highly toxic aspect of hegemonic masculinity: only when you're in agony, or when you're close to it that men believe they can share or accept their own subjectivity.

Death on the other hand, is seen as a gift (in the form of a sacrifice) for the sake of

Fight club and project mayhem, which connects to deep religious thinking. Tyler plays a fictitious God, with the protagonist playing a Jesus Christ figure who will be sacrificed.

3.5.Only Love Can Save You: Marla and The Love Triangle

even though my thesis argues that Fight Club is an existential examination of modern men's masculinity and society's expectations of it, Men seek out Fight Club for a variety of reasons, including discontent with their social status, their place in history, and the realization that their lives are not the ones they were promised. Tyler Durden, in particular for the writer, is the gold standard for this generation of men. He has sex the way the narrator wants it, he looks the way the narrator wants it, and he is strong in every way the narrator is not. Fight Club, on the other hand, goes beyond this single-gender or violent experimentation. It's about something that we all need human; which is compassion and love.

Apart from serving as an outsider to the male-only fight club, Marla's role in the group was to help strengthen Tyler's masculinity by extolling his heterosexuality. However, there are several drawbacks to this relationship. a non-operational goal, in which the protagonist will also be involved; When Marla had Access to the Paper Street House, She is a guest who has been given entry to the master's sacred headquarters.

Marla is never absorbed by this society as the men are: first, because she is a woman, and second because she is only sexually approached by Tyler. Her existence outside of the sexual realm is notable. Only the nameless protagonist, who has been there since the beginning, acknowledges the paradigm.

The nameless protagonist reveals much more to Marla than he does to Tyler or even the reader. The narrator also tells Marla his real name: I take out my wallet and show Marla my driver's license with my real name. Not Tyler Durden" (Palahniuk' 172).

From the early stages of the story till its end the protagonist confesses to the reader why he created Tyler.

When Tyler tries to kill the narrator in the explosion that would symbolically ruin history (by destroying the natural history museum), the narrator reveals that Project Mayhem as a whole does not revolve around history "I know all of this: the gun, the anarchy, the explosion is really about Marla Singer.... We sort of have a triangle going here. I want Tyler. Tyler wants Marla. Marla wants me. I don't want Marla, and Tyler doesn't want me around, not anymore. This isn't about love as in caring. This is about the property as in ownership. Without Marla, Tyler would have nothing. (Palahniuk 14)

Tyler prevents the fusion of Marla and the protagonist because, thanks to him, neither of them loses their potential for exposure, and this encourages such exposure. For starters, as previously stated, Marla maintains her otherness. Secondly, It could be argued that the main character's multiple personality disorder contributes to the creation of some kind of a separation between the body and the self , two personalities coexisting in the same body "Tyler Durden is a separate personality I've created, and now he's threatening to take over my real life" (Palahniuk 173).

As a result, the narrator's relationship with Marla is linked to the narrator's relationship with Tyler, and how he must break away from his homosocial friend if he wishes to be truly heterosexual. However, it cannot take the narrator to kill Tyler his symbolic father figure, and knock down the triangle. He needs to kill Tyler to fully acknowledge his feelings.

Finally, to murder Tyler, his symbolic father, the narrator receives assistance and support from both Marla and members of his pre-fight club support groups. Tyler holds a gun in the narrator's mouth at the end of the novel as the narrator struggles to figure out

who he is. Is no realization comes, although time is running out before the building on which they are in is going to be demolished.

Tyler intends for this moment of destruction to be the triumphant culmination of Project Mayhem. Only the appearance of Marla and other members of support groups help the narrator realize what it that He truly desires is;

Tyler and me at the edge of the roof, the gun in my mouth, I'm wondering how clean this gun is. Three minutes. Then somebody yells. Wait, and its Marla coming toward us across the roof. Marla's coming toward me, just be because Tyler's gone. Poof. Tyler's my hallucination, not hers. Fast as a magic trick, Tyler's disappeared. And now I'm just one man holding a gun in my mouth(Palahniuk 204).

When the narrator sees Marla standing in the building, risking her life and ready to take him as he is, he realizes that Tyler Durden is just a hallucination and that he is the one in control, after all.

Marla is the catalyst for this epiphany, not only Marla is the reason for the protagonist splitting his personality but she also the reason for his split from Tyler “ I know why Tyler occurred .Tyler loved Marla .From the first night I met her, Tyler or some part of me had needed a way to be with her” (198)

Marla's selfless, sacrificial love for the narrator, on the other hand, fails to save him: he shoots the gun into his head and goes insane. The narrator got into an asylum in the novel's final chapter; though he believes he has died and ascended to the heavens: he continues communicating with Marla through letters. “If there were a telephone in Heaven,” Jack says, “I would call Marla from heaven and the moment she says, ‘Hello,’ I wouldn't hang up. I'd say, ‘Hi. What's happening? "Tell me every little thing” (Palahniuk 207).

So perhaps fight club is a romantic story after all.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter it was realized that the way to appease the crisis of masculinity demonstrated by the protagonist, is to redefine the order in a new framework where masculinity is assessed in regard to new touchstones such as love and receptivity instead hegemonic politics of power.

4. General Conclusion

This thesis addresses some contentious topics. Even though the majority of the arguments are based on fictional literature, they are still grounded in reality.

One of these issues is the ideological trend that has, for some time, endorsed an effeminized society. The protagonists appear to be fighting against what I have labeled as emasculation that is the result of larger societal mechanisms.

My fundamental argument for the importance of gender follows Kaufman and Kimmel's arguments in that there is a "crisis in masculinity" through the effeminate men in the novel and the distortions in overly macho males. According to Kimmel, the loss of the Self-Made Man, the gains of industrialization and the consequences of the feminist movement all contributed to the demise of the Self-Made Man.

My main argument for these gender distortions comes from the testicular support organization "Remaining men Together": men have been "over-feminized" by adopting female behaviors like talking about feelings, cuddling, and the "nesting instinct".

The physical appearance of the men's bodies is perhaps the most obvious indicator of this distortion; they lack testicles, their "manhood," and some have developed breasts. The narrator's masculine identity and gender are lost, resulting in his sadness and general confusion among the male population, resulting in a resurgence of classical masculine ideals, which is embodied by Tyler Durden.

Tyler Durden, on the other hand, is not the solution to this "crisis," as his "overly masculine" violent behavior is seen as absolutely harmful, both for society as a whole and male identity.

Although Tyler Durden's rule brings men together, it also creates a society devoid of love, connectivity, and, maybe most importantly, honesty. The revelation that Tyler Durden is the narrator's hallucination not only serves as a metaphor for the novel's war between the sexes but also depicts the "perfect" man as nothing more than a dream or illusion. The answer is to accept both lairs, and racial identities, to "save" or "construct" a new masculine identity as is embodied through the character of Marla.

My thesis has identified various fundamental causes for the crisis in masculine identity and violence illustrated how fictional literature seeks to address it. Most importantly it showed that the way alleviates this crisis is to recast the order in a new framework where masculinity is assessed regarding new yardstick such as receptivity, empathy, and love instead of hegemonic politics of power.

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Appendices

1. Synopsis

The central plot of *Fight Club* focuses on the life of an unnamed narrator, a normal hardworking American male. He suffers from insomnia as a result of the stress of his work and the strain of his business trips. His doctor encourages him to attend a support group for individuals who suffer from testicular cancer to understand what true pain is like. His regular visits to a testicular cancer support group help him sleep better until he meets Marla Singer. Marla Singer, like the narrator, does not suffer from cancer and merely attends the support group for entertainment purposes. Because the narrator and Marla despise each other, they agree to join separate support groups so they won't have to meet.

The narrator encounters Tyler Durden on a beach. Tyler is a mysterious, charming and attractive man unlike him. Since the narrator's expensive apartment was blown up under highly suspicious circumstances, he and Tyler shared an abandoned house on Paper Street. This unlikely friendship paved the way to "fight club." The underground battle ring created by these two people has strict confidentiality rules as the first two rules of the club are "you do not talk about fight club". The men involved in the fighting are usually "blue-collar workers," and ordinary men with unsatisfactory lives try to release stress and bond with others through controlled physical violence. This fighting club later escalated to a much larger plan to destroy the financial system "Project Mayhem".

The important plot twist to this madness is that the narrator and Tyler Durden are the same people. The narrator realizes that when he thinks he is asleep, he becomes Tyler Durden. The plot continues with Tyler's attempt to blow up a building using a homemade bomb. He also intends to die as a martyr in the blast. The narrator waits for the bomb to

explode before killing himself, but the explosive malfunctions. While still alive, the narrator chooses to shoot himself to "kill" Tyler. The novel culminates with the narrator waking up in a mental institution and being addressed by a hospital staff who exposes themselves as members of the Mayhem Project and that they are waiting for Tyler/the narrator's return.

2. Glossary

Hegemonic masculinity: a practice that legitimizes men's dominating position in society while also justifying the subjugation of the general male population, women, and other marginalized male identity.

Phallic masculinity: The genital metaphor of the male phallus is associated with a form of hegemonic masculinity identified with power and control.

Homosociality : is a term used in sociology to describe same-sex interactions that are neither romantic nor sexual, such as friendship, mentorship, or others. The notion is mostly used by researchers to explain how males maintain their power in society.

Heterosexuality: the quality or characteristic of being sexually attracted solely to people of the opposite sex.

Supremacy: condition of being superior to all others in authority, power, or status.

Abnormal: deviating from the normal or average in a problematic or undesirable way.

Emasculation: the process of making men feels less like males by depriving their power and identity.

Mayhem: refer to a situation that is not controlled or ordered, when people are behaving in a disorganized, confused, and often violent way.

Semiotics: defined by Ferdinand de Saussure as the study of “the life of signs within society.” is the study of sign processes, which are any activities or processes that involve signs. A sign is defined as anything that shows a meaning that is not communicated by the sign itself.

