

Fight Club, directed by David Fincher in 1999, follows the story of the Narrator (Edward Norton), an uninspired businessman, and his struggles with insomnia. To deal with this, he joins a number of support groups for issues he has nothing to do with, such as testicular cancer, as he finds these situations are the only place he can let out his suppressed emotions. However, things get difficult once Marla (Helena Bonham-Carter) also joins these groups, as he feels he can no longer let out these emotions. The Narrator then meets Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt), the man he wishes he could be, and the two begin a 'fight club', a place where men can unleash their animalistic side through fighting each other. Things begin to escalate, however, until they are no longer in the Narrator's control.

There are many key themes in 'Fight Club' that reflect the time the film was created in; loss of identity, loss of masculinity, consumerism and violence stand out amongst these. Let's begin with identity. Oh, and spoilers.

SPOILERS AHEAD - Skip to End

The lack of a name given to the Narrator is crucial - he doesn't find it important enough to mention in his voice-over, and none of the characters even seem to know it. This shows that the Narrator doesn't feel like he has one true identity - in each of the support groups, he takes on a new name. This hasn't been encoded just for privacy reasons, it is because the Narrator is taking on a new role in each session. The Narrator can't even present himself in the way he wishes he can; confident, dangerous and masculine - he has to create his alter-ego, Tyler, to achieve this. This theme returns with the creation of Project Mayhem, the successor to Fight Club, in which the members take on no names until death.

Costume also plays a part in establishing this theme; in the office he works in, the Narrator is wearing the same as everyone else; a shirt and a tie. Tyler wears bright clothing. As the film progresses, the Narrator's work clothing becomes less and less smart until it just looks thrown on; he is becoming more and more like Tyler. This makes him unique to the other employees, giving the Narrator his own identity.

Identity was a recurring theme in a few movies in the late 90s; 'American Beauty' and 'American Psycho' also represent this strongly. In 'American Beauty', Lester becomes sick of middle-class American life and pursues his daughter's friend, as she is viewed as his escape. His wife and daughter, however, just want to fit in; his wife, Carolyn, is embarrassed by her husband in the social gatherings they attend, while his daughter, Jane, researches breast augmentation to try to become attractive like 'everybody else'. In 'American Psycho', Patrick Bateman tries desperately to fit in with everyone else; all of his co-workers have the same slicked-back hairstyle, the same clothes, and the same business card (mostly). Although he doesn't appear to

like it, Bateman forces himself to listen to pop music, as this is what 'everyone' listens to.

Masculinity also plays a bit part in 'Fight Club', as with the late 90s. Following the hyper-masculine identity of the 80s, with action flicks such as 'Terminator', 'Rambo' and 'RoboCop', the 90s appeared comparatively feminine. Tyler Durden embodies the resurgence of masculinity in the Narrator's eyes (which is ironic, since he is played by Brad Pitt, arguably the archetype of what the film is fighting against), and the fight club is their way of living the life of an alpha male. The men view themselves as superior to the modern representation of the man; this is reinforced when the two see an underwear advertisement and say, "Is that what a real man looks like?". The two also point out the lack of a father in their childhood, meaning they were raised by single mothers. This causes them to believe that, "This is a generation of men raised by women".

As is also a theme in late 90s films such as 'American Beauty', consumerism is another key theme in 'Fight Club'. Before meeting Tyler, the Narrator becomes obsessed with his "ideal IKEA nest", constantly buying new products to feed this addiction. Tyler teaches him to let go of his possessions and live life how it was

intended; "You are not your job, you're not how much money you have in the bank [...], you are not your ***** khakis".

To Tyler, consumerist society is a crippling disease; again, this is ironic since Brad Pitt, a Hollywood mega-star, plays his character. This theme of consumerism also ties in with the theme of masculinity - the Narrator becomes obsessed with his home, almost like a stereotypical housewife, and the "ideal man" shown in the bus scene is used to advertise underwear. The modern man is obsessed with his appearance, and this is something that Tyler despises

Obviously, violence is an integral part to the narrative of 'Fight Club', it is used as the Narrator's escapism once Marla ruins his experience in the support groups. The violence in this film is animalistic; this shows how the men are reverting back to their suppressed primal state. An interesting feature is how the fights are presented through cinematography as the film progresses; in the earlier fights, the camera is used more as an observer, as is typical of action films. However, as the stakes ramp up, the POV shots are used often, as if the audience themselves are situated in the film, and example of this being in the Narrator's fight with Angel-Face. This fight is also interesting as it shows the Narrator's lack of control over beating up who he views as his rival. The Narrator becomes jealous of Tyler's relationship with Angel-Face; this has led many to believe that this demonstrates a homosexual subtext. Perhaps the Narrator is suppressing his own homosexual feelings through the fight club - he did create his 'ideal man', after all. The act of not holding back on Angel-Face also represents the sadistic nature of the fight club and Project Mayhem; the Narrator claims that he wants to "destroy something beautiful".

The violence in 'Fight Club' is almost gratuitous, as popping and whipping sounds are used as opposed to most movies' exaggerated punch sound effects. This may have been anchored by the director to connote the satisfaction of the fight club to its members, adding a layer of verisimilitude to the film. It also adds to the realism of the film, which is important as it is meant to represent modern society. This goes hand-in-hand with the use of earthy colours in most scenes, juxtaposing with the sterile white colours used in the office. The office is separate from reality, and reflects how consumerism is separate from reality.

Something I feel important to mention is 'Fight Club's reception upon release; the film only made \$101m worldwide from a budget of \$63m, and received mostly poor reviews early on. The movie was branded 'fascist' by reviewers such as Alexander Walker and Roger Ebert, which Fincher responded to with, "How can a film that is a proponent of no ideology whatsoever be labelled as 'fascist'?". While some themes in the film can be viewed as fascist, such as Project Mayhem and the lack of names, I feel that the film promotes anarchy more; letting go of your possessions and destroying big banks; "everything goes back to zero".

The violence was also criticised, as the film was seen as promoting this - again, I feel the reviewers missed the point. The violence was used as a storytelling device, and represents how modern society forces the male to suppress his animalistic traits.

SPOILERS END

Personally, I feel that 'Fight Club' is a near-perfect film. The audience is placed in the Narrator's shoes, and sympathises with a character that could be represented as a villain had they been in a different movie. The key themes give the film a deeper meaning than simply a fighting club, and the film reflects the time it was made in. I love the plot twist, and the film becomes more and more interesting the more times you watch it.