

Fight Club Film Summary

Fight Club by David Fincher

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Context

Based on Chuck Palahniuk's best-selling novel, *Fight Club* is Tyler Durden's story of his own delusional activities. After he becomes tired of his pitiful life working a dead-end job and visiting support groups, he creates a fictional person whom he calls Tyler while he remains the Narrator throughout the film. Tyler creates an organization called Fight Club where men can beat up on each other and take out their aggression.

With time, Fight Club becomes more and more dangerous. Eventually, they begin making plans to blow up different buildings around the city. The Narrator tries to stop Tyler, but he is becoming out of control. The Narrator doesn't understand some of the inconsistencies in his life and in the way people treat him, but he finally realizes that he is Tyler. He has created another personality for himself so that he can lead Project Mayhem. In the end, he kills his other personality, but he can't stop the destruction he's started.

David Fincher has made his living directing television commercials and music videos for the likes of Madonna, Michael Jackson and Billy Idol. He made his way into the world of film with the best-selling film *Se7en* (1995) before making *Fight Club*. *Panic Room* (2002) garnered great attention and had one of the highest-grossing openings of any American film.

Edward Norton plays the role of the Narrator in the film. After getting his big break starring opposite Richard Gere in *Primal Fear* (1996), Norton went on to appear in *Woody Allen's Everyone Says I Love You* (1996) and *American History X* (1998). In 2000, he made his directorial debut with *Keeping the Faith*.

American's favorite hunk, Brad Pitt, always helps a film attract viewers, especially women. Pitt was first noticed in his small role in *Cutting Class* (1989) and then again in *Thelma and Louise* (1999). With *Se7en* (1995), he garnered worldwide fame with his looks and talent as an actor.

Fight Club, though a brilliant psychological thriller, was nominated for only one Academy Award: Best Effects, Sound Effects Editing, for Ren Klyce and Richard Hymns.



Summary and Analysis

Fight Club begins with the Narrator sitting in front of a camera and talking to the audience. The Narrator says that people are always asking him whether he knows Tyler Durden. The scene changes so that we can see Tyler walking around with a gun while the Narrator sits tied to a chair. The Narrator says that the saying, "You always hurt the ones you love," works both ways. He explains that they have front row seats to the demolition committee, and then several square blocks will become rubbish. He suddenly realizes that all of this has to do with Marla Singer. This introduction starts at the end of the film, and the audience will have to wait until the end to understand it. This is a stylistic choice made by the director.

Everything began, the Narrator explains, when he became part of a support group for men with testicular cancer. The audience then sees the Narrator at the support group. A man, Bob, is crying to him because his testicles were removed, and he is trying to remember that he is still a man. The Narrator then goes back in time.

Six months earlier, the Narrator is suffering with insomnia, and his whole life seems like a copy. His boss, Richard Chesler, orders him around, and the Narrator feels that he has become just a cog in a machine, nameless. He buys furniture to create a beautiful home in lieu of having a real life; he takes comfort in material things. The Narrator goes to see a doctor, but he is told that he just needs to get some sleep. The Narrator tells the doctor that he's in pain, and the doctor tells him to visit the testicular cancer support group. That, he says, is real pain.

The Narrator decides to take the doctor's advice and go to the support group. At the support group, one man, Thomas, talks about how his wife just had her first child with her new husband. Then, the group goes one on one, and the Narrator is paired with Bob. Bob invites the Narrator to cry, but the Narrator is obviously uncomfortable with the situation. Suddenly, though, he begins to weep, and he finds freedom. "Losing all hope was freedom," according to the Narrator. That night, the Narrator has the best sleep ever, and he becomes addicted to support groups. Since he cries the hardest, people always think that he is sick, and it gives him the opportunity to cry. Each evening he dies and is then born again.

One night, Marla Singer walks into the testicular cancer support group. She begins going to all the same groups that the Narrator attends. He is angry and can no longer cry or sleep. After not sleeping for days, he feels that he is no longer asleep or awake. At the cancer support group, one of the members, Chloe, is depressed because she wants to have sex one last time before she dies. She gives an impassioned plea for human contact that is, ultimately, pitiful and only draws uncomfortable silence from the group members. The therapist stops Chloe and begins meditation. The Narrator decides that if he ever had a tumor, he would name it Marla.

Later that night, the Narrator talks to Marla and confronts her about her lies. He says that she is a tourist, and she says that she's seen him planning to tell her off. He



threatens to expose her, and she threatens him with the same. She comes for the coffee and food, but he comes to be heard. She says she needs this just as much as he does, and they agree to split up the week. He asks her to exchange numbers in case they want to switch nights. Marla feels that the saddest part of her life is that she hasn't died yet. The Narrator, on the other hand, wonders whether he could wake up as a different person if he woke up in a different place. He also is waiting to die.

While traveling home from a business trip on a plane, the Narrator sits down next to Tyler Durden, who tells him that they put oxygen masks on the plane to get people high and accepting of their fate in case of a crash. Tyler tells him that he makes soap and that making napalm is simple. When the Narrator tries to pick up his luggage, his suitcase is vibrating, and the airport confiscates all his things. As the Narrator leaves the airport, Tyler speeds away in his convertible. The Narrator takes a cab home and finds that something in his apartment has exploded, and everything he owns is destroyed.

The Narrator has nowhere to stay. He finds Marla's number, and he calls but says nothing. Instead, he calls Tyler without even knowing why, but there is no answer. After the Narrator hangs up, the phone begins to ring. He answers, and Tyler is on the other end.

Tyler picks up the Narrator, and they go to a bar. The Narrator is upset because his wardrobe and furniture are now gone. Tyler feels that they are obsessed with consumerism. The Narrator just hopes that his insurance will cover it, but Tyler tells him that his things "own" him. The Narrator decides to go find a hotel, and Tyler tells him to just ask. Finally, the Narrator asks, and Tyler agrees to let him stay at his place. Then, Tyler asks the Narrator to hit him as hard as he can.

The Narrator begins to tell the audience more about Tyler. Tyler wakes up and begins working when everyone else is going to sleep. He works as a film projectionist, where he splices split-second lewd images into films, and as a waiter at a luxurious hotel, where he does unsavory things to the soup.

The scene flashes back to the present, and Tyler asks the Narrator to hit him again. Tyler says that he doesn't want to die without any scars. The Narrator hits Tyler's ear, and Tyler is in pain, but impressed. He then goes back and hits the Narrator. Later, they have a drink at the top of a building and walk home. Tyler lives in a house where the windows are boarded up and the front door is unlocked. The Narrator isn't sure whether Tyler is squatting or if he owns it.

Tyler and the Narrator continue living in the house and going out to drink at night. Outside the bar one night, two guys watch Tyler and the Narrator fighting. After a month, the Narrator doesn't miss television or a cold refrigerator. Outside the bar, Tyler and the Narrator fight each night. Soon, they have an audience, and people ask to be next in line to fight. They begin to start their own type of club.

The house is in bad shape, and rain leaks into the house. After a while, the Narrator explains that it seems like the volume on everything else besides his experiences with



Tyler is turned down. The problems with the Narrator's boss aren't so bad anymore. He simply doesn't hear his boss's nagging anymore.

One night, the Narrator and Tyler talk while Tyler takes a bath. Tyler says that he would fight his dad if he could. After being told to go to college and get a job, his dad's only answer as to what to do was "get married." The Narrator and Tyler both agree that as men raised by women, they are still only boys. During the week, they have a normal life, but on Saturdays, they fight with each other and with the other people that gather.

On Mondays, the Narrator always has difficulty paying attention at work. After a while, Tyler and the Narrator give the Saturday night fights a name: Fight Club. They start meeting in the basement of the bar, and they set the rules every week. The first rule of Fight Club is that they don't talk about Fight Club. The second rule is the same; they don't talk about Fight Club. The third rule says that if someone passes out, the fight is over. The fourth rule says that there are only two guys to a fight. The fifth rule is no more than one fight at a time. The sixth rule is no shoes and no shirts. The seventh rule states that fights will go on as long as they have to. The eighth rule says that you have to fight on your first night at Fight Club.

Everyone gathers around and yells as the men fight. The Narrator says that this is the most alive time of every week. He can't tell people that they had a good fight at any other time because who they are in Fight Club isn't who they are in real life. After a few weeks, every new person hardens.

One night, Tyler and the Narrator discuss which celebrities they would fight if they could. Tyler would fight Hemmingway, and the Narrator would fight William Shatner. All the members of Fight Club are always analyzing their reasons for being there, and they feel bad for the people who spend time in gyms trying to look like Calvin Kline models. Fight Club isn't about winning or losing or words. After the fight, nothing is solved, but nothing else matters.

When the Narrator has to go to the hospital because he gets hurt, Tyler fights for him. The Narrator decides that he would fight Gandhi, while Tyler wants to fight Abraham Lincoln. When the phone rings one morning, the Narrator hears Marla on the line. Apparently, he left a forwarding number, and she wants to know why he isn't going to the support groups. He tells her that he found a new one for men only. He tries to get off the phone, and she tells him that she has a lot of Zanex that she plans on taking. She says, though, that it's probably only a cry for help. She won't stop talking, so he just sits the phone down and leaves while she continues to talk.

In Marla's apartment, the audience sees Marla screaming, and then we discover that it is the Narrator's dream. He wakes up, and Tyler's door is closed. Marla walks into the room, and the Narrator asks what she's doing there. She gets angry and walks out. Later that morning, Tyler walks in, laughing.

Marla is still talking on the phone that night when Tyler decides to pick it up and talk to her. He goes to Marla's place so that she won't die, and she pulls him inside. They hear



sirens outside, and she's worried that someone has called the cops. They hurry out while the police call through the door. Tyler takes her to the house, and he has to keep her up all night so that she doesn't die.

The Narrator and Tyler talk about Marla the next morning. The Narrator is angry that she is invading yet another part of his life. Tyler doesn't want anything that happens in the house or in Fight Club to go to anyone else. While the Narrator is working out the next day, part of the ceiling falls on him, and he hears screaming because Tyler and Marla are having sex upstairs. The Narrator considers moving to a room where he won't hear them, but instead he listens and watches from outside the door.

While at work, the Narrator writes poems to everyone. He smokes at work, and his clothes are smeared with blood. His boss even sends him home one day. When he comes in, Tyler and Marla are having sex again.

That day, the police call about the explosion in the Narrator's apartment. They tell him that someone sprayed his apartment door keyhole with Freon and then used homemade dynamite to destroy his apartment. Tyler tells him that someone is trying to liberate him. The Narrator tells the police that he loved his stuff, and they tell him not to leave town. They consider him a suspect.

Tyler and Marla never stay in the same room unless they're having sex. Marla makes moves on the Narrator as well. He tries to ignore her, but Tyler later tells the Narrator to get rid of her. The Narrator tells her to go, and Marla leaves. That night, Tyler and the Narrator decide to make soap. They first break into a hospital that performs liposuction to get the human fat that makes the best soap from the dumpsters. Then they go home and boil it. Tyler tells the Narrator that with the right amount of soap, they can blow up anything. Tyler then spills some chemical compound on the Narrator that burns his hand. He will have a scar forever, and Tyler tries to get him to focus. He tells him that God probably hates him and that they don't need God. The Narrator screams, but Tyler tells him that he has to first give up, knowing that he will someday die. After the Narrator says that Tyler doesn't know how it feels, Tyler shows him a scar and says, "It's only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything." Then, he finally pours vinegar on the burn to neutralize it.

The next day, Tyler and the Narrator visit a department store, where Tyler sells the soap for \$20 a bar. One day, the Narrator's boss shows him the flier from Fight Club that he found on the copier. The Narrator tells him that he should be careful because the guy who wrote that might lose it and kill everyone if he talks about it.

During the conversation, the phone rings; it's Marla. She's afraid there's a lump in her breast, and he agrees to check for her. The Narrator goes over and checks her breast for her. He doesn't feel anything, and she thanks him with a kiss. Then he leaves, but he takes only a few steps out the door before he runs into Bob from the testicular cancer group. Bob says he has something so much better now, and he starts reciting the first two rules. He goes Tuesdays and Thursdays. Bob has heard all sorts of rumors about Tyler.



That night, the Narrator fights Bob. He feels that Fight Club is his and Tyler's gift to the world. Tyler gets angry one night and feels that too many people are showing up. They must be breaking the first two rules. Tyler feels that too many of them are working at jobs they hate to buy stuff they don't need. They have no purpose. Two guys come in late, and one of them is the owner of the place. He is angry they've been using it without his permission. The owner, Lou, doesn't believe that Tyler and the Narrator aren't getting paid to run Fight Club, and Tyler offers to let them join the Club. Then Lou begins to hit him, and Tyler falls to the ground. Tyler encourages Lou to get out all his frustration while he continues to laugh. Tyler lets Lou continue to beat him while he begs to keep using the basement. Finally, Lou agrees and leaves.

Tyler gives everyone the homework assignment of fighting and losing to a total stranger. Most people try to avoid fights, so the assignment is actually very difficult. The Narrator sees his boss Richard, who tells him that he's under review. The Narrator asks what would happen if the transportation department found out that they put in faulty breaks on the cars. The Narrator offers to stay on the payroll as an outside consultant and never come in to work. The boss fires him and calls security. Then, the Narrator begins to hit himself and yell as if Richard is hitting him. Richard watches in shock. The Narrator then begs while security comes in. Richard finally agrees to keep the Narrator on the payroll if he doesn't come to work anymore. Suddenly, the Narrator has everything he wants. They can have Fight Club every night of the week.

Tyler hands out homework assignments in sealed envelopes, and the audience watches as those in Fight Club switch street signs, hit cars and more. The Narrator and Tyler discuss the new Fight Clubs that are appearing all over the area. When the activities make it into the newspaper, Tyler keeps the clippings. One night, Tyler receives a homework assignment calling for a human sacrifice. They hold up a guy at a convenience store. The guy tells him that he used to want to be a veterinarian, and Tyler tells him that if he's not on the way to doing that in six weeks, they'll kill him. Tyler tells the Narrator that tomorrow will be the best day of that man's life, and the Narrator admits that Tyler has finally started to make sense.

One morning, Marla is at the house again, and the Narrator tells her that she doesn't have to go. She is still going to groups and tells him that Chloe is dead. The Narrator asks her why she keeps going to groups and coming back to Tyler. She asks the Narrator the same thing, and he tries to change the subject. Marla doesn't believe that the Narrator isn't interested in her, and she is disturbed about the scar on his hand. Downstairs, Tyler tells the Narrator what to say, and he repeats it word for word. The Narrator goes downstairs to confront Tyler and discovers a whole new part of the house. Tyler is training people, but to get in, they have to wait outside without food for three days until Tyler sees that they are committed.

The Narrator says that eventually everyone became just what Tyler wanted them to be. Finally, the guy waiting outside gets to come in, and another new guy, Bob, is waiting to train. When Tyler insults him, he tries to leave, but the Narrator stops him.



That day, Tyler shaves his head and talks about sacrificing himself for the greater good. The new trainee begins to act just like Tyler in time. As more and more people arrive, Tyler builds himself an army, and everyone trusts him as if he were God. The Narrator comes in one night to find everyone watching the news about a new act of vandalism, a fire at the Parker Morris Building, supposedly related to underground boxing clubs. All the guys laugh, and they tell him not to ask questions about Project Mayhem.

During a city dinner where club members act as waiters, they all leave and attack one of the VIP dinner guests who is investigating Fight Club when he goes into the bathroom. The Narrator follows them inside and watches as Tyler threatens to take the guy's balls if he doesn't abandon the idea of an underground group. Tyler explains that the guys the VIP wants to take down are the same ones who make his food and guard his home. Afterwards, they all leave and celebrate. Only the Narrator seems concerned, and he seems to be out of touch with what's going on with the group.

That night, Tyler and the Narrator are driving through a pouring rain. The Narrator is frustrated that he doesn't know about Project Mayhem since he and Tyler started Fight Club together. Tyler tells him that this doesn't belong to them; they are not special. The Narrator wants to be involved and wants to know what's going on. Tyler gets into a lane going toward a truck and asks how they would feel about life if they died now. The Narrator begins to shout that he's sick of the whole thing. Tyler tells the Narrator that he blew up his condo so that the Narrator could learn to let go. Finally, the Narrator agrees to just let go. As they drive, Tyler runs into car, and they go careening downhill. The Narrator has never been in a car accident before, but they all survive. Tyler rejoices because they had a new life experience.

The next morning, the Narrator wakes up to find that Tyler is gone after giving him a lecture the previous night. The house has become "Planet Tyler," and there are dozens of men working there. The house has begun to run itself, and the Narrator is kept "out of the loop." The Narrator feels that everyone he has ever known has abandoned him.

Marla comes to the house one night and asks about all the people. The Narrator tells her that they're part of the soap company. Marla asks to come in, and the Narrator tells her that Tyler is gone. She leaves. A few minutes later, some club members carry one of the other members in. He was been shot twice while they were destroying corporate art and a coffee bar. The police showed up, and shot Bob in the head. The Narrator shouts at them and asks about what they thought was really going to happen. They want to bury Bob in the garden, and the Narrator tells them Bob's full name, giving him identity and dignity in death. They begin to chant, and the Narrator can't get them to stop. Finally, he runs upstairs and finds some of Tyler's plane ticket stubs.

The police call the Narrator just as he is getting ready to find Tyler. Instead of talking to the police, the Narrator boards a plane to find Tyler. He knows when he walks into a city whether there is a Fight Club or not. He doesn't know whether Tyler is a bad dream or whether he is Tyler's bad dream. The Narrator hears rumors that Tyler changes his face every three years, but he is always just one step behind Tyler. One day, though, he walks into a bar and hears people chanting Bob's name. A man at the bar recognizes



him and asks whether he is being tested. The man has recognized the Narrator as Tyler Durden and shows him the matching scar.

The Narrator runs back to his hotel and calls Marla to ask whether they've ever had sex. She tells him that this is a stupid question because of course they've had sex. She calls him Tyler, but the Narrator tries to tell her that he's not there. Suddenly, Tyler speaks from the corner and tells him that he's angry that the Narrator talked to Marla about him. The Narrator demands to know why people think that he is Tyler. Tyler tells him to sit down, and Tyler explains that they are the same person. Tyler tells him that he is everything the Narrator wants to be. People everyday talk to themselves, but the Narrator has been brave enough to run with it. He has created Tyler. Each day, the Narrator watches Tyler and becomes a little more his true self - Tyler Durden.

Tyler tells the Narrator that the Narrator works night jobs because he can't sleep and that he's sleeping with Marla. The problem now is that Marla knows too much, and this might compromise their goals. The Narrator tells Tyler that he's insane, and Tyler tells the Narrator that he's insane. They don't have time for this, Tyler says. The next morning, the Narrator runs out of the room, but first he has to initial a list of phone calls made while he thought he was asleep. Tyler, his other personality, made them.

The Narrator gets home and discovers that no one is home. He finds a lot of soap and realizes that it would be enough to blow up anything. The Narrator calls the supervisors at several different buildings to warn them that something bad is going to happen. Then he goes to find Marla. She is angry that the guys attacked him. The waiter at the restaurant they visit tells the Narrator that everything he orders is free, so Marla orders a large meal. The Narrator tells Marla that there seem to be two sides to him and explains that he didn't totally understand their relationship until now. He tells Marla that he really cares about her, and he warns her that her life is in danger. He wants her to get out of the city and away from any major metropolis, but she doesn't want to listen. Marla tells him that he needs professional help and that she can't do this anymore. Tyler tries to stop her, and in the process, he almost gets run over by a bus. He gives Marla a roll of money to get on the bus and promises to never see her again. She tells him that he's the worst thing that ever happened to her, and the bus door closes.

The Narrator then asks a nearby policeman to arrest him as the leader of a terrorist group in the city and across the country. He even tells them where to find Robert's body and the bathtubs used to make nitroglycerine. The Narrator believes the plan is to blow up the credit card companies so that everyone goes back to zero. When the lead detective leaves, the others tell him that they respect him. They then tell him that he told them to cut off his balls if anyone, even him, tried to stop Project Mayhem. The Narrator begins to scream, and the lead detective tells them to head to Paper Street. The Narrator grabs their guns just before they begin to cut him and runs out of the building.

The Narrator runs through the streets trying to escape the monster, Project Mayhem, he created. Police are speeding through the streets, and the Narrator tries to make sure that he isn't seen. He runs up to one of the credit card company buildings, and he sees the Tyler of his mind outside. The Narrator shoots at Tyler and runs upstairs to a van



that he finds sitting there. He opens it to find tons of homemade dynamite. The other Tyler comes in to convince him that everything is okay, because no one will die in the explosions in the ten buildings that night. They will be vacant. Tyler tells the Narrator that he could have spent the whole day thinking about the wrong buildings so that the Narrator couldn't stop the bombs. The Narrator finally pulls the green wire on the bomb, and Tyler begins hitting him. He plugs the wire back in and locks it.

The Narrator shoots at Tyler, and Tyler shouts at him for shooting at his imaginary friend into a van carrying nitroglycerine. Tyler proceeds to beat up the real Tyler (the Narrator) until he finally drags him upstairs and drops him back down so that he can have a great view of the explosions. There are only three minutes left to go before the explosions, and the narrative finally returns full circle to the beginning of the film, where the Narrator is tied to a chair. Tyler points out all they have accomplished - economic equilibrium.

Tyler and the Narrator look down and see the police driving through the streets. The Narrator is worried about Marla, and he claims he doesn't want her hurt. Tyler points out that they're doing this together. The Narrator wants to get rid of this hallucination, but Tyler believes that the Narrator needs him. The Narrator argues that he doesn't want any of this, but Tyler points out that he wasn't the one who created an alter ego. Tyler says he has brought the Narrator a long way, but the Narrator feels that Tyler's anarchist plan is just too much. Tyler refuses to go back to the old life.

Finally, the Narrator realizes that the gun is in his hand, not Tyler's hand. He is in control; Tyler is only a figment of his own brain. The Narrator puts the gun to his/their head and cocks it. Tyler believes that the Narrator won't be able to bring himself to pull the trigger. The Narrator says that his eyes are now open, and he shoots himself. He doesn't die immediately, and a moment later the imaginary Tyler finally falls. Suddenly, some of the Project Mayhem guys walk in and find Tyler terribly hurt, but Tyler assures them that he's fine. They bring Marla inside, and Tyler sends the guys downstairs. She is terrified to find out that he has been shot. He tells her that he shot himself and lets her know that now he is okay. Outside, there are suddenly explosions on every side. He tells Marla that she met him at a very strange time in his life, and they watch the explosions together. The Mayhem, at least in the Narrator's life, is finally coming to an end.



Characters

The Narrator, played by Edward Norton

Description

The Narrator tells us the story of *Fight Club*. He is a lonely man who hates his job and has joined support groups to have a social life. At first, the Narrator is a helpless man who blames all his problems on others.

One day, the Narrator meets Tyler Durden on an airplane, and his entire life begins to change. After they start Fight Club, the Narrator begins to develop a sense of purpose in life and finds that he is motivated by this new group.

When things begin to change, though, the unnamed Narrator becomes concerned and tries to stop Tyler and his anarchistic plans. As the Narrator tries to stop the bombings, he discovers that Tyler is not a real person - he is simply a figment of the Narrator's own imagination that he has created to excuse his own unthinkable deeds.

Analysis

The Narrator spends much of his time alone and confused. In the beginning, he has no friends or family, so he seeks out others at support groups. When he meets Marla, he hates her at first, but he is glad to know that he's not the only one with problems.

Fight Club gives the Narrator purpose and also allows him to keep his job without ever having to show up. It allows him an outlet for his suppressed masculine instincts, which are not acceptable in modern society. He finds that he is very attached to Tyler and becomes upset when Marla starts getting more attention. His dislike for her grows, and she is constantly confused by his changing attitude toward her.

The Narrator is shocked to discover that he has been creating Tyler Durden in his own mind. He cannot believe at first that he has caused all his own troubles. Finally, he kills Tyler so that he can begin to stop Fight Club and can love Marla as he should.

Tyler Durden, played by Brad Pitt

Description

The Brad Pitt version of Tyler Durden is the second personality of the Narrator, Tyler Durden. This Tyler Durden is strong, handsome and commanding. He starts Fight Club and convinces others to join and later uses the Fight Club phenomena to create Project Mayhem to bring chaos to the community. Finally, Tyler is destroyed so that the Narrator can try to put an end to Fight Club and live his life.



Analysis

Tyler Durden represents everything that the Narrator wants to be and the things that he is scared to admit that he thinks and feels. The Narrator is able to shift these undesirable traits onto Tyler rather than dealing with them himself.

The Narrator is shocked when he discovers that Tyler is simply a figment of his own imagination. Suddenly, he realizes why people haven't understood some of the things he has done, and he destroys Tyler so that he can live his own life.

Marla Singer, played by Helena Bonham Carter

Description

Marla Singer meets the Narrator when they are both attending support groups to have a social life. They get frustrated about sharing the same groups, so they come up with a schedule, dividing up the support groups between them, until Marla refuses to follow it.

Marla and Tyler end up having an affair over the months, but she becomes concerned when he starts behaving unusually. She knows about Fight Club, but she is appalled by Project Mayhem and the way that the Narrator's feelings toward her continuously change.

Analysis

Marla is a very complicated woman. She is having difficulty finding a purpose in life, so she begins attending support groups. Over the course of the film, she threatens to commit suicide to get attention and because she is so tired of her lot in life.

Marla falls in love with Tyler and doesn't understand why the Narrator, who is actually Tyler, changes his feelings toward her constantly. Sometimes he is kind to her, and other times he is cruel and unfeeling. He sleeps with her and then throws her out of his house. At the end of the film, the Narrator tells her that he's been going through a difficult time; she understands and promises to see him through.

Robert "Bob" Paulson, played by Meat Loaf

Description

The Narrator meets Robert "Bob" Paulson at a support group for men with testicular cancer. Bob becomes a major part in Fight Club and supports Tyler in everything that he does without ever realizing that the Narrator never should have attended the men's support group.



Analysis

Bob is a kind and sensitive man who tries to take the Narrator under his wing at the support group. He is grieving over the effects of his disease. Bob benefits from Fight Club by accessing a masculine part of his personality that has been suppressed in the world he lives in, symbolized by his testicular cancer, eating away at his manhood. The two become good friends, and Bob becomes an active member of Fight Club and Project Mayhem.

Richard Chesler, played by Zach Grenier

Description

Richard Chesler is the Narrator's boss. The Narrator hates Chesler and blackmails Chesler into keeping him on the payroll after faking being beaten by Chesler in his office.

Analysis

Through Chesler, the audience sees the Narrator change. At first, the Narrator hates and yet fears Chesler, and as time passes he loses that fear. Finally, the Narrator takes matters into his own hands and begins making his own rules that he forces Chesler to follow. Chesler epitomizes and represents the socially acceptable world that the Narrator feels confined, dehumanized and emasculated by.

Chloe, played by Rachel Singer

Description

Chloe is a cancer patient who will probably not survive her treatment. She attends one of the support groups that the Narrator and Marla visit.

Analysis

Chloe helps us see that there are real people experiencing real problems, while the Narrator and Marla just sit in listening, vicariously experiencing others' pain. Chloe desperately longs for human contact. She is so eaten up by her cancer that she has become untouchable, but beyond her illness, she has natural human instincts that are being ignored. People offer her emotional support and pity, but they no longer see her as a person, with passion and needs. She is, in this way, much like the Narrator, whose animalistic desires are buried under the demands of polite society. Also, we see the passage of time when Marla tells the Narrator that Chloe has died.



Ricky, played by Eion Bailey

Description

Ricky is Tyler's first henchman after the Narrator. Ricky stands outside in front of the house until Tyler finally lets him come in and join them.

Analysis

The audience learns more about Fight Club as Ricky experiences his initiation. Also, we see the Narrator's envy after Ricky begins to become a more important part of the process as far as Tyler is concerned.

Themes

Man's Internal Struggle

Every person's greatest struggle is with himself or herself. In the film *Fight Club*, the Narrator creates another personality for himself so that he can deal with his own internal struggle. He is unhappy with everything in his life from his job to his relationships, and he cannot help himself. He has already lost his identity, which is why he remains unnamed throughout the film. His subconscious mind takes its own route to helping the Narrator, by creating Tyler Durden.

The Narrator's other identity, the handsome Tyler Durden, creates an organization known as Fight Club where men can take out their frustrations by beating each other up. This allows the animalistic, masculine side of these men to emerge and flourish in a society that pushes down the instincts of strength and combat. The Narrator even takes some anger out on his boss after experiencing Fight Club. As the men work out their internal struggles through violence, things get out of hand.

The Narrator eventually begins a new project known as Project Mayhem, in which the men are preparing to terrorize their cities. This new type of outlet destroys the cities, the communities and the men. Viewers should learn from the film that there is a need for outlets for natural human instincts, even those instincts that are violent. Without an outlet for men to express themselves, the drive to violence will build up until it is expressed in an unhealthy manner. The inner struggle of the characters in *Fight Club* is between their deepest instincts, the Freudian Id, represented by Tyler, and the internalized social controls of the Superego. Ultimately, the Narrator must find a balance between these two, a self or Ego.

Building Relationships

One of the reasons that the Narrator is able to leave his normal life is that he has no outside relationships. The Narrator spends his time going to work, attending support groups in which he doesn't fit and sleeping. Since no one knows anything about him, he is able to live his life without a lot of concern.

Relationships, though, help keep people sane. There is a sense of accountability when a person has contact with others who know what they are doing, where they are going and how they are doing financially, mentally and emotionally.

The Narrator has trouble building relationships, so he attends support group meetings in which people are forced into relationships with him. Since he has nothing in common with them, though, the relationships are not genuine, and the only person he gets to know at all is the other reject, Marla. Thus, their lives go spiraling out of control without any real, lasting relationships.



Power of Mayhem

Chaos, or mayhem, is a powerful force. The Narrator's life is in chaos when the film begins, and his life affects the lives of all those around him. Without any real relationships, the Narrator easily falls into chaos.

Toward the end of the film, the Narrator creates Project Mayhem. He plans to have everyone do one crazy act a day, and he then expands this idea into a larger project where his group begins to pull whole communities and whole cities apart. Mayhem takes over not only the men in Fight Club, but also the communities all over the country where these men live.



Style and Cinematography

Fight Club is one of the most unusual and intriguing films of its time. Director David Fincher uses his unique talents to create an underground world where anything seems possible. *Fight Club* becomes a living, breathing entity during the course of the film, climaxing in the bombings by Project Mayhem.

The cinematography in the film is stunning. There are scenes where bright, whirling colors help viewers to grasp the off-kilter nature of this world in which Tyler and the Narrator are living. Close-ups are also used to show the blood and gore of *Fight Club*, as the men rid themselves of their frustrations.

Finally, the viewer enters a dangerous world full of red and black, representing blood and danger respectively. The colors in the film help represent the difficulties the men face in their everyday lives and the horrors they are causing to the rest of the city through their dangerous, violent actions.



Motifs

Psychological Disorder

Many films have characters with psychological disorders. Like other films before it, *Fight Club* keeps the character's condition a secret until the end, so that the suspense and mystery of the situation increase throughout the film.

The Narrator is terribly conflicted. He lives a lonely, secluded life and finds a social life only by attending support group meetings in which he doesn't fit. He goes, though, because everyone is always accepting in the groups. When that's not enough, he creates an alternate personality whom he names Tyler Durden, his own name.

When the Narrator finally realizes that he and Tyler are one person, he is forced to deal with reality. He hates the idea that they are putting people in danger and potentially disrupting the fabric of society, so he decides to destroy Tyler. He shoots himself and kills the other personality so that he can put an end to Project Mayhem and enjoy life with Marla.

Underground Society

Secrets always keep viewers intrigued. Fight Club is an underground society formed by Tyler and the Narrator. They want men to be able to get out their excess energy and frustration by fighting one another, tapping into their natural male instincts, which have been suppressed by society. The pain of Fight Club is real, physical pain, which is much easier to deal with than the hard-to-define pain of living by soul-crushing rules of modern life. Fight Club, as an underground society, is symbolic of that that goes on beneath the surface of the mind. It taps into the unconscious, instinctive lives of the men who experience it.

Although the underground society is fairly safe at the beginning, it takes on a life of its own. At first, chapters simply spring up in other areas. Then, Fight Club begins expanding. Tyler comes up with Project Mayhem to up the stakes. The men begin to take out their frustrations and get adrenaline rushes from wreaking havoc on the lives of others whom they believe to be too selfish and materialistic.

Man versus Society

The individual man versus society is a struggle as old as humanity. Society has rules and regulations to keep the members in line, but sometimes things get out of hand. The Narrator feels that he has been ignored and mistreated by society, robbed of an outlet for his natural instincts and stripped of his humanity to become just a nameless drone, so he fights back.

Tyler convinces the Narrator and others that society is far too selfish and materialistic. To purge society of these evils, Fight Club begins attacking those who are involved, as well as the institutions at the heart of the problems.

Symbols

Tyler

The Tyler played by Brad Pitt is created in the mind of Narrator. When the Narrator discovers that he hates everything about his life, his subconscious mind creates a second personality who can take all of his suppressed desires and act them out. With Tyler, he creates an underground organization known only as Fight Club where men can take out their frustrations by beating each other. Since the first fight is between Tyler and the Narrator, Fight Club truly begins as a battle between one man and himself. It begins with an inner struggle and an expression of self-hatred and expands to become an expression of revolt against the constrictions of society.

After Fight Club takes off, the Narrator and Tyler also start Project Mayhem. The Narrator keeps this part of life only in Tyler's world and is surprised when he discovers that Project Mayhem is a dangerous mission to destroy the community and the businesses in it.

Tyler is symbolic of all of man's deepest, most animalistic motivations and desires. He embodies everything that's suppressed by society and feels no remorse for any of his actions. Although Tyler does everything that people secretly desire, he is not happy, and when the Narrator realizes that he and Tyler are one, he chooses to kill Tyler, even if it means killing himself.

Fight Club

Anger and aggression are major problems in our world, but they are also natural elements of human nature that need an outlet. Without an outlet, suppressed anger and aggression will erupt inappropriately and violently. Fight Club is symbolic of these problems and motivations. The men see Fight Club as an outlet that fulfills their needs to be men, with all of their animalistic desires. However, these men have spent many years pushing back their instincts, and when these instincts are let loose, they gain momentum until they become almost an unstoppable force.

Fight Club allows men to leave behind their problems and issues and escape into a simple world of pure combat. Ultimately, the men who join Fight Club no longer have to accept responsibility for their lives and families. As they become more accustomed to having no responsibility, these men begin to take a turn for the worse as they start punishing people and society for materialism on a daily basis.

Scars

When Tyler and the Narrator first meet, Tyler burns the Narrator with acid to scar him and make him stronger. Tyler has already performed the same treatment on his own skin, and he believes that the Narrator needs to experience it as well.

These scars represent the scars caused by pain and suffering in the world. These men's souls have been scarred both by other people's actions, society, nature and their own delusions. The scars make them feel more human and stronger than they truly are in real life. Instead, they have the option to live in a fantasy world where they can do or say anything and always be right.



Essay Questions

Describe the Narrator's life before Tyler.

Why is the Narrator addicted to support groups?

Who does the Narrator meet at the support groups? How do they meet?

How does the Narrator meet Tyler?

What happens to the Narrator's condo?

What type of group do the Narrator and Tyler start? What function does it serve?

Compare and contrast the Narrator and Tyler.

What is Tyler's plan for the city and the world?

Who is Tyler, really?

How does the Narrator get rid of Tyler?