

Fight Club's Incel To Exploitable Chad Pipeline

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<https://youtu.be/XfkJV6ToOyU>

Abstract

United States politics has been predominantly centered around the ideas of populism: the idea of leveraging the concerns of groups who do not feel heard by their leaders. From Donald Trump's rhetoric of restoring jobs to the working class and strengthening of nationalist values to Bernie Sanders' promises of socialized healthcare and free higher education, populism simply refers to this idea of an appeal to people's sense of disillusionment with a status quo. And although this sense of disillusionment is equal between both extremes of the United States political climate, the populist rhetoric used by each side is vastly different and at times diametrically opposed. *Fight Club* is a book released in 1996 with a more prominently referred to movie released in 1999 that eerily foreshadows aspects of the right-wing populist campaign of Donald Trump. *Fight Club* tells the story of the disillusioned and emmasculated middle-class American "White Collar slaves" [1:10:30] as they rise from underground boxing clubs to terrorist organization. This story, as a lens of analysis, can be used to dissect aspects of the Trump campaign, specifically its use of the Incel, Pick-Up-Artist, and overall Manosphere to rise to power.



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BIBLIOGRAPHY

OPENING

I used to be just like you, you know. Unwashed, lost, afraid... craving the touch of a woman, and yet despising the hand that reached out. An incel. I remember, all too well, those days which bled into night, then back into day, spent helplessly crawling through youtube, reddit, 4chan. The depths of the internet were cold comfort from the scorn of the outside world, but they were all I had. And then... in my darkest hour... He came for me. HE alone offered words which captured how I felt, HE lent me hope, and HE put me on a path of higher purpose. Donald Trump. As if he were a messiah blessed with vision from on high, he always spoke the truth that society was too apathetic, too scared, too WEAK to accept. The world may not have been ready to heed his words... but I was. Ready to stop being an incel, a sheep, a virgin. Ready to become a chad. Ready to finally... be like Tyler.

Tyler... Tyler... Tyler Durden. Tyler Durden is a character from the 1996 book later turned movie Fight Club. Fight Club depicts this man, Tyler Durden, shepherding a group of emmasculated and disolusioned office workers fed up with the status quo from underground boxing rings to a terrorist organization. You do not need to have watched Fight Club for this video, as this video will be going over Fight Club's ramifications, how Fight Club can be seen as a lens of analysis. Because the campaign of Tyler Durden is eerily similar to that of Donald Trump's alt-right campaign, specifically it's micro-targeting of incel, pick-up-artist, men's rights activists, and other so-called manosphere communities. I hope this dissection of Fight Club and it's real-world counterpart - Trump, Incels, and the Alt-Right - serves to demystify talking about the alt-right in an intellectual sense, as a lack of down-to-earth academic looks into these topics is what leads to events like #GamerGate (Chess & Shaw 2015). That's why this is a YouTube video. And because it's a YouTube video, I can say fuck.

I have an interest in this topic. The rise of the alt-right as we will later discuss is diametrically opposed to a few things... like my rights. One of the architects of this insurgency says about his induction into politics that: “For someone gay and in a wheelchair ... my challenges were political. My life was political. My mere existence was political.” (Wylie, 12) But more importantly continues to speak about the hacker community and his relation to it:

“Hackers couldn’t care less what you look like or if you walk funny ... [I learned] that no system is absolute. The hacker philosophy taught me that if you shift your perspective on any system---a computer, a network, even society---you may discover flaws and vulnerabilities. As a gay kid in a wheelchair, I came to understand systems of power early on in life. But as a hacker, I learned that every system has a weakness waiting to be exploited.” (Wylie, 12)

When researching this video, this book hooked me. As a trans person, as a programmer, as a sociologist, and as someone with an interest in psychology... something about all these coming together to destroy American society was fascinating. But I’m getting ahead of myself. I have one thing to say before we get started:

Don’t Talk About Fight Club.

Think of this as [*points to MAGA hat*] a bit of a phrase like Make America Great Again.

Topic and Content Warnings for: Racism and White Supremacy; Toxic Masculinity, Misogyny, and shirtless men; Mass Shootings, Politics, The Trump Campaign, psychological warfare and The Alt Right, as well as cults, Jonestown, 1984, and finally the incel, pick-up-artist, and men's rights activist movements, suicide, cancer, and mental health.

Chuck Palahaniuk, author of *Fight Club*, asks readers on the first page of his book *Choke* to not read *Choke* in order to save themselves while they’re still in one piece. Palahaniuk’s is a

master-class troll that deserves a feature-length video for himself, but this complexity has led him to create the rabbit-hole that is *Fight Club*. *Fight Club* leads people down very, very weird places and hundreds of pages of reading. This deep into the rabbit-hole, it's time to get into the nitty gritty, and start rolling around in some dark basements.

Ew.

INTRODUCTION PT 1

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. Jones had a fascination with power and real-world leaders ranging from Stalin, Marx, Mao Zedong, Gandhi to primarily Hitler (*Reiterman*, Raven) - all figures able to capitalize off of populist ideology regardless of their goals and actions. Gandhi and Marx were pupoulist leaders. They wanted to up-end the status quo: Marx through economic reform and Ghandi through political and peaceful resistance.

Philip Zimbardo, infamous for the cruel and unusual Stanford Prison experiment, saw Jone's techniques as similar to that of George Orwell's 1984. (APA, *Lessons from Jonestown*) Cruelty knows cruelty best, it seems. The four tenets Jones borrowed from 1984 to build Jonestown were:

1. The Panopticon of Big Brother: "Big Brother Is Watching You ... [but] of course there was no way of knowing... at any given moment." (Orwell, 4)
2. The use of 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.

The fourth point refers to a concept in 1984 known as NewSpeak. The high concept of 1984 is "what if a dystopian government (Ingsoc or English Socialism) existed and controlled the populace." 1984 has become synonymous with authoritarianism or anything vaguely related to it, but one of its most important ideas is this idea of NewSpeak. NewSpeak, created by 1984's

Ingsoc government, is a language created to control a population by removing, truncating, and adding words to prevent rebellious thoughts. (Orwell, 286) It's mind-control. Ingsoc itself serves as an example. Newspeak takes a complicated idea —English Socialism— and simplifies it in a way discarding “unnecessary” meaning. While most equate 1984 to any form of authoritarianism, it is this specific kind of manipulation of language and the mind that truly classifies 1984.

This is a real world phenomenon. The Nazi party is short for the Nationalsozialist party or The National Socialist party. Politburo is short for the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. But because of this truncation of unnecessary words, you don't think of a Nazi as a *national socialist*, you just think of them as a Nazi, which has a different meaning. When you think of the Politburo you do not think of revolutionary communism - you think of Stalin. The combination of words creates a sort of new word that can be appropriated to any meaning. (Orwell, 273)

Another example we will later cover is *incel*. An *incel* is short for involuntary celibate, or in layman's terms, someone who can't get laid by forces outside their control. But we sure don't think of *Incels* as people who just can't get laid... the word has developed its own, new meaning.

George Orwell poses the idea that in a sufficiently authoritarian regime, Newspeak can control a population. A great example of this is pronouns. Check-mate liberals. The idea is, if you remove pronouns from a language, there's little way to express gender identity, essentially erasing gender as a concept in the mind. 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*.

Control is key. Jim Jones indoctrinated through an ‘us-versus-them’ mentality and preying on irrational fears. (APA, *Cults of Hatred*) If you can prey on an individual's weakest points: their hatred, fears, insecurities you convince them to follow you. You can then capitalize off their insecurities: limit their speech, instill a fear of rebellion, train them to commit suicide, and commit extremist acts. You can create an army. Tyler Durden is a populist leader who capitalizes off a disillusioned and emasculated populus in order to build an insurgent army.

INTRODUCTION PT 2

For the sake of this analysis, *Fight Club* can be split into two stories. *Fight Club* is the story of an emasculated and disillusioned office worker (Jack) finding his identity through underground boxing rings and his relationship with the characters of Tyler Durden and Marla Singer as well as his relationship to his own masculinity. *Fight Club* is also the story of Jack following the lead of Tyler Durden to create first underground boxing rings, a terrorist organization, and inevitably becoming Tyler Durden. The first is an interpersonal view on toxic masculinity, emasculation, disillusionment with the status quo, while the second is a story focused on how that is leveraged for the sake of Tyler Durden's populist campaign. *Fight Club* is best known for Fight Club; however, Fight Club as an underground boxing club only takes up about a third the story.

Fight Club is the middle of an arc of three parts:

The Birth of Tyler Durden,

The First Recruit,

Tyler Durden's Army.

The Birth of Tyler Durden is the story of Jack's struggles in working class America, and subsequent emasculation and disillusionment. Tyler Durden is an alter ego of Jack occupying a role somewhere in-between psychosis hallucination and dissociative personality. The First Recruit is the story of Jack's indoctrination into Fight Club by Tyler Durden through populist ideals. Finally, Tyler Durden's Army is the story of Tyler. Tyler through the use of the techniques of indoctrination used on Jack and other characters such as Bob, is able to amass a terrorist organization named Project Mayhem capable of blowing up buildings. Each of these sections

involves moving elements and characters, but is ultimately two stories: the micro interpersonal story of Jack in corporate America and macro story of Tyler Durden's populist campaign.

This story will eerily echo aspects of Trump's campaign, something we will discuss afterwards. We will use the lens of Fight Club to analyze modern movements.

THE BIRTH OF TYLER DURDEN

At the end of *Fight Club*, Marla Singer, the main female romantic interest of *Fight Club* describes Jack and Tyler as “an insane person ... intolerable ... [with] serious emotional problems, deep-seeded problems, for which [he] should seek professional help.” [1:59:15] Marla is a suicidal xanax addict who, for fun, goes to support groups for cancer patients. For her to say Jack needs help -- there is definitely some weight behind that. However, Jack did not start off as this person; as Tyler. Jack starts off as a disillusioned and emasculated office worker in corporate America who sees *something* wrong, but who just can't put his finger on it. A lot happens between being a disillusioned office worker and becoming a terrorist organization leader, and the first step is insomnia.

Jack does not sleep. The first conflict of *Fight Club* portrays Jack desperately trying to cure his insomnia by any means necessary. His insomnia is driving him insane. “With insomnia, nothing is real. Everything is far away. Everything is a copy of a copy of a copy.” [Fincher, 4:00] (Phalanik, 11) And even as someone without insomnia I can sympathize with the stress that must put Jack under. Three weeks into Jack's insomnia, Jack re-visits the doctor, the explanation?: "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*, there is an underlying cause. This combined with this feeling of insanity creates a setup in which Jack needs to find the underlying cause.

Jack's underlying cause is routine. 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. A literal birds-eye view. The movie portrays Jack's beginnings from the perspective of an outside observer. Jack is never explicitly

named. Jack is simply “The Narrator,” with Jack only being the name the Fight Club community gave him. Jack does not live his life, but simply looks on as his life continues. This is mostly achieved through Edward Norton’s near monotone narration, creating this sense of monotonous routine.

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 taking a shit, 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. Or, in less sophisticated terms: Jack is being fucked in the ass by Starbucks. Jack’s boss suffers from this form of emasculation through routine, but so does Jack as he reads the newspaper sheepishly on a toilet. The routine of mindlessly flipping through newspapers, living life as a space monkey “[doing] the little job [he’s] trained to do... Pull a lever. Push a button.” (Phalanick, 4) Jack is nothing more than “a slave to the IKEA nesting instinct.”

Jack is suffering. How can he feel alive in his monotonous routine? He finds the answer: by tasting another's death. He does this in St. Christopher's Episcopal Church [9:39] by visiting cancer support groups, pretending he is dying of testicular cancer. 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. It’s REALLY narcissistic, and the idea of narcissism will play a key role later on in Trump’s campaign - not for the reasons you might think. 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] It becomes his new routine.

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, 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. Jack and Marla cannot BOTH be the center of the world. 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 this routine of other’s suffering. The taste of death that keeps Jack alive. “The amazing miracle of death... so sweet if it weren’t for... Marla.” (21)

Marla does not 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 being fucked in the ass by America and is narcissistic. He is weak, at his darkest moment, ripe for exploitation, and “this is how [he meets] Tyler Durden.” [23:00] (14)

Tyler's birth is illogical. “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) It’s important to mention that this is some of the absolute gayest the book gets, as Jack quite literally simps for Tyler Durden as he’s naked, glistening with sweat, on a beach, pulling driftwood. It’s... really gay. But in this story, Jack simps for Durden; he simps for the version of himself he wants to be. 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.

Tyler Durden’s Birth says a lot about race. Fight Club says a lot about race. It’s precisely by the exclusion of race that Fight Club says a lot about race. Everybody in it is white. And why wouldn’t they be? It’s a white man’s story. It’s the story of those at society’s top not feeling like they’re on top anymore. The seemingly perpetual warfare of American experience was brought to a screeching halt as the last great enemy of American hegemony was defeated. White middle class Americans no longer have an enemy to fight against. They’re left drifting through

monotony and white collar jobs. As Tyler says, they're "the middle children of history... and [they're] very very pissed off" [idk the time stamp sorry].

People of color don't have this problem. They have many other problems. They are... "them" - "others" - not part of the ingroup. While we? We have to deal with this monotony, this routine, this sense of being closeted to who we truly are. Those who aren't these white men are crushed by the boot of American society in very obvious ways and have been fighting against said boot for hundreds of years. Their perpetual warfare is wholly different from that of white America and, as such, didn't end with the fall of the Soviet Union. It's the warfare against the systems that *Fight Club*'s protagonists had benefited from for so long.

Fight Club shows the white America turning its anger inward. Tyler tells the members of *Fight Club* they are "slaves with white collars" [1:10:30]. Slavery in America obviously has racial connotations. This line then has one of two meanings. The first is what I think the intended message of the work was, which is that American neoliberal capitalism is the enemy of even the group that it purports to help. White men have just as much to gain by destroying the systems that bind them as any minority. Of course, this is still problematic. *Fight Club* glosses over the struggles of marginalized people to bend over backwards to accommodate its intended audience by co-opting imagery of the horrors that white people perpetrated against people of color in America. That's clearly not great.

The second, however, is far more dangerous. This is the message that the right, the incels, the reactionaries get out of it. White men are now the oppressed ones. White men don't see themselves as slaves to corporations but to the "woke mob." Their existential threat isn't capitalism but the great replacement. The banks don't need to be destroyed, the cultural bolsheviks do. And we'll talk about this more later. The racial message of *Fight Club* has

changed in the decades since the book and movie came out; It's no longer about disaffected workers finding a way out of our capitalist hellscape but about a cool guy saying that women and people of color are enslaving and destroying white people and for some reason he's actually fake for some reason that now only serves as a weird plot twist.

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 at this moment is a salesperson, and his first step is having 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 has a product to sell: his movement. He asks a leading question: what is a duvet? Why do humans know what a duvet is? Is it 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] Tyler pinpoints Jack's issue: he is sick of routine, he is sick of being emasculated by the consumer lifestyle of corporate America, he is desensitized to crime and poverty; he is disillusioned with the status quo.

Jack is 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’s members are polarized. They 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 is no longer a part of corporate America. Jack starts

smoking in the office, showing up with blood-stained shirts. He is sent home. Jack is given an ultimatum: clean up and work for the man or go back to the ingroup. But Jack has “[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 *them*.

Women are *them*. There is no rule against women showing up at Fight Club, but no women do. Fight Club is a narrative for 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. But that’s an understatement. It’s an ultra-masculine film serving as a basis for those who feel emasculated and disillusioned to regain their masculinity. And, this feels kinda weird to say out loud, but masculinity is only for men. Fight Club is a support group for “men only.” [47:52] Women like Marla are only a “sport fuck.” [53:10] The othering of women and the inherent misogyny of Fight Club serves as a tool for polarization. Fight Club is not only a masculine film, but a toxically masculine film; to the point where Fight Club has become one of those “red flag” films that if a date tells you it’s their favorite you run.

Toxic masculinity and corporate disillusionment go hand-in-hand. Fight Club changes its 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. They quite literally equate these self help and self improvement junkies to people masturbating, as these men do not define their own masculinity through grit, but instead are told by corporate America how to be. Instead of this form of “self-improvement” Tyler instead offers “self-destruction.” [45:20] Logically it makes no sense. Because this self-destruction is self

improvement to these men. But that's not how society views it. After Fight Club everyone "felt saved" [46:25] but in reality, they are members of society so polarized they can no longer function with the *other*. It's a self-cycle where the men in Fight Club are disillusioned and emasculated by corporate America, and these feelings then perpetuate a further feeling of disillusionment and emasculation. They have a sort of hindsight bias where they can never think of being who they once were. This leads these men to be incredibly dangerous, this leads them to be perfect recruits for an army.

TYLER DURDEN'S ARMY

“Why do we believe the stories our leaders tell us? ... If you want to get thousands of strangers to work as a team, you need someone to hold things together... The human brain is not equipped to juggle more than a hundred and fifty meaningful relationships... Projects [such as the pyramids or sending rockets to the moon] on that scale call for cooperation in much larger groups, so leaders needed to incentivise us. How? With myths. We learned to *imagine* kinship with people we never met. Religions, states, companies, nations -- all of these only really exist in our minds, in the narratives our leaders tell... The most obvious example of such a myth is, of course, God. Or call it the original Big Brother.”

Rutger Bregman, *Humankind* pg. 233

Project Mayhem is born. Project Mayhem is a project on the scale of a religion with the capacity to blow up buildings for the sake of wiping all credit. And as the scale of Fight Club exceeds the dozens, then hundreds, it needs a myth on the scale of God. And that God is Tyler Durden. Durden becomes Big Brother. Durden becomes Big Brother not by physically being everywhere, but because he could be anywhere. Project Mayhem “automatizes and disindividualize” (*Foucault*, *Discipline and Punish*, 218) Tyler Durden’s power. Jack is an inmate in the panopticon, “there was no way of knowing whether [he] is being watched at any given moment.” (*Orwell*, 1984, 4) Tyler Durden is internalized in Jack because Jack and Tyler Durden are the same person. And like Jack, Project Mayhem members never know if Durden is around the corner as they ask “is Durden building an army?” [1:49:52] to Tyler Durden’s face. Tyler,

throughout the first half of Fight Club is able to build an army capable of going to any extreme. Throughout the second half, he acts as God, pushing his members to terroristic extremes for the sake of hypocritical ideals.

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 is 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: Wisterol and Diabonal. [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.

THE REAL WORLD PT 1

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 pummelling 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 are the incel community, the seduction community, and men's rights activists. Incels, a term short for *involuntary celibacy*, is the most prominent of these groups 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*)

Incel's 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. (Wynn 2018) The *red pilling* of an incel, or later on members of the alt right, is gradual. (Munn 2019) 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*. 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. (Wynn 2018) It’s unsurprising, then, that incel terminology constitutes of *sui fuel* and *rope fuel* — terms for encouraging suicide rather than self-help. Incel forums on places such as Reddit and 4Chan only serve to further isolate these groups as Incels seek them out as a form of digital self harm. (Wynn 2018) With all this, it's no wonder some people consider *going ER* — short for Elliot Rogers who killed six and injured fourteen in a shooting.

Red pilling shields from all responsibility. All because by continuously taking these red pills, incels continuously change their perception of reality around them. A perfect example of this is another manosphere community: 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. In order to do this, they have to create the idea that women want this. Matt Forney, a popular

Pick-Up-Artist states that “Deep inside, every girl is screaming for a man to put her in her place” (Forney, 2018) The seduction community, as it is also known, view women as a “scientifically hackable quest for maximum sex with mimal emotional investment.” (Baker 2019) Baker describes the rise of *Fight Club* as a possible danger that came with the rise of the Pick-Up-Artist community, and specifically the book *The Game: Pene-[laugh]-trating The Secret Society of Pick-Up-Artists* by Niel Strauss. This liminal book of Pick-Up-Artistry opens by assuaging doubts that the events of the book are real: “it really happened.” (Straus, 9) Straus then asks us 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. There have been many books that have come after this one, many people hoping to capitalize on the seduction community by promising that these are perfect techniques, when in reality they just don’t work. These techniques mostly don’t work because they have gems of advice like “Not complimenting [women] will help you because you are withholding a reward that all women want, one that they will stick around waiting for.” (Valizadeh, 2007) But if something is wrong, if these amazing techniques *don’t work*, then 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 this natural order is polarizing. A natruall order, that according to Roosh V—another prominent pick-up-artist— is “woman and gays are seen supieror to straight men.” (Yates, 2015) This quote is just another perfect example of the levels of reality that get disoriented from redpilling. 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. You can escape, Niel Strauss the author of *The Game* did, but he is just one in a community of many.

Manosphere communities feel systematically emasculated. Incels will blame chads and alphas, pick-up-artists will blame women, and men's rights activists blame Western civilization. In the Men's Rights Movement: Feminists, The Gays, Cultural Marxists are to blame. Feminism within Mens Rights Activist groups are seen almost as a boogie-man. Research done on r/MensRights shows that the two biggest themes in the community are an active oppression of men, and a pervasiveness of feminism. (Rafaiel & Freitas 2019) To the MRA community, feminism is everywhere: in the government, in academic communities, in your video games (Chess & Shaw 2015) - and feminism is out to get you. This is how you get GamerGate. The idea that the government is funding hundreds of millions in order to invade the video game industry with "feminism" and "Cultural Marxism" - whatever that means. All of this in response to research aimed towards making games, STEM, and society better and more inclusive (something I explore in my video *Why Women Don't Code But Trans Women Do*). This manosphere sense of the word "feminism" and "Cultural Marxism" is pretty much devoid of any meaning - they're just a catch-all word for *them*. Because when the manosphere talks of feminism and GamerGate, they are talking about the opposite of everything I just said: a worsening of games, STEM, and society. And all this unironically reminds me of Big Brother. That is not to say that feminism is by any means big brother, but I am saying that's what these groups believe.

This Cultural Marxism and Feminism is bad. They ask others to use their preferred pronoun, words "at the vanguard of ... [ideology] frighteningly similar to the Marxist doctrines that killed at least 100 million people in the 20th century" (Peterson 2016) This quote, from

Jordan Peterson's op-ed on the National Post, is what propelled him into fame by capitalizing off of prejudice around Bill C16 in Canada. Peterson believes that pronouns are quite literally 1984, which as I have stated previously is antithetical to what literally 1984 says; as pronouns give people more expression rather than less. Let's take this one step further. Putin, in his blood and soil campaign to occupy Ukraine, put out a statement on March 16, 2022 stating that gender freedoms are a part of decadence and national betrayal to Russia. (Putin 2022) Putin even used the same exact tools Donald Trump used on the campaign trail for the purpose of attacking the Donetsk region by creating extremism and Russian sympathy. (Wylie 2019:151) Keep in mind, this information has existed since 2019. This is where manosphere ideology becomes incredibly dangerous beyond merely a personal prejudice. Their systematic emasculation by an entire system and culture leads towards a vulnerability that is exploited by right-wing populist leaders. This is where Fight Club becomes Project Mayhem. This is where a populist leader can create Jonestown. This is where a reality-TV host can become Trump.

Manosphere communities are insulated. Because of the design and culture of 4chan and Reddit's communities, manosphere communities are continuously self-radicalized. (Massanari 2017) They gate-keep and implicitly or explicitly discourage female participation. (Massanari 2017) This creates a feed-back loop. If you've ever been in an event where the microphone sounds really loud out of the speakers and you get a wuuuuub noise, that's a feedback loop. The microphone is picking up the speakers and then the speakers play the sound from the microphone and it gets louder and louder until someone turns off the microphone. That is a feed-back loop. And this feed-back loop is propelled by memes and in-jokes that only the groups understand. As Innuendo Studios puts it, how do you explain to a journalist that the colors purple and green are a symbol of rape in the GamerGate logo? "How do you explain that the number 1488 is a Nazi

number?” (Danskin 2021) And the worst part about this, is those attempting to de-radicalize join a losing battle, because those radicalized are already in their in-group, and we have to convince them to go against that in-group. (Danskin 2021)

Fight Club echoes manosphere ideology. 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 hypergamous femoid, 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*. Joker starts off with a mentally ill clown, Arthur Fleck who slowly falls down a rabbit-hole of being ignored by society. Joker is slowly red-pilled through this refusal of help, through rejection by women, by the world hating him; to the point where he has a Joker moment. In our online lingo, what does having a Joker moment mean? Does it mean when Joker killed two people on the subway? Does it mean when Joker kills Murray on live TV? Does it mean the riots that ensue? Does it really matter? A Joker moment is synonymous for the idea of going ER. For the idea of taking online actions and shitposting on 4chan and taking real-world and decisive action. (Munn 2019) And the batman franchise is ripe for picking apart by incels. As F.D signifier puts it, is Joker really the incel, or is Batman?

Violence is the only answer for the manosphere. Incels are seen by some as almost terroristic in their mind-set. When an incel becomes black pill, or even red pill, it’s almost no wonder that the next logical step is to *go ER*. If the world is absolutely broken in their mind,

and further biologically or hierarchically determined, in their mind they would be doing the world a service. We can in some ways sympathize with Joker, and even cheer him on as he *goes ER*. This isn't to say that every incel would commit a hate-crime or act of terrorism, but that these groups are so hopeless and exploitable that they very easily could given the right prodding from the right people.

Incels largely overlap with the US 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*, a pill that comes in all shapes and sizes: ranging islamaphobia, homophobia, anti-SJW sentiment, anti-semitism, you name it! (Munn 2019) 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.

THE REAL WORLD PT 2

Fight Club overlaps with Donald Trump's presidential campaign. This story extends beyond Donald Trump's presidential campaign. This is where I have to bring in a name I mentioned at the start of this video: Cristopher Wylie. Because *Fight Club* is a story that, when analyzed, leads you down a lot of very, very interesting places. This is not the story of Trump, actually. It is the story of how Steve Bannon is Tyler Durden.

Background is necessary. Cristopher Wylie is one of the founding members of a firm called Cambridge Analytica. Cambridge Analytica popped in the news with a series of articles from the Guardian serving as an expose. The Guardian's headlines ranged from: 'I made Steve Bannon's psychological warfare tool' to '50 million FaceBook profiles harvested' to headlines featuring Brexit, FaceBook, police raids, you name it. By 2014, Cambridge Analytica was a psychological warfare firm used by alt-right leaders: Trump, Ted Cruz, Roy Blunt, Tom Cotton; with interest from people like Jeb Bush. (Wylie 2019:140) With millions invested by right wing investors, and with heavy influence from Steve Bannon; Cambridge Analytica was a direct part of the alt-right's creation story in America through its targeting of incel and incel-adjacent communities to create ripples that would almost inevitably lead to the election of Donald Trump. This was done through the harvesting of 87 million FaceBook profiles, in which Cambridge Analytica created psychological profiles which would be used to create and target campaign advertisements. This is far more dangerous than you would first think. In 2019, Wylie published a memoir talking of his time at Cambridge Analytica: the story of how he created the alt right. Minf*ck is one of the best books I have read: a mixture of terrifying and interesting that I wouldn't recommend enough.

I have a personal connection to this. Christopher Wylie is a gay data scientist; a fashion, psychology, and sociology nerd - and I relate a lot to him. He thought of the world almost like a game. He wanted to be at the edge of science. And he really was with the work he was doing. He wanted to be remembered for decades (Wylie 2019:111)... I can understand his excitement. I get excited about projects, sometimes overlooking important details. And although I haven't created something like the alt-right, glossing over key details in my excitement has led to criticism from others. Eventually the extent of harm Wylie did crashed down on him, and he blew the whistle. As a gay and disabled man, he created something opposed to his existence, and also one that is opposed to mine. And because of that I can put myself in his shoes. Wylie learned how to create an uprising, because he helped create one. And the concept is actually quite simple:

“Insurgencies, by nature, are asymmetric, in that a few people can cause large effects... [You identify] the types of people who are both susceptible to new thinking and connected enough to inject [a] counter-narrative into their social network... The manipulator attempts to ‘steal’ the concept of self from his target... Often this involves gradually breaking down what are called psychological resilience factors over several months... Targets are encouraged to begin catastrophizing about minor or imagined events... Counternarratives also attempt to foster distrust in order to mitigate communication with others... The ultimate aim is to trigger negative emotions and thought processes associated with impulsive, erratic, or compulsive behavior.” (Wylie 2019:48)

I feel like I just summarized the plot of *Fight Club*. Tyler Durden identifies Jack as susceptible to new ideas. He creates a community of people like Jack in Fight Club. He gradually breaks Jack down. Jack starts to view the world differently and stops trusting anyone outside of

Fight Club. Durden can then make Jack - or the other fight club members - act on their negative emotions in order to carry out his bidding. Cambridge Analytica found three major traits that lead someone to be the most susceptible to this manipulation. Wylie called these Dark Triad traits. They are machiavellism (ruthless self interest), psychopathy, and narcissism. (Wylie 2019:119) Some of these can be seen in Jack: as I said, he is kinda a narcissist. Steve Bannon, through the use of Cambridge Analytica, capitalized off the Jacks of the world.

Steve Bannon views himself as a thinker. Steve Bannon is actually more important than Trump in this story; Trump being more so the result with Bannon being the journey. Wylie describes his first interaction with Steve Bannon in quite positive terms.

“We talked for four hours - not only about politics but about fashion and culture, Foucault, the third-wave feminist Judith Butler, and the nature of the fractured self... He spoke with a certain wokeness I hadn't expected at all.” (Wylie 2019:60)

Before this, Wylie had never known about Steve Bannon. Why would he? Bannon was just a small contributor to Breitbart news. He saw something unique though. He saw how incels could be mobilized, specifically during the events of GamerGate (Wylie 2019:62). He learned this group was fierce, having run a gold-farming service in World of Warcraft. He saw that a toxic web can mold a toxic self. (Munn 2019) which led him to Cambridge Analytica. GamerGate made Breitbart, and made Steve Bannon. (Danskin 2021) Later though, Wylie recognized some of Bannon's hypocrisies in viewing himself as a free-thinker:

“I knew Bannon would go on rants about how America was changing too much, his prophetic notion of an impending great conflict, or his misreading of dharma in Hinduism, which bordered on feteshistic Orientalism.” (Wylie 2019:143)

But what did Bannon want? What did Bannon want with a military and counter-terrorism contractor? Bannon was against the establishment. Wylie describes Bannon as wanting to break everything, fracture the establishment; he did not want the state dictating America’s destiny. (Wylie 2019:132) To do this he needed an army for his movement. (Wylie 2019:132) He needed an army to unleash chaos. (Wylie 2019:132) So for such grand philosophical ideals, where could Bannon start his army? All he needed was a basis, and from that basis he could build. And that basis would be the Incel community. Wylie describes Incels 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 2019:150)

Incels are nothing more than men bitter with our corporate world. They feel emasculated, fucked in the ass by society. 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.” (Wylie 2019:152) These are people who started by watching Steven Crowder or Ben Shapiro. (Munn 2019) And they are attracted to the spectacle of Trump, as he presents a view of insurgency to up-end the status quo. (Nicholas 2019) Even further, “many of these seething young men were ready to burn society to the

ground.” (Wylie 2019:152) Incels would become a perfect base for where an insurgency could be built. All Bannon needed was a foundation. Wylie speaks to this:

“Cambridge Analytica needed only to infect a small sliver of the population, and then it could watch it spread... Meetings took place in counties all across the United States, starting with the early Republican primary states, and people would get more and more fired up at what they saw as ‘us vs. them.’ What began as their digital fantasy, sitting alone in their bedrooms late at night clicking on links, was becoming their new reality. The narrative was right in front of them, talking to them, live and in the flesh.” (Wylie 2019:122)

Cambridge Analytica didn’t need to convince everyone. They just needed a small number of people, primarily Manosphere communities or the people associated with them to start organizing in small groups. Then they’d organize in bigger groups. Then they would self organize and self campaign. Once that was done, Cambridge Analytica could move onto the next place and watch as this virus spread. Cambridge Analytica went beyond just exploring incels and the manosphere but also looking into and capitalizing off of racial tensions. (Wylie 2019:123) They would explore what people truly believed. White men in America felt closeted (Wylie 2019:116). Where they once could be racist or misogynistic, now because of the political correctness culture they would be labeled racists. They felt closeted the same way the gays do, but are by no means marginalized. (Munn 2019) And this sense of being in the closet, even something as simple as having closeted hobbies (that of general Reddit culture) is a *powerful* tool for radicalization into the alt right. (Danskin 2019)

Research shows their methods are effective. Two of their tactics were tailoring and micro-targeting. Tailoring is creating advertisements for a specific populous, and micro-targeting

is taking advertisements and showing them to people on an individual level. With 87 million FaceBook profiles, Cambridge Analytica was able to create psychological profiles of millions upon millions of Americans. They would then tailor advertisements that would polarize populations. Once these tailored ads (like “drain the swamp”, “make america great again”) were created, Cambridge Analytica targeted these advertisements to people on an individual level to create the most polarization. The advertisements Cambridge Analytica used show patterns that mirror r/MensRights: engagement is the highest when a target is either angered or disgusted. (Rafael & Freitas 2019) This campaign messaging appealed to the sense of “being in the closet” in regards to racism and misogyny and targeted people on an individual level to cause the most damage. Cambridge Analytica colonized the self, hearts, and minds of people on an individual level. (Munn 2019) Recent research from the 2020 election shows that even with fairly tame Trump advertisements showcasing Biden mocking people, Hunter Biden's corruption, Biden taking away guns, Biden saying black Trump supporters are not Black, and the neglect of veterans; that simply just targeting these ads to the right people for the greatest polarization could decrease an unaligned groups intent to vote Biden by 7.1%. (Jacobs-Harukawa) That is enough to sway close elections, with Jacobs-Harukawa predicting that this algorithm could have flipped Arizona from Biden to Trump. And what's the funniest thing about Jacobs-Harukawa's research is it uses sci-kit learn - a data science library meant for beginners - just to showcase that implementing this methodology is easy. For fucks sake, I could've done this given enough spare time. I, a fucking 18 year old high-school graduate, have enough knowledge that I could have helped swing the elections of an entire state in 2020. Other research shows that not just campaign advertisements, but memes and humor that normalize alt-right ideas play a key role in radicalization. (Munn 2019) Cambridge Analytica's work, though, went way beyond simple

data-science and campaign ads. They had 87 million FaceBook profiles. They did not just swing a state, they swayed an entire country's culture.

With all this, it's no wonder I call Bannon or Trump the same as Durden. They're both quasi-religions leaders leading an extremist movement of hypocrisy. The only difference is that Durden's happens in two hours on screen and Bannons over years in the real world. The ball started rolling with Bannon, and it keeps rolling faster and faster as Roe v. Wade is overturned and trans and queer people are targeted and villainized. The actions of alt-right leaders like Tucker Carlson are responsible for events like the mass-shooting of a black community in Buffalo, New York. And it's shown time and time again for years that the use of online polarization can directly lead to offline extremism. Whether through academic research (Hassan et al. 2018) (Munn 2019) or through the thousands of pages of online manifestos written by mass shooters, or through the literal creation story of the alt-right. It's a pipeline that leads to countless acts of stochastic and unpredictable extremist violence. (Munn 2019) (Hassan et al. 2018)

Cambridge Analytica hacked society. Durden hacked society. In hacking, there is a term called a zero-day. Zero-days are vulnerabilities, exploits, and bugs in code that have not been seen or patched. These zero-days can be sold for sometimes a few hundred or a few million dollars. An example is when the US and Israel, using four zero-days likely costing in the millions of dollars to acquire, was able to shut down Iran's nuclear program. (Wendover 2022) Cambridge Analytica in the 2010s and the author of Fight Club in 1996 found exploits in society. They exploit frustration, racial and ethnic tensions, misogyny and systemic oppression. And once that exploit, that zero-day was found in society, it was used not to de-radicalize and reduce tensions - because it very well could have -, but to further cause tensions because a handful of wealthy men

viewed it all as a game. They created a populist campaign that upturned the status quo for the worse - and now we have to struggle to once again upturn the status quo for the better.

Populism is not inherently bad. *Fight Club* is both a story about reclaiming masculinity and it's about destroying corrupt systems. *Fight Club*'s duality is its potential to be reactionary or progressive. *Fight Club* demonstrates how a system can be destroyed. This can pose a threat to some systems; a perfect example is recently China changed then unchanged the ending of *Fight Club* on Tencent. (CNN) Sometimes the system being threatened is women having rights, other times it's the rich profiting off the backs of the poor and downtrodden. It's a story of populism. And like most political strategies, the power of the people is in the hands of the wielder. Leftists run on populist campaigns and so do the right. Promising everyone an equal vote, good pay, housing, health-care, education - these things all appeal to people's needs and up-end the status quo. Just because The Right is enamored with *Fight Club* as their origin story doesn't mean we shouldn't learn a few things from it. Because populism is effective. Everyone has needs; and we need to really hammer in on those needs.

In the fall of 2011, a few hundred protesters gathered outside America's most important financial institutions on Wall Street in New York City. Their goal was to occupy the veins of the 1% routing blood to the other 99% of us. The movement spread across the country and overseas to hundreds of cities, mostly through the help of the internet. A movement grew off the back of populism - one much like *Fight Club*. Destroy the financial institutions, and spread the wealth among *us*. Police resistance and lack of specific planning led to the movement's eventual failure, but the movement was able to galvanize a progressive base for politicians like Bernie Sanders. Occupy Wall Street set the stage for the tactics and rhetoric of the left for at least a decade.

Occupy Wallstreet is like Fight Club. The Occupy Movement realized that the economic structures of the 1% were a fundamental force holding the populous down. These systems couldn't just be amended but had to be entirely done away with. Revolution was the name of the game in both cases. They didn't help people pay off debts or invest in stocks. They wanted to end our banking systems and stock market. Fight Club did this through blowing up credit buildings - and while I'm not saying we should do that - at a certain point a sort of violent populism that The Right espouses becomes tempting to the left. Especially when our futures are uncertain, in the case of climate change, we have to start asking ourselves when enough is enough. (*PhilosophyTube*, Violence & Protest)

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 beta and becomes a legend, a God. 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] in reference to this, which is in some ways true. Everyone wishes they had something they don't. And these groups feel wronged by society. The same kind of wrong a leftist author writing about Trump's exploitation of incels feels about the status quo. But an incels desperation leads them down a dark path; a path 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, recognizing these groups as a perfect army; mansphere circles willingly latch on until the end.

Populist leaders are dangerous. They are dangerous because they exploit a vulnerable group and utilize them for personal gain. People who are radicalized by being in groups like Fight Club; like Project Mayhem; like Incel, PUA, and MRA forums; like the Trump campaign, Charlottesville protests. Fincher and Phalanick do their jobs too well, making it tempting to fall for the cult of Tyler. (Baker 2019) The internet (Munn 2019) and even the way Reddit (Wojcieszak 2009) or YouTube (Munn 2019) are designed makes it even easier for campaigns to capitalize off

of the already weak: people who can be de-radicalized by a cup of tea, counseling, healthcare, education (Bregman 2021:337-344), through desegregated environments (Bregman 2021:351-354), a round of soccer, Christmas and mothers day cards (Bregman 2021:373-376). By being more clear with our language rather than hiding behind fancy academic terms. (Carol & Shaw 2015) And this is all because we're going against people who don't want to be de-radicalized; if they *can* be de-radicalized that's not something they'd tell us. (Danskin 2021) Why would they believe us? To them we're all a bunch of NPCs. (Munn 2019) Manosphere circles remain in these polarized groups with leaders who polarize them further as they chant to not "hate the player ... hate the game." (Straus 2005) And we should hate the game, but not the game these groups are conditioned to 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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Notes

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