

# Homosexuality in *Fight Club*

## ROUGH DRAFT

Many critics, such as Alexander Walker, critic for the *Evening Standard* (a London paper), and David Ansen, critic for *Newsweek*, have stated that they have found a great deal of homoerotic material in the film *Fight Club*, starring Edward Norton, Brad Pitt, and Helena Bonham-Carter. I did not see any of these homosexual overtones, nor do I believe that they are present in the film. Ansen felt that the entire premise of "guys masochistically lining up to be beaten by Brad Pitt reeks with homoeroticism" but I feel differently. I feel that these men are fighting to reclaim a sense of masculinity that has been denied to them, not because it gives them a sense of sexual gratification. Furthermore, Walker wrote that "Pitt and Norton in *Fight Club* raise their own level of sad-sexual gratification by steering head-on into traffic." Again, I feel that in this scene, the characters were not trying to achieve a level of sexual gratification from this. I feel that this scene is an allegory for the life of Norton's character. Norton's character is learning the importance of letting go of all the aspects of his life that he cannot control. Finally, some critics have said that Norton's reaction to Pitt sleeping with Bonham-Carter is proof that Norton and Pitt have a homosexual relationship. I feel that Pitt represents the father that walked out on Norton when he was six years old. Norton's jealousy is due to the fact that Norton feels like his father is walking out on him again. Perhaps on the surface, *Fight Club* contains some material that appears homoerotic, but I feel that below the surface are emotions far more complex than sexual gratification.

The narrator, a man who refers to himself as Jack, is the central character in *Fight Club*. Jack is a white-collar accident investigator for a major automotive manufacturer. When the movie begins, Jack is so emotionally isolated that he has severe insomnia. Jack begs his doctor for drugs to help him sleep, the doctor tells him that if he wants to see "real pain," he should go observe a testicular cancer support group. Jack goes to the group. Soon, Jack gets hooked on support groups, from sickle cell and blood parasites to colon cancer. Jack finds mental relief at these groups, until Marla Singer, played by Helena Bonham-Carter, appears. Marla, a morbid, callous woman, is dressed

appropriately in her dark grunge clothes and cigarette between her lips. It is clear that she is in good health, just like Jack. As Jack states, "Her lie reflected my lie." With Marla present, Jack no longer feels connected to the groups. Now that another faker is present, these groups are no longer a release for Jack's angst. Around this time, Jack meets Tyler Darden, played by Brad Pitt, on an airplane. Tyler is an enigmatic rebel. Immediately, Jack is intrigued by Tyler's mysterious charisma. As Jack arrives home, he sees that his apartment has exploded. With no other place to go, Jack turns to Tyler. After a few beers, Tyler agrees to let Jack say with him, but, in return, Jack had to him hit. The two get into a fight and the seed for starting a fight club is planted.

Soon thereafter, Jack and Tyler founded Fight Club, a place where emasculated men can go and reclaim their manhood through fighting. However, it did not stop there. Tyler believes that society is to blame for the turmoil the modern man is experiencing. So, Tyler uses the members of Fight Club as his army. It began with Tyler giving the other members "homework assignments," such as starting fights with random strangers. Soon, Fight Club becomes "Project Mayhem," nothing short of a small army of anarchists. When Jack learns that the ultimate goal of Project Mayhem is to bomb the major credit card buildings, Jack begins to oppose Tyler. By doing so, Jack establishes his own identity, his own sense of masculinity. This search for the meaning of masculinity in the modern world is what I feel is the major theme of the film. However, the ways masculinity is explored is what leads some to believe that *Fight Club* is laden with homoeroticism.

As David Ansen wrote in his review, "All these guys masochistically lining up to be beaten by Brad Pitt ... The homoeroticism is off the charts." I do not feel that these men fight out of sexual excitement. I believe that these men fight to prove that they are still men. Historically, masculinity has been defined by type of job and fighting prowess. Now, the typical avenues to prove masculinity have been removed. With the rise of the two-income household, a man cannot even measure his masculinity by how well he takes care of his family. As Susan Failed wrote in her review of the film, "For men who are offered fewer and fewer meaningful occupations, beating each other up may seem like the one thing guys can still do well." The reason that Jack and Tyler started Fight Club, and not, for instance, a painting club or a wood carving club, is because fighting is one of the last things that is still considered completely masculine. The men that joined Fight Club did not need something to release their aesthetic passions; they needed to awaken the most primal parts of their male psyches. As Peter Travers wrote in his review in *Rolling Stone*, at

Fight Club, "emasculated men bond by punching on another until numbness gives way to feeling." For some reason, fighting gave the men who joined Fight Club a new fire. The first time the audience meets Bob, the ex-bodybuilder who had his testicles removed, he was a distraught mess. As he hugged Jack, he murmured, "We're still men," although he sounded as though he was trying to convince himself. However, when Bob fought Jack, Bob definitely had a passion that he lacked earlier. For the first time in a long time, Bob felt like a man. I do not know why fighting makes men feel like men, but for some reason, it does. There is no homosexual motive behind the men fighting. All they want is to feel like men.

In his review of the film, Alexander Walker wrote, "As in David Cronenberg's pornographic film *Crash*, in which sick sadists engineer road accidents to top-up their libido, Pitt and Norton in *Fight Club* raise their own level of sado-sexual gratification by steering head-on into traffic." I do not believe that the characters drove into traffic for sexual pleasure. I believe that this scene is an allegory for Jack's life. This scene takes place right after Project Mayhem's first major prank, and Jack is demanding an explanation as to why Tyler did not tell him about it. Tyler, after a few vague answers, lets go of the car's steering wheel. As Jack reaches for the wheel, Tyler screams at him, "Let go! Just let go...." This is an important statement about Jack's life. So many things Jack does, including working at a job he hates, he does in order to feel more secure. However, there are some things in his life that he cannot control. These things can end up destroying Jack, just as the uncontrolled car eventually crashed. These things cannot be controlled, and by attempting to, Jack is wearing himself out. As Tyler said, Jack must let these things happen, and when they do, walk away, just as Tyler and Jack walked away from the destroyed car.

Some critics have stated that Jack's jealousy over Tyler sleeping with Marla is proof that there is a homosexual connection between Jack and Tyler. However, it is never stated whom Jack is jealous of. It is obvious that Jack is attracted to Marla, however, he lacks the courage to approach her. By Marla sleeping with Tyler, rather than him, Jack may feel rejected by Marla. Even if Jack is not jealous of the attention Marla is paying to Tyler, I do not believe that this shows that there is a homosexual between Tyler and Jack. I believe that Jack sees Tyler as a father figure. Jack states that his father walked out on him when he was six. Jack never learned what it means to be a man. As Jack said, "I'm a 30 year-old boy." Tyler is important in this respect because he acts as the father Jack never had by taking him in, bonding with him, teaching useful tricks, such as how to

make dynamite out of soap, and most importantly, by teaching him how to be a man. Once Tyler began to sleep with Marla, Jack felt like his father walked out on him again. Once again, the most important male figure in Jack's life pushed him aside. I believe that Jack did love Tyler, but not in a sexual way. Tyler was like a big brother to Jack, and once Tyler stopped spending time with him, Jack felt jealous.

In conclusion, I do not feel that *Fight Club* contains the heavy homosexual overtones that some critics have accused it of having. The men did not fight in out of a sado-masochistic sexual desire; they fought in order to recapture the masculinity that they cannot achieve in today's society. Tyler and Jack did not swerve into on-coming traffic in order to attain a measure of sexual satisfaction. This scene is an allegory for Jack's need to control all the aspects of his life. Jack's jealousy over Tyler and Marla's relationship did not stem from a homosexual attraction. Jack is jealous because he feels abandoned by his best friend. I feel that *Fight Club* is not about homosexuality. In the words of Peter Travers, "It's about being young, male and powerless against the pacifying drug of consumerism. It's about solitude, despair and bottled-up rage. It's about how not to feel dead as Y2K approaches. It's about daring to imagine the disenfranchised reducing the world to rubble and starting over." I feel that the film is about men coming together to discover who they are. This movie is about brotherhood, not homosexuality.

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Note: This essay was revised to deal with the director's intentions in creating the film. This draft seems to assume that the characters are "real people" as opposed to parts of arguments or examples that the director is presenting to support his theme or thesis statement. (We are assuming that films and novels can be analyzed like argumentative essays.)

Also, the references to the critics needed to be better developed and documented. He did not represent their arguments very clearly in his background.

Finally, Stroud's arguments needed better supporting examples from the film. He needed to make his supporting arguments clearer so that his examples from the film could be explained in more detail. His discussion here is too vague.

The final draft was two pages longer.