

Free essay on the duality of personality and the internalization of masculine vio...

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Fight Club was not a novel that gained popularity immediately. However, the novel became something of a cultural sensation with the release of the film adaptation; like much of Palahniuk's work, Fight Club is a dark, disturbing piece of literature that focuses on the less-savory aspects of human nature. Some have lambasted the novel as misogynistic, and others have misconstrued the text to support anarchy and domestic terrorism; however, much moreso than a political treatise, the text is an insight into the twisted depths of one man's psyche, a man that should be neither pitied nor exalted; a man with demons and strengths like any other. In Fight Club, Palahniuk's narrator informs the reader, " I love everything about Tyler Durden, his courage and his smarts. His nerve. 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). However, Tyler Durden is an inseparable part of the narrator, a portion of his own psyche cordoned off. Tyler Durden is reflective of the narrator's masculinity and his quest to reaffirm it within the constructs of his society.

The concept of a " split personality" as it exists in the novel Fight Club is not a psychological reality; it has been widely disavowed by the psychology profession. Dissociative Identity Disorder is a real diagnosis, but diagnosis of the condition is extremely rare, and does not present itself in the way that the narrator and Tyler Durden do in Fight Club. However, as a literary device, the single-body, dual consciousness of the narrator and Tyler Durden is extremely effective; it creates a sphere of otherworldliness that the reader can exist in, fascinated by the insanity and eccentricity of Tyler Durden's character, while still remaining comforted by the startling normality of the

narrator.

One of the ongoing themes throughout the book is the theme of violence, and its inextricable link to masculinity. Many readers have interpreted *Fight Club* as a misogynistic representation of violent masculinity and revolt against the feminization of men, but in reality, the novel presents a much more complex view of the issue. Ta writes, "Setting himself apart from the masochistic subject that remains a slave to the economic system, the white male rebel must revolt against a dominant culture that has ostensibly pushed his masculinity to the margins. In the face of this social and economic disempowerment, he seeks recourse in victimhood, becoming the divided self who at once laments his victimization but also depends upon it as a point of protest and identification" (Ta 269). Ta's analysis of Jack, the entity made up of both the narrator and Tyler Durden is a very compelling one. The narrator needs his victimization to create Tyler Durden; he cannot be Tyler Durden in every sense because Tyler is the essence of chaos. Jack's consciousness, once it has split, recognizes what it perceives as victimhood, but also recognizes the anger and aggression that comes with the perception of victimhood.

The narrator expresses his desire to be like Tyler Durden, but also a fear of being like Tyler Durden (Palahniuk 174). This is because he recognizes the chaos in Tyler; he sees the potential for downfall, and feels a genuine fear that others would not follow him in the same way that they follow Tyler Durden. The narrator says, "Valley of the Dogs. Where even if they don't kill you, if someone loves you enough to take you home, they still castrate you" (Palahniuk 174). He feels an extreme fear of castration; of becoming less-

than-a-man, while Tyler is a full-blooded embodiment of masculinity. Tyler came up with the idea for fight club; he made the soap, he burned the narrator, he threatened the man with the gun; all the violence in the story is inflicted by Tyler and received by the narrator. There is certainly the appearance of a masochistic side to the narrator; however, he is incapable of recognizing it in himself, perhaps because he fears that it will make him seem feminine. The narrator fears feminization to an extreme extent, often going out of his way to participate in Tyler's violent acts in an attempt to stray away from his previous upper-middle-class lifestyle, and to ground himself back in what it means to be a man and a human being.

If Tyler Durden is Jack's expression of extreme masculinity, the narrator is not the expression of extreme femininity. The only regularly recurring female character in the novel, Marla, can be seen as the foil to Tyler's excessive masculinity. Marla is an emotional wreck, constantly making demands and threatening to kill herself. Tyler treats Marla with disdain, but Marla goes back to him repeatedly, regardless of how he treats her; the narrator appears perplexed by her willingness to be treated badly. As the narrator develops and sinks deeper under Tyler's spell, he becomes more fearful of the masochistic elements of sexual relationships; this may indicate that the narrator fears becoming feminized further, and fears being "castrated"-- the cost of being loved.

The narrator and Tyler are both part of Jack, but that does not inherently mean that the narrator and Tyler are connected. These two characters are separate parts of Jack's psyche, and they are not aware of each other in the novel-- at the very least, the narrator is unaware that Tyler is a figment of his

imagination. Neither personality is the “ dominant” personality in the sense that neither personality seems to be aware of the other; they interact as if they are two separate entities. Jack, as a character, does not seem to be aware of the different identities that he has constructed within his head. Initially, it may seem that the narrator is Jack’s identity, and Tyler is the identity that has splintered off and become its own, but a closer look at the text reveals that this is probably not the case.

In the text, the narrator initially meets Tyler Durden and is enthralled by his hatred of common culture. While he exists and lives within the popular culture, he is aware of the meaning behind many different behavioral nuances that the narrator is initially either unaware of or purposefully ignorant to. Jack himself has been suffering from insomnia, something that the narrator recognizes; the narrator is enthralled by Tyler’s promises of a new world. However, Tyler’s calls for a new world and a new manner of thinking heavily echo Jack’s dissatisfaction with his own life. ““ You have a class of young strong men and women, and they want to give their lives to something,” Tyler says to his group one night, ““ Advertising has these people chasing cars and clothes they don’t need. Generations have been working in jobs they hate, just so they can buy what they don’t really need. We don’t have a great war in our generation, or a great depression, but we do, we have a great war of the spirit. We have a great revolution against the culture. The great depression is our lives. We have a spiritual depression”” (Palahniuk 149). Tyler’s speech to his followers directly mirrors all the things that Jack and the narrator were expressing about his/their lives before Tyler became part of their psyche.

In truth, the narrator's existence is separate from Jack's character as well, as there are periods of time which the narrator cannot account for. Jack is an insomniac, as previously noted, and suffers the depressing effects of the condition for a long period of time before meeting Tyler Durden. Jack is living what is, by all accounts, the American dream, and he is miserably unhappy. His unhappiness is turned inward, and he begins to wonder if there is something systemic that is causing all the unhappiness that he sees day in and day out at his job. According to Ta, " Jack resorts to [this] survival mechanism, but his pathological condition is not revealed until the end. Hence, most of the film serves as a Freudian reading where Jack expresses melancholic loss of his ' manhood' by repressing his libidinal identity and creating the alter-ego of Tyler" (Ta 271). In short, Jack feels emasculated by his job, his boss, and the expectation of normalcy; it is this emasculation combined with the pathological conditions that he suffers that combine to create the personality of Tyler.

It makes sense, then, that the narrator should love Tyler and idolize him, although he is another facet to the same personality. Tyler in his very inception is something completely different from what the narrator is; Tyler is an avatar for the narrator, devoid of fear, insecurity, or doubt, and always willing and capable of going further than other people are ready or willing to go. Tyler's personality has all of the traits that Jack wishes he could have; when his personality splintered from the extreme case of insomnia that he was suffering from, Jack poured all of his insecurities and fears into the narrator, and all of the things that he wished he could be into Tyler Durden. However, Jack could not have foreseen the violence and extreme nature of

the personality; indeed, he did not create it intentionally by any means. As Tyler devolved further into violence and extremism, Palahniuk questions whether hypermasculinity is a positive trait-- just as he questioned whether the emasculation of men was a positive action (Quiney).

Fight Club is a novel that appeals to a wide array of different audiences, and has been examined as a text a number of times. The interpretations of the text vary from analyst to analyst, but the underlying themes of masculinity and violence remain. In his text, Palahniuk forces the reader into a corner, challenging him or her to question all of the long-standing values that he or she has held regarding the nature of violence, gender, and sexuality.

Works cited

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