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### Don't Talk About Fight Club

November 18, 1978 saw the deaths of 912 lives from cyanide poisoning or gunfire in the country of Guyana. The Guyana settlement served as an escape from the racism and persecution of The United States, but in reality acted as a voluntary concentration camp. The settlement, run by Jim Jones, would later be known as Jonestown. Philip Zimbardo, infamous for the cruel and unusual Stanford Prison experiment, saw Jones's techniques as similar to that of George Orwell's 1984. The four tenets Jones borrowed from 1984 to build Jonestown were:

1. "Big brother is watching you"
2. Self Incrimination and public humiliation
3. Suicide drills: "the proper thing was to kill yourself before they get you" (Orwell, 86)
4. The blurring of words and reality (APA, *Lessons from Jonestown*)

The fourth point refers to a concept in 1984 known as Newspeak. Newspeak, created by 1984's Ingsoc government, "is a language characterized by a continually diminishing vocabulary; complete thoughts are reduced to simple terms of simplistic meaning." (Wikipedia, *Newspeak*) Ingsoc uses the concepts of Newspeak in order to take a complicated idea —English Socialism— and simplify it in a way discarding "unnecessary" meaning. The Nazi party is example, short for the Nationalsozialist party or The National Socialist party. However, when talking about The Nazis, one's first thoughts are not nationalism and socialism. A Nazi is simply a Nazi. (Wikipedia, *Newspeak*)

George Orwell poses the idea that in a sufficiently authoritarian regime, Newspeak can control a population. If you remove the word *power* from language, then how do you talk about power-dynamics? You can talk about *control* or *injustice* but what if you remove those from the language. The idea of The Thought Police implies these ideas of *power*, *control*, and *injustice*, but if you remove the words *thought* and *police* too by combining them in a simplified concept of *thinkpol*, Ingsoc creates a secret police that cannot mentally be perceived by the populace as *bad*. Sorry, not *bad*, but *ungood*.

A cult of hatred is a cult built on a common hatred, with forms of cult indoctrination stemming from an 'us-versus-them' mentality to preying on irrational fears. (APA, *Cults of Hatred*) If you can prey on an individual's hatred, fears, insecurities, and convince them to follow you, you can then limit their speech, capitalize of their insecurities, instill in them a fear of rebellion, and if ever caught train them to commit suicide. You can create an army.

Tyler Durden is a populist leader who capitalizes off a disillusioned and emasculated populus in order to build an army in which he is God.

## PT. 1 The birth of Tyler Durden

The Narrator does not sleep. The first conflict of *Fight Club* portrays The Narrator desperately trying to cure his insomnia. The Narrator, Jack, is displayed as a sleepless Edward Norton lying in the same bed with the same camera angle multiple times throughout this arc. “With insomnia, nothing is real. Everything is far away. Everything is a copy of a copy of a copy.” [Fincher, 4:00] (Phalanik, 11) Three weeks into Jack’s insomnia the explanation for his insomnia is: “Insomnia is just the symptom of something larger. Find out what’s actually wrong. Listen to your body.” (9) Jack’s insomnia stems from “something larger”, implying an underlying cause; and, Jack’s insomnia is driving him insane— “nothing is real, everything is far away, everything is a copy of a copy of a copy.” Herein lies the perfect setup in which Jack needs to find this underlying cause.

Jack’s underlying cause is boredom. Jack lives a simple life: a simple office job in a simple world. A world where nothing goes wrong. A very corporate world. A very perfect world. Jack thinks he’s at the height, able to see through everyone. The movie portrays Jack’s beginnings from the perspective of an outside observer. Jack does not live his life, but simply looks on as his life continues on. This is mostly achieved through Edward Norton’s near monotone narration, creating a duality where Jack can see everything but is bored.

Jack is just a hypocrite. As Jack’s very perfect life goes on, he quips to his boss that, “He was full of pep. Must’ve had his grande latte enema.” [4:45] This is immediately followed by a shot of Jack on the toilet, reading the newspaper in a disinterested manner only lasting a few seconds. Grande Latte is obviously a Starbucks drink. An enema is “a liquid preparation inserted into the rectum” which is used commonly to “aid bowel evacuation.” (Peate, *How to administer an enema*) A grande latte enema is quite literally sodomization by corporate America. Jack’s boss suffers from this form of emasculation, but so does Jack as he reads the newspaper sheepishly on a toilet. The peak of masculinity involves domination, not being dominated.

Jack is dead. Jack doesn’t sleep, and Jack works tirelessly on the same task his whole life, nothing more than a space monkey “[doing] the little job [he’s] trained to do... Pull a lever. Push a button.” (Phalanick, 4) And, as Jack is dead... nothing more than “a slave to the IKEA nesting instinct,” [TimeCode] how can he feel alive? Jack does this by tasting not his own, but others’ death. He does this in St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church [9:39]. Not only is Jack bored and a hypocrite but also kind of a narcissist... almost grandiose. St. Christopher is widely regarded as a martyr in Christian religion, and although exclusive to the movie, it’s not much of a stretch to say Jack internally views himself or the dead people in support groups as martyrs. They die so Jack may live. And, among the men slowly dying of testicular cancer, Jack never feels more alive. Jack feels bliss. Not even “babies... sleep this well.” (12) [9:25]

Jack’s bliss is shattered by Marla. Marla is a “liar” and a “fake (12) and a “tourist” (13). Jack “[needs] this.” He needs these groups. He “can’t sleep with Marla here.” Marla is a tourist, a fake, a liar. “Get out.” (13) With Marla’s intrusion into his sanctuary of death, Jack is no longer able to sleep. Two nights into sleeplessness, Jack begins questioning reality. Marla is a fake to Jack, Jack is a fake to Marla, but is every last individual in the support groups “faking with their

lesions and coughs and tumors?” (13). “Marla’s lie reflects [Jack’s] lie, and all [he] can see are lies...” (13) “This is the only one real thing in [his] life.” (13) Jack is driven insane and his world is muddled. The world cannot revolve around Marla and Jack simultaneously. Marla may be a liar, a fake, a tourist; but so is Jack, too weak to admit he is himself a liar, a fake, and a tourist. Everything to Jack once again becomes “far away... a copy of a copy of a copy.” However, now Jack knows the cause. The cause is he needs excitement fueled by death. The taste of death that keeps Jack alive. “The amazing miracle of death... so sweet if it weren’t for... Marla.” (21)

Marla doesn’t die and Jack still cannot sleep. The only refuge of sleep Jack can achieve is the brief moment “when the plane banked too much to one side,” (14) where Jack hopes for death. Narratively, Jack is plagued by insomnia and stress. Metaphorically, Jack is sodomized by corporate America and suffering from an idea of grandiosity. The only thing left for him is to start seeing people. “This is how [he meets] Tyler Durden.” [23:00] (14)

Tyler’s birth is illogical, but Jack’s desperation is concrete. “Tyler, you are by far the most interesting ‘single-serving’ friend I’ve ever met,” [23:55] Jack says as the soap salesman explains how to create napalm. Or was it a nude beach? “Naked and sweating, gritty with sand, his hair wet... Tyler had been around a long time before we met... pulling driftwood logs out of the surf.” (19) But wasn’t Tyler also a “movie projectionist with the union... a banquet waiter at a hotel, downtown... and he gave me his phone number.” (20) Or was it simply just a card labeled “THE PAPER STREET SOAP COMPANY” [23:35]? Was the birth of Tyler an instant? Was the birth of Tyler a gradual coming into existence as Jack continuously devolves into madness? It doesn’t matter. On page 30 or at 28:35 Jack calls Tyler begging to “deliver [Jack]”, to “rescue [Jack]”, to “deliver [Jack] from Swedish furniture... from clever art.” (31) Jack begs. “May I never be complete? May I never be content? May I never be perfect? Deliver me, Tyler, from being perfect and complete.” (31) It’s a desperate plea, a desperate attempt, a desperate grab at the only straw left in Jack’s life. Jack is disillusioned and does not know what to do. But, “if you ask [Jack] now, [he] couldn’t tell you why [he] called [Tyler].” (31) He really doesn’t know, he is simply desperate. He cannot sleep and he cannot cope. In his own psychosis he burns his house down, he ruins his life, all in a desperate grapple to make life worth living. No matter the narrative, as the darkest hour reigns in, Tyler picks up the phone. Tyler is born.

Schizophrenia is typically diagnosed after a first episode of psychosis or continued delusion. A schizophrenic or psychosis episode is characterized by auditory and visual hallucinations. Schizophrenia can also be characterized by delusions of which some examples are grandeur and persecution. Examples of ongoing psychosis may involve seeing a clown reminiscent of the movie IT following you with murderous intent. (McGough, *TEDxPSU*) While, examples of short-term delusions might include drawing parallels between friends, family, or oneself and the anime Neon Genesis Evangelion; or, that an organized campaign of memes is centered around destroying one’s identity. (personal communication, January 24, 2022) These initial episodes of psychosis are typically brought by an onset of insomnia and extreme stress. Jack does not accurately represent schizophrenia but does draw parallels. The character of Tyler is an imaginary friend representing a delusion of grandeur. From Marla’s outside perspective

Jack/Tyler is “an insane person ... intolerable ... [with] serious emotional problems, deep-seeded problems, for which [he] should seek professional help.” [1:59:15] This comes from a suicidal xanax addict who, for fun, goes to support groups for cancer patients. The most important thing to keep in mind is that Jack and Tyler are not mentally okay.

## PT. 2.1 The First Recruit

Jack is first disillusioned. Jack and Tyler Durden have their first conversation and first Fight Club meeting in a bar. Jack has a look of complete death on his face, the look of someone who hasn't slept and had all their possessions burned down. Tyler's first step is to have Jack realize his disillusionment. Jack is still convincing himself that insurance will cover the burned down condo, and therefore return to his previous life. But, Tyler shatters Jack's world by first asking him what a Duvet is, asking why humans know what a duvet is, and if it's really necessary to know what a Duvet is. [29:50] Jack is lost, but listening, responding that our society is just consumers, Tyler immediately goes on to espouse: “Right. We are consumers. We are byproducts of a life-style obsession. Murder, crime, poverty. These things don't concern me.” [30:10] The “me” in this sentence is Jack, and as a consumer, he really doesn't care about murder, crime, poverty or anything else. He is desensitized.

Jack is then indoctrinated. Once the realization that he is desensitized settles in, he becomes disillusioned. That's where Tyler offers his solution, “never be complete... stop being perfect... lets evolve. Let the chips fall where they may.” [30:40] If Jack is able to discard everything he knows, and stop being perfect, he will evolve. However, Jack doesn't know how to do this, he just knows he has to. That's why after offering Jack a place to stay, Tyler asks Jack to “hit [him] as hard as [he] can.” [32:20] Tyler asks Jack to just “do [him] this one favor” because he's “never been in a fight.” [34:20] This is about as bold-faced a lie as one can possibly imagine. Tyler is established through his career as a projectionist flashing genitals on children's films or ejaculating in restaurant food to have confidence and gusto. Even if Tyler has truly never been in a fight, there is no reason he'd enter a fight with Jack just to prove himself something. Tyler is doing this entirely for Jack and framing it as simply a favor. Combined with a sense of disillusionment, Jack goes from the idea being “so fucking stupid” [34:48] to “we should do this again sometime” [35:55] in the span of one minute of run-time. While Jack was once “a slave to the IKEA nesting instinct,” simply collecting furniture for the sake of feeling perfect and whole, Jack is now completely willing to live in a house which “[looks] like it was waiting to be torn down.” [36:25] It's quite the unpleasant place to live; when Jack turns on the tap, the water comes out brown. [37:00] But, Jack doesn't seem to mind and “by the end of the first month [he] didn't miss TV.” [37:50] TVs are the symbol of corporate America, where even the shows themselves began blurring the line between advertisement and entertainment in the 60's. Jack no longer needs to reference Starbucks in his insults, there isn't even a sign of civilization for miles around.

Jack and Tyler indoctrinate others. Jack and Tyler's fights draw spectators. The first spectator to step up and ask sheepishly “can I be next?” [38:09] is a man who clearly hit the bar

right after work— still in a suit and tie, with kempt hair, although his white shirt is a little ruffled. Tyler's only requirement for this man to have a round is "lose the tie." [38:15] Ties are yet another symbol of the status quo, of corporate America. Beyond that, a tie is not cut out for fighting. It dangles from your neck, easily grabbed, and can be used to choke you. Tyler is giving this man an ultimatum: choose your boring life, or choose me.

Fight Club begins. Every day Jack and Tyler pretend to be "Ozzie and Harriet" [40:34] a reference to the longest running live-action sitcom of the time. "But, every Saturday night, [they] were finding out that [they] were not alone." [40:40] Tyler found a base that could be indoctrinated into his state of mind. They are disillusioned with the status quo of corporate America. In a way, they are all emasculated by society like Jack is by a grande latte enema. They are men who can only cope with their lives through a night at the bar. And when Tyler asks them to metaphorically "lose the tie," they willingly become a part of Fight Club. To Jack this is just "finding out that [he is] not alone," but to Tyler, this is the beginning of his future insurgency.

"Don't Talk About Fight Club" is an ingroup signal for an us-vs-them mentality. *Fight Club's* most famous scene occurs after an undetermined time-skip between fighting in the parking lot of a bar, to in it's dimly-lit basement. A crowd gathers around Tyler as he stands, cross-armed with a triumphant look on his face, everything exists in silhouette as the light's only bright enough to show Tyler's face. He is the only man in the world. In these conditions Tyler states, "the first rule of Fight Club is you do not talk about Fight Club. The second rule of Fight Club is you do not talk about Fight Club." [43:00] Tyler establishes three safety and honor rules. If someone needs to stop, you stop; only two guys to a fight; only one fight at a time; fights go on as long as they have to. Finally, two indoctrination rules are established: "no shirts, no shoes" and "if this is your first night at Fight Club you have to fight." [43:35] These rules are the core of Tyler's goals. "No shirt, no shoes" signifies allegiance to Tyler, and "First night at Fight Club you have to fight" forces indoctrination to those present. The safety and honor rules enforce masculine ideas of honor and pride. Most importantly, "Don't Talk About Fight Club" is stressed in the first two rules, making the quote quite famous. But, throughout the movie, people do talk about Fight Club. Not talking about Fight Club, but simply alluding to it, creates an aura of mystery lending to an us-vs-them mentality. You don't talk about Fight Club to keep a secret, you don't talk about Fight Club because *they* won't understand.

Fight Club is toxically masculine. There is no rule against women showing up at Fight Club, but no women do. Fight Club is a narrative around men. "A guy came to Fight Club for the first time. His ass was a wad of cookie dough. After a few weeks, he was carved out of wood." [44:35] *Fight Club* is seen as a masculine film. It's not. It's an ultra-masculine film serving as a basis for those who feel emasculated and disillusioned to regain their masculinity. And in Tyler's narrative, you cannot lose and subsequently regain your masculinity if you're not a man. Fight Club is a support group for "men only." [47:52]

Toxic masculinity and corporate disillusionment go hand-in-hand. Fight Club changes it's participant's world-view. Jack and Tyler feel sorry for "guys packed into gyms, trying to look like how Calvin Klein or Tommy Hilfiger said they should." [45:10] To Tyler and Jack, that is

not a man. That is just someone absorbed in a self-serving fantasy involving submission to the status quo. Instead of “self-improvement” Tyler instead offers “self-destruction.” [45:20] Logically this makes no sense. Fight Club is self-improvement as it allows participants to find themselves... but Tyler frames it as the opposite of what men who submit to the status quo do. Not only is it the opposite, it is superior. The men in Fight Club are disillusioned with corporate America and feel emasculated by it, and their emasculation leads to a further sense of disillusionment. The solution of Fight Club is not necessarily a logical solution, but after Fight Club, everyone “felt saved.” [46:25]

Fight Club’s members are separated from the rest of the world. Jack “[gets] right in everyone’s hostile little face...” acknowledging “these are bruises from fighting... I am enlightened.” [55:30] Jack starts smoking in the office, showing up with blood-stained shirts, and as a result is sent home. He’s “[given] up the condo life, [given] up... worldly possessions.” [55:40] And by throwing away the life built up by the status quo, Jack is unable to relate to anyone outside of Fight Club. Fight Club is his in-group and everyone else is “other.” And, by virtue of Fight Club being mens-only, women are also othered— with women like Marla only being a “sport fuck” [53:10] for men like Tyler.

## Pt. 2.2 Tyler Durden’s Army

Project Mayhem is born. Project Mayhem is an idea which begins differently between the book and movie. The movie’s Project Mayhem origins is Tyler pouring lye powder on Jack’s hand. Because, “without pain, without sacrifice, we would have nothing.” [1:02:45] We see Tyler’s self-realizations and then Jack’s indoctrination. This pain elevates a man like Tyler from leader to God. Tyler views it as “the greatest moment of [his] life,” [1:03:05] and while Jack is screaming and begging for relief, Tyler drills his philosophy into Jack before ending the pain. “First, you have to give up ... First, you have to know, not fear ... that some day you’re going to die.” [1:03:50] It’s coercive. Jack is experiencing more pain than he will ever experience, and the only salvation is submission to Tyler by vowing the knowledge he will someday die. And in vowing this knowledge, he is more willing to follow Tyler. Jack’s vow ends the pain and earns him a congratulation. The first mentions of Project Mayhem in the book have no explanation. And, this interpretation also makes sense, as you can never know about Project Mayhem: “the first rule of Project Mayhem is you don’t ask questions about Project Mayhem.” (84) Tyler Durden is the only soul knowing all the details. Tyler creates Fight Club, then Project Mayhem, for “it [is] at fight club that Tyler [invents] Project Mayhem.” (87) Fight Club is a pipeline into Project Mayhem.

Bob is the perfect Project Mayhem recruit. Bob’s origin story is as the originator of chest-expansion programs on TV. He is peak corporate masculinity, although never shown to be such in the movie. To do this, meatloaf takes the brand-name steroids: Winstrol and Dianabol. [8:15] And now, while once the height of manliness, is left “bankrupt... divorced... [with] two grown kids [who] won’t even return [his] phone calls.” [8:30] Corporate America juices Bob for all he is worth and tosses him aside— they emasculate him, giving him “bitch tits” [3:10] as a

symbol of his emasculation. Bob cries... “we’re still men.” [3:20] He isn’t happy. How can he be? In this state of despair he finds Fight Club, regaining his masculinity, and able to feel “better than [he’s] ever been in [his] whole life.” [1:08:10]

Tyler spreads Project Mayhem. Without Jack’s knowledge, Tyler spreads Fight Club to two other week-nights. Without Jack’s influence, he is able to recruit new members to the cause. His introduction begins by stating the influx of new members “means a lot of people have been breaking the first two rules of Fight Club,” [1:10:00] yet he then immediately veers into a speech. Mention of the first two rules isn’t a chastisement, but a reminder of member’s allegiance to Tyler before beginning new member’s indoctrinations. He names those gathered in the dimly lit basement “slaves with white collars.” [1:10:30] Fight Club is inherently for the white-collar corporate worker; as they are the ones emasculated most by society; the most susceptible to Tyler’s ideals. The men gathered in Fight Club are “the middle children of history... [with] no purpose or place.” [1:10:45] They are the middle children because they are lost, without the purpose of an older brother or the love of a younger brother. Without a war to fight, or an economic depression to conquer, there is nothing for them to dominate. The great war these men need to fight is a spiritual war and the depression they need to conquer is their lives. [1:10:50] Tyler’s final two notes before cut off are: “we’re very, very pissed off” and “first rule of Fight Club is you do not talk about...” [1:11:20]. Tyler acknowledges the anger and resentment built up among white collar slaves, giving them words to describe their anguish, and in re-stating the first rule of Fight Club, gives them a leader to follow.

Tyler’s insanity escalates and Mayhem follows. Tyler begins handing out homework assignments ranging from causing power outages to befouling fountains to ‘molesting’ performance artists. News clipping for the ‘molested’ performance artist only talks about politics and a new court’s opening. [1:21:15] If the articles say any more, those words are covered by Tyler’s hand. After all, this is Tyler’s narrative. Homework assignments are never lethal, even when blowing up an Apple store, [1:21:20] and the news eats up the headlines. The stories really don’t matter, but it’s not every day a newspaper can say both a performance artist is ‘molested’ and a public fountain is befouled all in one day. Within this escalation, Tyler robs a store pointing a revolver to the back of the store clerk’s head. The gun is later shown to be empty. Still, Tyler berates the store clerk: “what did you want to study? ... what did you want to be? ... If you’re not on your way to becoming a veterinarian in six weeks, you will be dead.” [1:23:25] This is just in Tyler’s world-view. The store clerk will aspire to become a veterinarian, and will wake up next morning on “the most beautiful day of [his] life... his breakfast will taste better than any meal [Jack] or [Tyler] have ever tasted.” [1:23:55] Despite bombing stores and pointing guns, “it [starts] to make sense in a Tyler sort of way.” [1:24:00] In one scene, Jack goes from critical of Tyler’s insanity to fully in support. Tyler’s followers believe in Tyler. And why wouldn’t they? The third and fourth rules of Project Mayhem are “no excuses” and “no lies.” (87)

Tyler’s army is ready. Tyler gathers Fight Club’s most loyal members and officially indoctrinates them into Project Mayhem, serving as a further pledge of allegiance to Tyler’s campaign, resulting in increasingly organized and dangerous homework assignments. Army

recruitment consists of a three day test, where members stand rigidly outside Tyler's home while berated with insults: a test for "[becoming] what Tyler [wants] us to be." [1:28:50] Once passed, Tyler asks if you brought: "two black shirts... two pair of black pants... one pair black boots... two pairs black socks... one black jacket... [and] \$300 personal burial money." [1:29:00] No longer is it the case of "no shirt, no shoes." Now, every recruit to Project Mayhem wears this uniform, bringing with them \$300 in case of death on the battlefield. Each Project Mayhem member must be "ready to sacrifice himself for the greater good," [1:30:10] and on his own dime. Almost surprisingly, Jack flatly admits "Tyler built himself an army." [1:30:45] But, why does everyone follow Tyler? For what reasons are they putting their lives and individuality on the line for Tyler? "To what purpose? For what greater good? In Tyler we trusted." [1:31:05] This eerily echoes the United States' official motto of "In God We Trust." Tyler is parodying the institutions he despises and implying himself to be God.

Jack is disillusioned while Tyler plays God. Jack and Tyler's visions and views deviate, yet Project Mayhem continues on; and, by this point in the narrative it is clear Jack and Tyler are the same person. Tyler wants to "be legend... [to not] grow old." (Phalanick, 3) Jack feels left out of Project Mayhem, wanting a sense of belonging he no longer has. He is "Jack's inflamed sense of rejection." [1:35:30] Disillusioned, he wants to destroy Project Mayhem, he wants to "[destroy] something beautiful." [1:37:03] He is "Jack's broken heart." [1:44:05] Tyler hypocritically claims Project Mayhem "does not belong to us." [1:38:18] Members ask, "is Mr. Durden building an army?" [1:49:52] Tyler has control over every aspect of Project Mayhem, but mostly succeeds in making Project Mayhem seem like a decentralized collective working for a greater good. Bob's death reveals to Jack that alongside stripping Project Mayhem members of their sense of fashion they are stripped of their names. Regardless of Project Mayhem members not having names, Tyler is still Tyler Durden although sometimes people call him Mr. Durden. Not even Jack (who is Tyler) can stop Project Mayhem. Tyler is so powerful that even the most insane words are law. Members do not question Tyler when he asks, "if anyone ever interferes with Project Mayhem, even [Tyler], [they] gotta get his balls." [2:02:15] Members don't question orders to castrate Tyler if he stops his own project and not only that, they view him as a "brave man to order this." [2:02:05] Tyler is willing to emasculate himself for trying to stop himself.

Tyler wins. Fight Club is not a feel-good tale where Project Mayhem is stopped and Tyler goes to prison and everyone lives happily ever after. (Though it was in China for a few days) In the movie, Jack kills Tyler and holds Marla's hand as buildings explode in front of his eyes. Pixies *where is my mind* plays as buildings crumble and credits roll. Tyler's plan succeeds and his story is complete. Sure, Jack's ending is confusing and unclear at best — well illustrated by a song where the chorus repeats "where is my mind" three times in a row, a song quite literally about being turned upside down. And further confusion abounds considering Tyler does succeed but dies pleading with Jack to "think of everything we've accomplished," [2:10:15] and to think of "how far have you come because of me." [2:11:30] Blatantly flaunting his hypocrisy, Jack shoots himself through the cheek therefore shooting Tyler through the brain where he can speak for a second before dying while Jack literally stands up with a hoarse voice from likely a shot



windpipe and orders his men to retreat but also get gauze to treat a crushed windpipe and blown out cheek. Either way, *Fight Club* is not something that belongs to a greater us, it's something that belongs exclusively to Tyler. For this, Tyler creates an army and pipeline of indoctrination. He feeds off the disillusioned and emasculated: people who feel wronged by society; to take action under Tyler as their god. *Fight Club* issues its warning: be wary of Tyler ... and leaders like him.

### PT. 3 The Real World

Tyler Durden is cool. This is objectively the wrong take on *Fight Club*. Tyler Durden is not cool ... he's kind of an asshole. Like, asshole is an understatement. But, it's not hard to see why so many people think of Tyler Durden this way. Pete C. Baker in a New Yorker Op-Ed describes *Fight Club* as a "tale of disaffected American men who chase authenticity by pummeling the shit out of one another in poorly lit basements." However, through this lens of coolness, *Fight Club* is also a guide on how to "stop being a miserable beta," and to be more like Tyler, "an alpha who does what he wants and doesn't let anyone stand in his way." Language like *beta* and *alpha* are ideas coming from the Manosphere, a label for groups and communities prioritizing men in society; of which the most infamous is the Incel community. Incels, a term short for *involuntary celibacy*, are online communities prioritizing men who cannot be sexually successful, and like *ingosc* or *thinkpol* from 1984, incels gain a new distinct meaning from the parts of involuntary celibacy. Incels are primarily seen as a community known for outputting mass shooters. (Anti-Defamation League, *Incels*)

Incels' worldview is a catastrophizing one where you take the *red pill* and then the *black pill*. Catastrophization is the idea of taking small logical leaps to get to an illogical conclusion. An example of catastrophizing is if you're late to work your boss will be mad at you which will get you fired which will leave you homeless; therefore, being late to work will leave you homeless. (ContraPoints, *Incels*) The idea of the *red pill* comes from *The Matrix*, meanwhile the *black pill* is a uniquely incel term. Much like *Fight Club*, *The Matrix* is a movie commonly used by ultra-masculine groups who look up to Neo; and, like *Fight Club*, is completely miss-understood considering the creators of *The Matrix* are trans women. The *red pill* comes from a scene in which Morpheus refers to Neo "a slave... like everyone else... born into a prison... for your mind," offering the *red pill* as "the truth, nothing more." (The Wachowskis, *The Matrix*) Incels are slaves in a mental prison and taking the *red pill* for them is adopting the incel world-view where some men are born without the ability to attract partners. A view where females are *femoids*. And, these *femoids* are *hypergamous*; meaning they seek out men of higher status. These higher-status men are known as *chads* or *alphas* who, with their appealing skull and wrist sizes, are able to attract women. (Anti-Defamation League, *Incels*) Some incels can and do get laid, however, they are *normies* used by women as a stepping-stone to getting a *chad*. At its core, the *red pill* is the idea there are three groups of men: *incels*, *normies*, and *chads*.

Where it becomes truly catastrophizing is when Incels become *black pill*ed. The *black pill* is the subsequent idea that these three groups are genetically predetermined: that an incel will

always remain a virgin and therefore will never be happy. (ContraPoints, *Incels*) It's unsurprising, then, that incel terminology constitutes of *sui fuel* and *rope fuel*— terms for encouraging suicide rather than self-help. And, with this group, it's no wonder some people consider *going ER* — short for Elliot Rogers who killed six and injured fourteen in a shooting.

Tyler Durden is a chad. Baker talks of his experiences in the online incel community where he saw “references and offhand worship of Brad Pitt’s character, Tyler Durden, all the time.” Because in the incel worldview: Tyler Durden is a chad, Marla is a femoid who’s hypergamous, and Jack is a normie. This op-ed was actually not in response to *Fight Club*, but in response to *Joker*. “[Joker] presents us with Arthur Fleck, a mentally ill social outcast—a white man, perhaps inevitably—so neglected and maltreated by the world that his recourse to violence is all but guaranteed.” Yet, Baker continues that, “if jumping from one movie to another were possible, [Joker] would be a great candidate for Project Mayhem.” *Joker* embodies the idea of an incel *going ER*, and it’s not an illogical leap to consider Joker as gladly joining Project Mayhem.

A chad is not a nice thing. Jack’s father is a chad, and Jack wants to beat him up. [39:40] Jack explains how his father would have a new family with a new woman every six years akin to setting up a new franchise. [39:55] From Jack’s perspective, his father objectifies women, and so does Tyler. Tyler wonders “if another woman is really the answer we need.” [40:25] And it would make sense that the misogyny Tyler holds overlaps with his ideals. Tyler uses fighting and toxic masculinity as a form of indoctrination into Project Mayhem, drawing a lot of parallels to the Manosphere. And this form of *red pilling* eases a transition down the rabbit-hole of control.

Incels largely overlap with the alt-right. And, much like incels, there are a staggering amount of parallels between movements in the alt right and the concepts in *Fight Club*. Southern Poverty Law Center classifies Incels under the ideology of *Male Supremacy* hate groups.

“A tight overlap exists between the ‘alt-right,’ white supremacist and male supremacist circles, which feed each other’s narratives of the dispossession and oppression of white men, which is blamed on minorities, immigrants and women. Both the alt-right and the manosphere agree that feminism is the cause of Western civilizational decline. In fact, the misogyny intrinsic to the ‘alt-right’ might very well be one of its distinctive feature, or a ‘gateway drug.’ (SPLC, *Male Supremacy*)”

And this gateway drug is the *red pill*. According to research from the Swiss Institute of Technology, “there is significant overlap in the user bases of the Manosphere and of the Alt-right, and... users in the Manosphere systematically go on to consume Alt-right content.” (Mamié, Robin, et al.) A *red pill* incel is extremely vulnerable to indoctrination to the alt-right, or further spiraling into the *black pill*, all going to show how exploitable the emasculation and disillusionment mentality is in reality.

*Red pilling* shields from all responsibility. Another manosphere community is the Pick-Up-Artist community who objectify women and seek to obtain and dominate them sexually for no real purpose other than because they can. The liminal book of Pick-Up-Artistry, *The Game* by Niel Straus, opens by assuaging doubts that the events of the book are real: “it really

happened.” (Straus, 9) Straus asks the reader not to “hate the player ... hate the game.” (9) In other words, don’t hate the Pick-Up-Artist or misogynist, hate the society that made women hard to get. If something is wrong, it is because the world does not bend to a natural order. And in cases of discord, perceptions and reality itself can be shifted to comply with the natural order. (Shaun, *PragerU & The Law*) And once bathed in this natural order, it’s hard to escape. You no longer think of yourself as capable of being wrong, fostering an ‘us-vs-them’ mentality and infinite scapegoats for blame. It fosters the ability to have a populus that can be instilled to act on any order.

Given the nature of Tyler’s populist narrative, and given a community of disillusioned and emasculated men existing within incel and alt-right communities; it would make sense real world parallels can be made between existing populist leaders and Tyler Durden. Real world parallels exist, and *Fight Club* is a threat. China changed the ending of *Fight Club* on Tencent’s streaming services so the authorities arrest Tyler Durden. (CNN) The type of populist leader *Fight Club* creates is China’s biggest threat. One of the most prominent far-right figures resembling Durden in American politics is undoubtedly Donald Trump. On the campaign trail and throughout his presidency, Trump wielded toxic masculinity and the people’s disillusionment with the status quo as a weapon. Trump did this through the help of Steve Bannon and consulting from Cambridge Analytica. Christopher Wylie, a whistleblower for Cambridge Analytica commented on how Bannon saw incels as the perfect base for a following. Wylie described this community as,

“men who felt ignored and chastised by a society— particularly women—that did not value average men anymore... The incel community was in part propelled by the increasing economic inequality depriving young millennial men from accessing the same kinds of well-paying jobs their fathers had.” (Wylie, 150)

Incels are nothing more than men bitter with our corporate world. They feel emasculated. And they need someone to follow. Therefore, it would make sense that as Project Mayhem members follow Tyler Durden, incels are “perversely attracted to society’s ‘winners,’ like Donald Trump... who in their warped view represented the epitome of the same hypercompetitive alphas who brutalized them.” (152) Even further, “many of these seething young men were ready to burn society to the ground.” (152) And this is where “[Steve Bannon] saw these young men as the early recruits in his future insurgency.” (152)

## Conclusion

Tyler is Jack’s desire for change. Jack creates Tyler because he is “looking for a way to change [his] life.” [1:53:20] Tyler is the perfect alpha male. Tyler “[looks] like [Jack wants to] ... [fucks] like [Jack wants to] ... and most importantly... free in all the ways [Jack is] not.” [1:53:30] Tyler doesn’t need to worry about his skull shape and treats women as sport. Tyler doesn’t need to worry about his IKEA catalog or maintaining a perfect condo lifestyle. Tyler is quite literally “all the ways [a man wishes they] could be.” [1:53:26] So, it’s no wonder he’s

worshiped in mansphere circles. He is their perfect leader. He overcomes his life as a normie beta and becomes a legend, a God. In the end, though, Jack loves Marla and kills Tyler. Being an incel or a toxically masculine manly man isn't healthy. It just isn't. Tyler claims all people "see themselves as they'd like to be," [1:53:45] and this is in some ways true. Everyone wishes they had something they don't have; something true even for people who are objectively wrong and fall into the alt right, or are incels, or are toxically masculine manly men. These groups feel wronged by society. It's the same exact wronging that left-leaning communists feel; but, their desperation leads them down a dark path—a path that is easily exploited for ill means. Their ideas of correcting society are an imposition of their ideologies onto everyone else, something that cannot be done alone. So, when a leader like Trump comes along and recognizes these groups as a perfect army, they willingly latch on in droves and continue following his promises even after their leader is gone. Populist leaders are dangerous. They are dangerous because they exploit a vulnerable group and utilize them for personal gain. These groups ask us to not "hate the player ... hate the game." (Straus, 9) And we should hate the game, but not the game these groups believe in. We should hate and seek to uproot the systems which not only create populist leaders but also create groups with these exploitable and dangerous mentalities.

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