

Deconstructing Identity: Consumerism, Masculinity, and Resistance in *Fight Club*

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ABSTRACT

The film *Fight Club* (1999), directed by David Fincher, offers a complex critique of consumerism, masculinity, and resistance. This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to examine how the film's language and visuals critique capitalist ideologies, challenge traditional masculinity, and explore rebellion against societal norms. The findings reveal consumerism as a force that commodifies identity, masculinity as a construct in crisis, and resistance as both rebellion and chaos. By integrating CDA and MDA, the study highlights the film's layered critique of identity, power, and societal values, positioning *Fight Club* as a culturally significant text that continues to provoke critical reflection.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, fight club film, consumerism, masculinity and resistance

INTRODUCTION

Discourse Analysis is a research method in linguistics that examines how language is used in context to create meaning and convey messages beyond the level of individual sentences. CDA stands for Critical Discourse Analysis, which is a specific approach within the broader field of discourse analysis. Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is an analytical approach used to study communication and meaning making by considering not only written or spoken language but also various modes of communication and representation. In this thesis, the author will embark on a journey into the intricacies of this iconic film, delving deep into the realm of CDA and MDA. Through this analytical lens, the author aims to unravel the layers of meaning, power structures, and ideology that permeate *Fight Club*'s narrative, characters, and dialogues. Through the labyrinthine corridors of *Fight Club*, shall engage with the theories and

methodologies of both methods, drawing upon a rich tapestry of critical thought, including postmodernism and feminism. The objective is to deconstruct and interpret the film's discourse, shedding light on the complex interplay of language, images, and ideologies that shape the story's fabric. In a world where the themes explored in *Fight Club* remain as relevant as ever, this analysis seeks to not only elucidate the film's timeless significance but also to invite critical reflection on the pressing issues it raises. The film *Fight Club* (1999), directed by David Fincher and based on the novel by Chuck Palahniuk, has remained a subject of academic fascination due to its complex narrative and rich thematic exploration. The movie presents a provocative critique of consumerist culture, the constructs of masculinity, and the undercurrents of resistance in modern society. The film's layers of meaning demand a nuanced analytical approach, making it an ideal subject for the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). While CDA focuses on the role of language in shaping and reflecting power relations, ideologies, and social structures, MDA extends this analysis to include visual, auditory, and symbolic elements, offering a more comprehensive interpretation of meaning.

The interplay of consumerism, masculinity, and resistance in *Fight Club* reflects broader sociocultural dynamics, particularly within the late 20th-century context. Consumerism, as portrayed in the film, is not merely a backdrop but a pervasive force that shapes identities and interpersonal relationships. Similarly, the depiction of masculinity in *Fight Club* challenges traditional norms, presenting a spectrum that ranges from vulnerability to hyper-masculine aggression. These themes converge to form a narrative of resistance – not only against societal expectations but also against internalized ideals of perfection and success. This convergence underscores the relevance of discourse analysis methods in unpacking the ideological tensions embedded in the film.

Through the lens of CDA, the study examines how dialogues and monologues in *Fight Club* construct and reinforce themes of consumerism, masculinity, and resistance. By analyzing specific language choices and their contextual implications, the research uncovers how the film critiques capitalist ideologies and the commodification of identity. Meanwhile, MDA allows for an exploration of the film's visual and auditory elements, such as the stark contrast in lighting, the use of symbolic imagery, and the non-linear narrative structure. These elements collectively contribute to the film's ability to provoke reflection on societal norms and individual agency.

Furthermore, this study situates *Fight Club* within a larger cultural and historical framework, examining how its themes resonate with or diverge from contemporary discourses on consumerism and gender. By drawing on theories from postmodernism and feminism, the research highlights the film's critique of hegemonic structures and its subversion of traditional narrative forms. This intersectional approach not only enriches the analysis but also positions *Fight Club* as a text that continues to challenge audiences and scholars alike.

This paper seeks to bridge the gap between textual and visual analysis, demonstrating the efficacy of combining CDA and MDA in film studies. By dissecting the intricate layers of *Fight Club*, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how media constructs and deconstructs societal ideologies. Ultimately, this study invites readers to critically engage with the ways in which films like *Fight Club* reflect and shape the cultural zeitgeist, making them enduring artifacts of their time.

METHODOLOGY

The research approach and design for this study is qualitative approach to analyze the meaning making in *Fight Club* film. Investigating how specific discourses shape and are shaped by social practices and power relations. The author closely examines the characters of the Narrator (Jack) and Tyler Durden, tracing their conversations and motivations throughout the narrative. This qualitative method of analyzing films involves dissecting the storyline to gain a deeper comprehension of the film's themes and messages, as well as the intricate interaction between visual and narrative aspects. The methodology employed in this study integrates Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to examine the multifaceted dimensions of *Fight Club*. The research adopts a qualitative approach, focusing on an in-depth analysis of specific scenes, dialogues, and visual elements that reflect the film's central themes. This dual-method framework enables a holistic understanding of how language and semiotic resources interact to construct meaning.

For the CDA component, the study relies on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, which includes an analysis of textual features, discursive practices, and broader sociocultural contexts. The textual analysis examines the language choices in key

dialogues, exploring how power dynamics, consumerist ideologies, and constructs of masculinity are embedded within the film's script. Discursive practices are analyzed to understand the production and reception of these narratives, considering the film's historical and cultural milieu.

Incorporating MDA, the research draws on the theories of Kress and Van Leeuwen to analyze the visual and auditory modes present in the film. This includes an examination of cinematography, mise-en-scène, sound design, and symbolic imagery. For instance, the stark lighting contrasts and chaotic editing styles are scrutinized to uncover their contribution to the themes of alienation and resistance. Additionally, the interplay between visual elements and dialogue is explored to reveal how they collectively reinforce the film's ideological messages.

Data collection involves identifying and categorizing scenes that prominently feature themes of consumerism, masculinity, and resistance. Scenes are selected based on their relevance to the research questions, with particular attention given to recurring motifs, character interactions, and significant plot developments. The analysis is iterative, allowing for continuous refinement of interpretations as new patterns and connections emerge.

The methodological framework also incorporates intertextual analysis, situating *Fight Club* within a broader discourse of cultural texts. By comparing its themes and narrative strategies with other films and media, the study highlights the unique and shared ways in which cultural products critique societal norms. This approach not only deepens the analysis but also contextualizes *Fight Club* as part of an ongoing dialogue about consumerism, gender, and resistance.

To ensure rigor and reliability, the study employs triangulation, combining insights from CDA, MDA, and intertextual analysis. This multi-pronged approach enhances the validity of findings and provides a comprehensive understanding of the film's complex discourse. Ultimately, the methodology underscores the importance of integrating textual and visual analyses in exploring the intricate interplay of language, culture, and ideology in cinematic works.

DISCUSSION

The author conducts an in-depth analysis of the film *Fight Club*, directed by David Fincher. Based on Chuck Palahniuk's novel, the film depicts a grim narrative exploring

human discontent with contemporary existence and a culture dominated by consumerism. Utilizing vivid imagery and intricate storytelling, the film delivers a compelling narrative on alienation and disorientation within a rapidly evolving society. This chapter provides an exhaustive examination of the cinematic techniques employed by Fincher to convey philosophical and social commentary in *Fight Club*. Each facet of the film is meticulously scrutinized to unveil the underlying significance of every scene and character.

Data 1 Consumerism

1. In the scene at 04:36 - 05:40, "*Like everyone else, I had become a slave to the IKEA nestint instinct*".
2. Scene 04:41 - 04:44 "*Yes. I'd like to order the Erika Pekkari slipcovers*".
3. Scene 05:07-05:09 "*I would flip through catalogs and wonder, "What kind of dining set defines me as a person? We used to read pornography, now it was the Horchow Collection"*".
4. Scene 05:13- 05:21 "*If I saw something like clever coffee table sin the shape of a yin and yang, I had to have it*".
4. "*Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes. And working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need*" at 1:07:38-1:07:43.
5. At scene 29:25 – 29:26, Tyler says "*Stop being perfect*", and
6. At scene 29:27-29:28, Tyler says "*Let's evolve*".

Data 2 Masculinity Issues

1. This is a dialog between Jack and Tyler at minutes 32:51-32:59.
"Narrator: Why?
Tyler Durden: Why? I don't know why, I don't know. Never been in a fight, you?
Narrator: No, but that's a good thing.
Tyler Durden: No, man it's not. How much can you know yourself if you've never been in a fight? I don't wanna die without any scars".
2. Jack: "*Yes, they are bruises from fighting and yes, I am comfortable with that. I am enlightened*" (53:09-53:13).
3. Tyler says, "*I want you to hit me as hard as you can*" (31:02-31:04).
4. Jack mumblings "*I felt sorry for all the guys packing into gyms, trying to look like what Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger said they should*" (43:16-:43:21).
5. Jack: "*Is that a man looks like?*" Tyler Durden: "*Self-improvement is masturbation. Now Self-destruction...*".
6. Tyler answered "*Self-improvement is masturbation. Now, Self-destruction...*" (43:22-43:29).
7. Minutes 38:44 – 38: 49 Tyler says "*We're a generation of men raised by women. I'm wondering if another woman is really the answer we need*".
8. Tyler Durden: "*The first soap was made from heroes' ashes, like the first monkey shot into space. Without pain, without sacrifice, we would have nothing. Like the first monkey shot into space*" (1:00:04-1:00:10).

9. At 1:00:00-1:00:02 Tyler also goes on to say, *“Stay with the pain, don’t shut this up”*. And Jack answered with *“I’m going to my cave. I’m going to my cave; I’m going to find my power animal”*.

Data 3 Resistance

1. At 54:44 – 54:47 *“Reject the basic assumptions of civilization, especially the importance of material possessions”*.

2. Tyler Durden: *[to the police chief] “Hi. You’re going to call off your rigorous investigation. You’re going to publicly state that there is no underground group. Or... these guys are going to take your balls.*

They’re going to send one to the New York Times, one to the LA Times press-release style. Look, the people you are after are the people you depend on. We cook your meals, we haul your trash, we connect your calls, we drive your ambulances. We guard you while you sleep. Do not... fuck with us”. At the scene Jack said, *“When the fight is over nothing solved, but nothing mattered” (44:25-44:28)*.

In the scene at 04:36 - 05:40, Jack feels like he is a slave to the IKEA nest instinct. Just like everyone else, he feels that the world of consumerism makes him buy things which is not that important for Jack. Starting with Jack who speculates on the character of the dining set, at scene 05:07-05:09 which can be minimized by matching his taste and use. And at scene 05:13- 05:21, Jack also feels that when he finds the same item but has different characteristics, he will immediately buy the item without further do. Here it is explained that the impact of consumerism on Jack himself can be felt strongly, making him greedy and not good at controlling himself. At scene 29:25 – 29;27, Tyler says “Stop being perfect”. He proposes a deeper concept about how to free yourself from the pressure to be perfect and meet society’s expectations. Tyler believes that obsession with perfection and ideal appearance only brings dissatisfaction and emptiness in a person’s life. In the context of this film, Tyler Durden encourages Jack (the narrator) to break away from these expectations and break away from social conformity. He wants Jack to be free from the pressure to always appear perfect and accept his imperfections and uniqueness as an individual. . Tyler also said “Let’s evolve” at the 27-29:28, what Tyler meant was to encourage Jack to change mentally and emotionally to reach his full potential. As already explained, Tyler as a character full of ambiguity and anti-consumerist philosophy, emphasizes the need for humans to break out of their comfort zones and surpass the limits they set for themselves. We ourselves know that if the monotonous everyday life continues, then the comfort zone can have a negative impact on a person’s personality. This is because someone might be reluctant to take risks or explore new things that may

cause discomfort. Vice versa, personal growth occurs when someone steps out of their comfort zone and faces new challenges that allow them to develop as individuals. In the context of the film *Fight Club*, it can also be understood as a call to change the norms existing in society. Tyler Durden plans to at least change Jack's perspective by rejecting consumer culture and the standards imposed by modern society. Tyler Durden encourages individuals to question and revise existing paradigms and take real action to bring about social change for the better. Therefore, Tyler's call applies not only to individuals but also to society as a whole.

At scene 53:09 – 53:13, here it implies that Jack is proud and comfortable with his scars. He considers that the scars are a sign that he had a good fight, and he has reached an understanding of himself, and many make scars and tattoos a masculine identity. By saying that he "I am enlightened", shows that he has reached a point where he has accepted his life situation. He not only accepts the scars but also symbolically all his actions including the matter of taking risks that Jack has not been able to realize before. There are many violent scenes in the movie that are based on the concept of masculinity. At scene 43:16-43:21, Jack himself explains his sympathy for men who have fallen into the culture of consumerism and the imposition of beauty standards by the industry in advertising. He feels that men are chasing the dream body as shown in Calvin Klein advertisements, featuring a solid masculine body and perfect abs. at scene 43:22-43:29, is still closely related, here "self-improvement is masturbation" is interpreted as a futile effort, feeling like you have done everything but it is the same. Because the aim of the business is not based on one's own will. At the scene 38:44 – 38: 49, Tyler tries to convey his thoughts about how many men of his generation were raised by their mothers without the presence of a father figure. Because, here, Jack and Tyler tell how they also lost a father figure who was supposed to be a complement to a family. . Based on the scene 1:00:04-1:00:10, Tyler is implying that even something as simple as soap has its own history, just as every history will require sacrifices for the fruits of those sacrifices to be used and enjoyed for the future. This refers to a living creature or primate that was sent into space for a mission, the primate was named Albert II launched by the United States on Tuesday, June 14, 1949. Tyler uses the example of this event to emphasize the idea that any sacrifice will always require sacrifice from either animals or humans themselves.

The resistance attitude shown by Tyler is where most of Tyler's actions are wrong and controversial. Because Tyler has an ideology to reduce the level of capitalist depression by bombing every existing company. Tyler's charisma also has a negative side because he tends to manipulate club members with an intensity that is like brainwashing, he rules with anarchic missions to realize the ideology he considers correct. The wild instinct of doing whatever we want, without thinking about the consequences that will occur. With Tyler wiping out all capitalist companies, there will be social inequality, new economic problems, and imbalances in life. . From the beginning, Tyler is a hypocrite, where he talks about consumerism, but he wears fashionable clothes and a nice haircut. Which is the fairness of most people being, we all want to be the one doing the right thing, but we always cheat in some way or show our hypocrisy. He always looks like this throughout the film, talking about consumerism but Tyler is an example of where consumerism affects a person.

The discussion of *Fight Club* reveals how consumerism operates as a subtle yet omnipresent force in the lives of the characters, particularly through the Narrator's obsession with material possessions. The recurring imagery of IKEA catalogs and designer furniture symbolizes the reduction of identity to commodifiable attributes, illustrating the film's critique of a consumer-driven society. This preoccupation with consumer goods reflects broader cultural narratives that equate success and self-worth with material acquisition. The analysis highlights how the film's dialogue, such as the statement "We buy things we don't need, with money we don't have, to impress people we don't like," encapsulates the disillusionment inherent in consumerist ideology.

Masculinity, another central theme, is portrayed in *Fight Club* as both a source of power and a site of crisis. The film deconstructs traditional notions of masculinity through its depiction of male characters grappling with their sense of purpose and identity. Tyler Durden's philosophy, which champions aggression and self-destruction as pathways to liberation, serves as a counter-narrative to the emasculating effects of modernity and consumerism. However, this hyper-masculine ideal is not without critique; the film exposes its inherent contradictions and the societal consequences of unchecked violence and dominance. By juxtaposing scenes of physical combat with moments of vulnerability and introspection, *Fight Club* challenges viewers to reconsider what it means to "be a man" in contemporary society.

The theme of resistance is intricately woven into the narrative, with Tyler Durden embodying a figure of rebellion against societal norms. Project Mayhem, the anarchistic movement central to the plot, symbolizes the extremes of anti-establishment ideology. The film critiques both the allure and the dangers of such movements, emphasizing the thin line between liberation and chaos. Through its portrayal of resistance, *Fight Club* raises critical questions about the effectiveness and ethics of radical change, inviting viewers to reflect on the complexities of challenging systemic oppression.

A critical interplay exists between consumerism and masculinity in *Fight Club*, with consumer culture amplifying the crisis of male identity. The film suggests that the commodification of life and societal pressures to conform to materialistic ideals exacerbate feelings of inadequacy among men. Tyler's disdain for consumerism and his rejection of perfectionist ideals highlight the struggle to reclaim identity in a homogenized world. This intersection of themes underlines how the societal constructs of masculinity are shaped and distorted by consumerist values, leading to destructive behaviors as depicted in the formation of Fight Club.

Furthermore, the visual and narrative strategies employed in *Fight Club* enhance the thematic critique of social issues. Kress and Van Leeuwen's framework for MDA underscores the significance of symbolic imagery in reinforcing ideological messages. For example, the chaotic and fragmented editing mirrors the Narrator's psychological disintegration, while the visual juxtaposition of corporate environments with violent fight scenes underscores the clash between consumerism and primal masculinity. These techniques not only deepen the narrative but also provoke critical reflection on the societal norms being challenged.

Finally, the social implications of the film's themes extend beyond its narrative confines. By engaging with Fairclough's concept of CDA, the study highlights how *Fight Club* reflects and critiques broader cultural discourses, such as the commodification of identity and the pursuit of self-improvement. The film's enduring relevance lies in its ability to resonate with contemporary audiences, sparking discussions about the implications of consumer culture, gender constructs, and the ethics of resistance. This analysis positions *Fight Club* as both a product and a critique of its time, inviting viewers to interrogate their own roles within these sociocultural frameworks.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of *Fight Club* through Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis reveals a complex interplay of consumerism, masculinity, and resistance that mirrors broader societal tensions. By deconstructing the language, visuals, and symbolic elements of the film, this study highlights its critique of capitalist ideologies and the commodification of identity. The exploration of masculinity exposes the fragility and contradictions inherent in traditional gender constructs, while the theme of resistance underscores the challenges and risks of opposing societal norms.

This study demonstrates the value of combining CDA and MDA in uncovering the deeper meanings within cinematic works, offering insights into how films reflect and shape cultural discourses. *Fight Club* serves as a timeless critique of modern society, resonating with audiences by addressing enduring issues of identity, power, and ideology. The film's multifaceted narrative and stylistic choices invite continued scholarly engagement, ensuring its place as a pivotal text in cultural and media studies.

Future research could extend this analysis by examining the reception of *Fight Club* across diverse cultural contexts or comparing its themes with those of other films critiquing consumerism and masculinity. Such endeavors would further illuminate the dynamic relationship between media, culture, and societal change.

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