

The Disturbing Victims of Chuck Palahniuk

Anders Westlie



Master thesis at ILOS

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

16.11.2012

The Disturbing Victims of Chuck Palahniuk

© Anders Westlie

2012

The Disturbing Victims of Chuck Palahniuk

Anders Westlie

<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Trykk: CopyCat Express, Oslo

Abstract

The writings of Chuck Palahniuk contain a large variety of strange and interesting characters. Many of them are victims of the choices they or others made, which is how their lives become interesting. I aim to see if there is any basis in reality for some of the situations and fears that happen. I also mean that Palahniuk thinks people are afraid of the wrong things, and afraid of too many things in general, and will approach this theory in my discussion.

Introduction

This thesis has been through an abundance of versions and changed shape and content very many times over the years; from being all psychoanalysis to pure close reading, and ended with a study of victims, fears and reactions. In the end, the amount of close reading that has gone into it has bypassed the use of theory. This is mostly a reaction to past criticism to my over-use of critics, and focusing on that rather than the texts at hand.

I find my time disposition in the production process of this paper to be shame, but life will sometimes get in the way of good intentions. As such, I hope that you, dear reader, find my efforts not in vain and take some interest in what my efforts have produced.

I will say thanks

To one group of people.

Thank you to those who believed in me

I only wish

You could have made me believe in myself

Before it was nearly too late.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Disease and Insanity	7
2.1	Worse than Worst Case Scenarios	8
2.2	STD Surprises	11
2.3	Sick but not Showing	16
2.4	Cancer	18
2.5	An Insane Industry	20
2.6	Playing with the DSM	21
2.7	Enter Tyler Durden	23
2.8	Addicted to Sex	24
2.9	Victimization	25
3	Violence and Self-Abuse	27
3.1	Something to Fight for	27
3.2	Loneliness	29
3.3	Workplace Violence	30
3.4	Real Fights	32
3.5	Destroying Beauty	33
3.6	The Ultimate Mistake	35
3.7	Who Hurts Who, Tyler?	37
3.8	Tender is Confronted	38
3.9	Threatening Cults	39
3.10	Scared Asexual	41
3.11	Doomsday Destruction	42
3.12	Just Too Perfect	43
3.13	Irreversible Damage	44
4	Gender and Sexuality	47
4.1	Nesting	47
4.2	Bob's Plight	48
4.3	Emasculation	49
4.4	Split down the Middle by the Libido	50
4.5	Sex Substitute for Sale	51

4.6	Shane's Journey	52
4.7	The Three Transgenders	53
4.8	Abject Anal.....	54
4.9	Sexualized Teenagers	55
4.10	Following the Lead	59
4.11	..And Men?.....	60
4.12	Amateur Pornography	61
5	Conclusion.....	64
	Sources	67

.

1 Introduction

The notion that successful literature is written with the ability to invoke emotional reactions in the reader is neither new nor controversial. Following from this we know that a popular way in which to do this, is to unsettle the reader. On this subject, it is my thesis that Chuck Palahniuk, through his writings, attempts to unsettle his readers in order to show them what they fear, why they are afraid of the wrong things, and how fears, real and fake, create victims that have to decide on what paths to take from there. As such, I aim to show how he does this, what the basis of those fears are in society, and how these fears are often unfounded, perhaps rather redirected from other issues that people would be right to worry about.

Chuck Palahniuk is certainly most famous for his debut novel *Fight Club*, which became a blockbuster movie with a cult following. Beyond this novel, however, he has by now produced quite an extensive body of work, where each novel is more unsettling than the one before – not just to us readers, but to the author himself.

"Every time I write something, I think, this is the most offensive thing I will ever write," Palahniuk tells his audience. "But, no, I always surprise myself."¹

The offensive parts he talks about are also necessarily those which the readers find unsettling – when you shake the foundation, it is not a question of which is cause and which is effect, it is the same. When it comes to offensiveness and Palahniuk's writings, however, he has not always been on the same page as his publishers. As the story goes, *Invisible Monsters* was his first novel intended for publishing, but was rejected "Because the marketing people found it too disturbing"², to which his response was obvious;

"I wrote *Fight Club* as big screw you to all these people," he says. "They were all saying: 'Could you write something a little lighter?', so my automatic reaction was to do something much darker."

In the beginning, Palahniuk's chosen genre of writing was transgressive fiction, which he describes as

¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/mar/13/fiction.chuckpalahniuk>

² <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/fighting-talk-how-chuck-palahniuk-became-the-marilyn-manson-of-the-literary-circuit-450867.html>

...loosely defined as fiction in which characters misbehave and act badly, commit crimes or pranks as a way of either feeling alive or as political acts of civil disobedience. [...] They came all the way to September 11, 2001, when irony didn't die, but transgressional fiction died. Because suddenly any kind of transgressional fiction that was sitting on any desk in New York ready to be published was suddenly pulled off the market. Because any eco-terrorism, political terrorism, societal pranking, anything like that, suddenly was going to look like big, blanket terrorism.³

As a response to this development, Chuck explains further in another interview;

I have switched to writing horror novels, because in America today, you just can't do transgressive fiction. Nobody wants to hear that message, and certainly nobody wants to laugh about it. Americans don't want to be criticised right now. They just won't hear it. The day of 9/11, I realised this was happening. You could not have published *Fight Club* on September 12 or since. The American public is not going to have any sympathy or understanding for subversive art or arguments for a long, long time.⁴

Thus we see that the author himself considers the novels that were published before 9/11, *Fight Club*, *Survivor*, *Invisible Monsters* and *Choke*, to be representative of transgressive fiction, and those he wrote after the infamous incident, *Lullaby*, *Diary*, *Haunted*, *Rant* and *Snuff*, to be within the genre of horror. I will have a focus on *Fight Club* and *Invisible Monsters* in this discussion, his first novels, though many avid readers of his consider these just as unsettling as his horror. This will of course be balanced by discussions related to *Survivor*, *Diary*, *Haunted* and *Snuff*, as they cover many important areas in such a discourse, a selection I feel will be best suited to the discussion of my topics; disease and insanity, beauty, violence and self-mutilation, gender and sexuality.⁵

The critique he has for society in his early novels is one I have interpreted in such a way that he thinks people are afraid of the wrong things; you should not fear random flesh eating viruses when you have no health care – you should rather look at your lack of health care and

³ Sartain, "Even the Mona Lisa's Falling Apart": The Cultural Assimilation of Scientific Epistemologies in Palahniuk's Fiction', in *Stirrings Still*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p40 / *Postcards from the Future: The Chuck Palahniuk Documentary*

⁴ <http://johannhari.com/2003/11/10/chuck-palahniuk-predicts-destruction/>

⁵ A question these interviews raise, which I will not answer here, is what exactly differentiates what he calls transgressive characters, like Tyler Durden (*Fight Club*) and Brandy Alexander (*Invisible Monsters*), from those in horrors, like Branch Bacardi (*Snuff*) and Brandon Whittier (*Haunted*) – if there even is a difference, beyond that of intent.

do something about it. You see this type of mentality in nearly all his novels as characters are afraid of things that do not matter, and ignore the important issues in life.

This is my key reason for approaching Palahniuk's novels in the way I do here; looking at them from the angle that they are critiquing society; looking at the bigger issues hidden behind the stories that we see on a daily basis. When talking about *Survivor*, he says what his approach to writing a novel is;

The books are never about what you think they are about. *Survivor* is really about our education system because I feel, more often than not, kids are sort of taught or trained to be the best possible cogs in some big corporate machine. They're not really taught in an empowered way that they can start their own company so that they can create and run their own lives. They are sort of taught to be just good employees, to just fit in.⁶

While education is not a topic I chose to handle, other topics are treated in the same way, and based on the novels I focus on, these topics are possibly more relevant for broader contexts and wider discussion.

All of these topics are directly connected to deep rooted fears that the human race nurtures, and also to immense industries that make money from dealing with related issues, just as they are surrounded by groups claiming power and authority based on them. For this reason, I have collected various numbers in terms of statistics, though also allowed other critical writers to do that job for me; while one would usually not accept such numbers that have already been processed repeatedly, at some point you just have to accept that numbers will never be as clean and true as you want; this is also a topic to which I return repeatedly. The way in which the media and other groups use statistics in order to sell their messages and opinions is often worthy of study and criticism, and I choose to do so.

Towards finding a critic that covers many of the same areas as I do, I have found Barry Glassner – his *The culture of fear : why Americans are afraid of the wrong things* is a heavy book when it comes to content, yet approachable for a broad readership due to honest and simple language. Additionally, as I mean Palahniuk agrees with Glassner in Americans being afraid of the wrong things, it seems made for this discussion. Glassner also attempts to put his finger on the pulse of the media, finding the cases they enjoy making noise about and seeing what is hiding underneath the spectacle.

⁶ <http://chuckpalahniuk.net/books/survivor>

Between the texts and the subject matter, there is no way out of using close readings in order to get under the skin and between the lines of what is written; Palahniuk is known for speaking his mind, also writing clear cut and direct messages. This, however, does not mean he has no hidden purposes; as he said on the topic of *Survivor* "the books are never about what you think they are about." This is why I use my experience in psychoanalysis, which lets me attempt to find his intended meaning. Through studying Freud, Lacan and Derrida, also Kristeva and Butler, I have developed an understanding that will let me make an attempt worthy of joining in the debates that surround my chosen topics, especially as I join it at the angle of social critique read into an author that has a tendency to be approached at the level of face value. Several of his characters and plots are the very embodiment of the Other, an old literary favourite. The best description was perhaps made by Sigmund Freud in his "das Unheimliches", which translates the key term into English as the Uncanny, a term just as good as the Other which is more used nowadays. It is a simple truth that Freud here delved deeper into discussing this subject than anybody had before him.

The most extreme cases go beyond the Other and approach the abject, best seen from Kristeva's angle. She defines the abject in comparison to the Other, or the Uncanny, like this: "Essentially different from "uncanniness," more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory."⁷

In short, the abject is the process of becoming the other; the other cannot be the self, at that point it is abject. Examples range from being deathly sick, or just violently and incurably sick, or perhaps just becoming something you yourself cannot phantom to understand; examples from Palahniuk will include incest, emasculation, several severe mental disorders, and notions even worse than these, or combinations of them. A very simple form of abjection can even be the process of ageing, if one has been such inclined as to fear it, and even not want to grow old, or fears not ageing well.

Lacan's mirror phase, explained in *Écrits*, goes a long way towards explaining why several of Palahniuk's characters behave the way they do; they realize how society sees them and go to extremes in order to shatter the mirror and be able to start anew. This is an extreme way in which to avoid subjection, and we are left wondering what they become when they are no longer able to fit into the molds they once occupied, no longer subjected.

⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.5

The topic of subjection is one focal issues on which Foucault writes, along with repression and other topics related to the history of sexuality and medical treatment; between *Power*, 'The Panopticon' *History of Sexuality* and *The Birth of the Clinic*, his key topics were covered. Though, one cannot help noticing that he spent much time on the same topics, just slight variations in each publishing.

A last central theorist that has been studied in order to breach these topics was Judith Butler; with the gender and sexuality issues that appear in *Invisible Monsters*, and are also present in other of his novels, the ability to read outside of the binary heterocentric system becomes necessary; the title of *Undoing Gender* does indeed sound like the story of Shane's life. Between her and Foucault, we can also see the power inherent in gender, quite relevant to all of the novels.

Lynn M. Ta has taken the approach of literary gender studies, unleashing it on *Fight Club* with a mix of post-modern gender theory, contemporary issues related to maleness and also what contemporary consumer society does to us.

From *Fight Club*, Ta does what I have also found necessary; including a few quotes from the movie. This is because the movie has done a job of summarising some of the very best lines in the novel, transforming a message that can be spread over several chapters into lines so sharp and direct, they have become the stuff of legends; indeed, I suspect this is part of the key to the success the movie had.

Throughout the ages, different intellectuals have come to the same conclusion; Samuel Taylor Coleridge said "in politics, what begins in fear usually ends up in folly", which we can sense evolved into Franklin Delano Roosevelt saying that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself" nearly two centuries later.

More recently it seems that while our fears may have developed, so must also our will to shake them; Michelle Obama had a longer speech but well worth repeating:

...Barack and I talked long and hard about this decision. This wasn't an easy decision for us because we've got two beautiful little girls and we have a wonderful life and everything was going fine and there would have been nothing that would have been more disruptive than a decision to run for President of the United States.

And as more people talked to us about it, I mean the question came up again and again, what people were most concerned about I think was—

they were afraid.

It was fear. Fear again, raising its ugly head in one of the most important decisions that we would make. Fear. Fear of everything. Fear that we might lose. Fear that he might get hurt. Fear that this might get ugly. Fear that it would hurt our family. Fear.

But you know the reason why I said “Yes”? Was because I am tired of being afraid!

I am tired of living in a country where every decision that we have made over the last ten years wasn't for something, but it was because people told us we had to fear something. We had to fear people who looked different from us, fear people who believed in things that were different from us; fear of one another right here in our own back yards—I am so tired of fear and I don't want my girls to live in a country, in a world, based on fear...

...We have a chance to make something real happen; something possible happen; to live beyond our fear.⁸

With such influential figures throughout such a span of time all pointing out the same; fear keeps us back, fear makes us unable to fulfill our potential, even suggesting that the fear of what might happen is as bad as the things that we fear, it is somewhat astounding that we have not moved beyond this staggering fear. For this reason, I aim to point out some reasons, some groups and institutions that do their best to keep us afraid. For them, it's a case of money and power, and for those who fear, it should be so much more than that. It should be a case of living lives without having to watch out for what is unlikely to happen in the first place. Rational thinking and common sense should be allowed to overrule attempts at fear-based subjection.

⁸ <http://autisticbfh.blogspot.no/2007/10/michelle-obama-im-tired-of-being-afraid.html>

2 Disease and Insanity

In Palahniuk's writings, I will suggest that the repeated use of themes such as disease and insanity has a reason beyond the obvious idea of literary entertainment. Through scaring and creeping out readers, Palahniuk also has a goal in telling the readers that they are afraid of the wrong things. Of course, socially critical thinkers such as Foucault will agree; fear is power, and a great way of controlling the populace, a concept probably most famously discussed in his writings collected in *Power*, 'The Panopticon' and *History of Sexuality*. With that in mind, we enter the topic of disease. The issue of fear relating to disease has had a great impact on society through the years. Beyond the scope of power, we will also have to acknowledge that there is money to be earned from fear – incredible amounts of money; treatments for diseases that are for most intents and purposes completely harmless, are a multi-billion dollar industry, not to mention the industries that surround the legitimate medical ones, with so-called herbal, natural, ancient and several other large sounding treatment names; where a majority of the products lack scientific proof of their working, and are not subject to medical industry standards. Recently we can also see a spike in the numbers counting people who suffer from what I will call modern mental disorders; these are the ones that we used to think of as quirks or personality traits rather than insanity. As these numbers increase so does the value of treating these same disorders. Outside of the directly related industries, there is one clear winner when it comes to the financial market surrounding fear: the news media. The old slogan 'if it bleeds it leads' is still very much in effect; give the audience something grotesque or scary and they will watch your show or buy your paper.

In recent years, this type of fear has been easy to come across, headlined by a variety of animal-themed diseases. Through Mad Cow disease, avian flu and most recently swine flu, we find behavior and diets to have been altered, behavior to have changed when it comes to hygiene and fear of infection, and in relation to this, uncountable hours of commercial slots to have been sold. Through these episodes, we have also seen international organizations like the WHO assert their intentions and stakes at power, just like we have seen the medical industry sell cures and vaccinations that have even been accused of being more dangerous than that which they are made to defeat. Adding to this, we can only start to imagine how many hours worth of TV-spots and pages of newspaper ad-space have been sold, just because people were curious, afraid and wanted the latest news on the recent scare.

2.1 Worse than Worst Case Scenarios

In Palahniuk's writings, we can repeatedly see diseases mentioned, though different effects and contexts exist to play with them. His best example of an infectious disease is found in *Haunted*. The story of Miss Sneezzy might be an extreme case, but the general idea is not so far from real situations and stories. First off, we have her initial contraction of the virus;

My old man, he didn't know enough for a college degree, but he knew how to make money. . . . My old man, he had his maps. His treasure maps, he called them. . . .

The old man's treasure maps were the WPA maps, showing where to find each patch, how many graves it held, how the headstones would look. . . .

Every summer I was out of school, me and the old man would follow these maps . . .

If we could've read the headstones, we'd see how almost the entire town had died in one month. The first cluster of what doctors would call the Keegan virus. Rapid-onset viral brain tumors. (*Haunted*, pp.371-374)

The notion of scary hauntings, curses and scary diseases contracted from ancient burial grounds is a century old cliché, and one cannot help wonder if the entire tradition could be based on ancestral guilt, seeing as the diseases that exterminated several native American tribes were early forms of biological warfare; white man's diseases more or less intentionally spread among those who had no knowledge and experience in dealing with them, and as such died of them. Similarly, on the African and Asian continents, the pyramids and royal gravesites (though completely different types of tombs) were assumed to inflict curses on grave robbers and other invaders. When this was combined with traps to discourage unwanted visitors, it led to a whole host of myths and horror stories that we can still see in contemporary Hollywood productions.

The suggestion that burial grounds such as the one Miss Sneezzy and her father robbed might still contain living traces of a contagious disease is highly unlikely. However, if diseases that we currently take for exterminated from the modern world were to suddenly reappear, they would presumably go unchecked for a very short period before being noticed and treated. A similar story and real fear is easily found in recent history. In 1998 scientists unearthed seven miners buried in Longyearbyen in an attempt to find an intact virus locked away in the

permafrost⁹. The virus they were looking for was the dreaded Spanish Flu that killed between 20 and 50 million people between 1918 and 1920. Before this exhumation there was an uproar of people who were afraid the pandemic flu would be unleashed again by said scientists. However, this did not happen; nor did they find an intact trace of the virus. The way in which Miss Sneezy was treated by the fictional governmental agency is quite extreme;

You build up a viral load to the point you can transmit the Type 1 Keegan virus, and don't expect you'll get a lawyer. Or a caseworker. Or an ombudsman. You end up on Columbia Island, and you can expect to stay in a decent hotelish room like at a franchise hotel, a Ramada Inn or a Sheraton, but for the rest of your life. The same room. The same view. The same bathroom. Room-service food. Cable-television movies. A brown bedspread. Two pillows. One brown recliner chair.

There's people locked up here, people who did just one wrong thing. They sat next to the wrong stranger on an airplane. Or they took a long elevator ride with another person they never even spoke to—then all they did was not die. There's lots of ways you can spend the rest of your life locked up here. Here being a little island in the middle of Puget Sound, in the state of Washington, the Columbia Island Naval Hospital.

Most of the people here, they arrived when they turned seventeen or eighteen years old. The staff doctor, Dr. Schumacher, says we were exposed to something when we were little, some virus or parasite that took years to build in our system. The day it hit the right viral load or blood-serum level, the people around us started to die.

That's when the Centers for Disease Control would notice a cluster of deaths, and the teams come throw you in a container suit and cart you here for the rest of your natural life ...

These days, the government can't kill me and they can't cure me. All they can do is damage control. (*Haunted*, pp.369-374)

However, this is not so far from the worst case scenarios we hear about with regard to strange diseases found around our real world that it reads as an impossible chain of events. With recent events such as the 'pandemic' H1N1-virus, the treatment of victims and reactions of

⁹ <http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/featured/the-town-where-no-one-is-allowed-to-die/4118>

authorities rings closer to home than we might want to admit. It is often suggested that extreme cases call for extreme measures, and it may easily be agreed that her case was extreme. The cases found in reality, however, appear closer to being the boy who cried wolf, and this is exactly what Palahniuk might be trying to say. In a context more temporal to the writing of the novel, we find examples in outbreaks of the Ebola virus, and the scares surrounding mad-cow disease. The Ebola outbreaks were almost exclusively contained to small local areas in Congo, and the mad-cow disease was, one might suggest, more efficient at getting cows killed than humans.

From the second and third passages of my excerpt, one might notice that Palahniuk here uses the language of the media; the victims are not at fault, they never are. They are merely unlucky, struck by random misfortune that ends up, to varying degrees, ruining their lives. Additionally, descriptions are lacking, only given when something appears that could make the reader even more sympathetic to the victims, making the cases even more horrible. In typical ‘have your cake and eat it too’ fashion, both the poor innocent contagious people who unwillingly and unwittingly have killed everybody they knew and everybody who interacted with them as well as these exact victims are described as people who just lost the lottery that is life, the carriers as accidental mass murderers who find themselves locked up in isolation for the rest of their lives, for their own security and that of the world, and also their victims, dying without being left even the slimmest of chances due to the most random of events, and everybody due to just having been in the wrong place at the wrong time. The situation becomes one of those that the media would gladly work; making people afraid of something there is no way they could defend themselves against or do anything with.

These scares surrounding certain diseases are quite transparent in their creation; Barry Glassner describes a concept called “the Cuisinart Effect¹⁰”. He explains how a journalist from the *Washington Post* studied reports on a major network news program: actual reports about Ebola were interspersed with clips from the movie *Outbreak* - a movie arranged around a theoretical outbreak in the US of a virus based on the Ebola virus. To further entangle the two stories, the only known outbreak of Ebola outside of the African continent was in a US lab, where monkeys were infected; this led to the book on which *Outbreak* was based, and this same infection of monkeys happens in the movie, causing the outbreak. As pointed out in the essays surrounding the fear of this virus, we find the same issues that surround Ms.

¹⁰ Glassner, *The Culture of Fear*, p.xxiv

Sneezy's disease and even those surrounding the feared mutations of the H1N1 virus; the theoretical worst case scenario viruses for us will kill themselves due to being too virulent; this is exactly what happened in *Haunted*, as the virus was 100% lethal except for the two who were merely carriers; everybody else was near-instantly incapacitated and died before they could infect others. Comparing this to the more lethal pandemics in known history, we find examples in the bubonic plague and the Spanish flu, where the key to the spreading of the diseases was the fairly long time it took for symptoms to start showing during which the patient was already infectious and also the slow rate at which they killed those infected; this was what allowed the diseases to spread nearly unchecked as carriers were allowed weeks to infect others before anyone took notice. With the current state of medical technology, any disease that is this slow to spread in the first place, which is also a reasonably normal mutation of any virus known to man, is likely to be treatable before it reaches a state near my two example pandemics, as the already present cures will either function or be adaptable to deal with the new threat.

2.2 STD Surprises

On a more realistic subject, while still dealing with diseases, we have his treatment of STDs in *Invisible Monster*. The transformation of Shane proves quite a telling story; as Shannon says

"It's not like they hit me or made me drink satanic blood or anything," I'd say. "They just liked my brother more because he was mutilated." . . .

"He was my big brother by a couple years. His face was all exploded in a hairspray accident, and you'd think my folks totally forgot they even had a second child," I'd dab my eyes on the pillow shams and tell the audience. "So I just kept working harder and harder for them to love me." Evie would be looking at nothing and saying, "Oh, my shit! Oh, my shit!" And her acting, her delivery would be so true it would just bury mine.

"Yeah," I'd say. "He didn't have to work at it. It was so easy. Just by being all burned and slashed up with scars, he hogged all the attention." (*IM*, pp.72-73)

Indeed, looking at the collected comments of his sister, we can draw the assumptions that three factors made Shane the favourite child; he was born first, he was good at sports, and he got to play the role of victim of unfortunate circumstances. In short, as Shannon later says,

My dead brother, the King of Fag Town. The voted best at everything. The basketball king until he was sixteen and his test for strep throat came back as gonorrhoea. (*IM*, p.96)

The transformation at this point is rather drastic:

... my father said, "It's not strep throat you've got, mister, and we'd like to know where you've been and what you've been up to."

"Drugs," my mom said, "we could deal with."

Shane never said a word. His face still shiny and creased with scars.

"Teenage pregnancy," my mom said, "we could deal with."

Not one word.

"Doctor Peterson," she said. "He said there's just about only one way you could get the disease the way you have it, but I told him, no, not our child, not you, Shane."

My father said, "We called Coach Ludlow, and he said you dropped basketball two months ago."

"You'll need to go down to the county health department, tomorrow," my mom said.

"Tonight," my father said. "We want you out of here."

Our father.

These same people being so good and kind and caring and involved, these same people finding identity and personal fulfillment in the fight on the front lines for equality and personal dignity and equal rights for their dead son, these are the same people I hear yelling through my bedroom door.

"We don't know what kind of filthy diseases you're bringing into this house, mister, but you can just find another place to sleep tonight." (*IM*, pp.148-149)

In this conversation, while at one point the parents seem to be two voices speaking as one, simultaneously, the two voices seem to react to different things. The mother suggests all sorts of other, perhaps more common acts of teenage indiscretion and carelessness, and appears to react to the sexual deviancy and the specific act that must be performed to contract what Shane has. This is a topic I will return to later, in my chapter on sexuality. Their father, however, reacts to two completely different things; his dropping out of the basketball which appeared to define who his child was in his eyes, and the actual disease that Shane has contracted and inflicted upon the household.

The high regard and high standards in which the parents held Shane put him on a pedestal from which he could easily topple. This rather disgraceful disease, in the eyes of his father, makes him pass beyond being his perfect beloved son, star athlete and innocent victim of a random occurrence that maimed him for life into the role of the abject, an unknowable 'monster', in his parents' eyes.

This unknowable side of him, based on his sexuality and how his newly revealed orientation is incompatible with his parents' view of the world, casts him in the role of the Freud's Other; he is still the very same man he was prior to the information being revealed, but he has taken on something unknowable. This point is further emphasized when the call comes from the Rhea sisters, saying that he has died of AIDS; this turns him from the unknowable other in the son who is doing something they cannot come to terms with into a much more acceptable figure; our son – the victim of circumstances beyond our control. It can be suggested that the most interesting side of this entire storyline is the severity of the reactions to STDs compared to homosexuality; gonorrhea is nothing and AIDS is deadly, but they pale compared to the threat of sexuality. Just as Shane's parents could forgive him for being gay once they assumed he was dead, the nurse helping treat Shannon states the same thought, just in clearer language:

She looked at me craning my neck to see back down the hall, and she asked if I had any family.

I wrote: yeah, there's my gay brother but he's dead from AIDS.

And she says, "Well, that's for the best, then, isn't it?" (*IM*, p.44)

This is a statement that is in complete agreement with how Glassner writes about groups who state “that AIDS is God’s punishment for homosexuality.”¹¹

I suggest that there a satirical point here, this time concerning negative stereotypes. Shane becomes one as easy as this;

Jump to them and their telephone and years ago some crazy man, some screeching awful pervert, calling them and screaming that their son was dead. Their son they didn't want, Shane, he was dead of AIDS and this man wouldn't say where or when and then he laughed and hung up. (*IM*, p.178)

A homosexual male dying of AIDS could perhaps be something anybody would believe due to it fitting with what they expect should happen. In any other case it would be a fair question to ask if parents would believe not only a random call telling them that their estranged child has died, but also the cause. However, stereotypes can be deeply embedded in the uncritical mind. The entire subconscious belief that the nun stated out loud might be strong enough to silence critical voices; he’s better off dead than living as a homosexual, and as one of ‘them’, his death to AIDS is just a reasonable end to it all. Again we see that Palahniuk uses satire to get a simple message across; we should not buy in to the easy explanations, not always believe what we are told. It is also an attempt to pointing out that stereotypes are just a simple solution for people who are trying to understand things that they refuse to look at from an unbiased or informed point of view, very often based on, or as a result of, behavior that falls outside of the norm that they accept. In this example, we see AIDS as a gay stereotype, yet all over the world it is a problem for people of any sexuality, even extending as far as to children who are infected en vitro.

Returning to an earlier point, the delayed reactions of his parents towards Shane’s supposed death at the hands of AIDS is to make him into the much preferred role of the victim, allowing the entire family unit to grow into this same role;

The house, the brown living room sofa and reclining chairs, everything is the same except my father's put big Xs of duct tape across the inside of all the windows. Mom's car isn't in the driveway where they usually park it. The car's locked in the garage. There's a big deadbolt I don't remember being on the front door. On the front gate is a big "Beware of Dog" sign and a smaller sign for a home security system. When I first

¹¹ Glassner, *Fear*, p.163

get home, Mom waves me inside fast and says, "Stay back from the windows, Bump. Hate crimes are up sixty-seven percent this year over last year." (*IM*, pp.144-145)

Through this the parents give the entire family an identity. Though perhaps extraordinary and extreme, their new group identity allows them to bond with others in similar situations and bond when faced with reactions that might appear;

"The Wilsons put a PFLAG sign in their yard. Two nights later, someone drove right through their lawn, ruined everything." ... "Don't forget the Bradfords. They got a burning bag of dog feces on their front porch. It could've burned their whole house down with them sleeping in bed, all because they hung a rainbow PFLAG wind sock in their backyard." (*IM*, p.147)

Furthermore, the language with which he writes, not only in passages on this topic but most of his entire authorship is short and concise, perhaps taking on more of a journalistic style, with varying intensity and lengths for dramatic effect, rather than the way one would actually write a narrative;

My high-school English teacher, Miss Frasure, one day she's holding a paper I wrote, telling the whole class how good it is, the next day she's wearing sunglasses inside. Saying the light hurts her eyes. She's chewing those orange-flavored aspirin the school nurse gives out to girls on the rag. Instead of teaching, she turns out the lights and shows the class a movie called *How to Field Dress Wild Game*. The movie's not even in color. It's just the only reel of film left on the shelf in the audiovisual room.

That's the last day they see Miss Frasure. (*Haunted*, pp.366-367)

It must be noted that Palahniuk has often been criticized for this style of writing, especially in novels that I have chosen to omit here; the language and style accused of being made for a movie script rather than a novel. Nevertheless, the impact it has is that our emotions are guided more by the flow of the text than of descriptions, and we might even accuse the author of only attempting descriptive discourse when he describes the grotesque, no matter what shape it takes on. This, I suggest, shows Palahniuk's love for the abject in the way described by Kristeva. On the topic of disease, we might notice how it is not quite as easy to summon aspects of visual horror except in more rare and extreme cases.

2.3 Sick but not Showing

In both these cases of infectious diseases, we see that the threat is purely physical.

Throughout, this theme will stay relevant, but in the cases of these diseases, there is another side to the story. An infection is a slow process, and an infectious disease can be spread to others. As such, the reasons behind the scary effect these characters have on us can vary. First off, we have the inner workings of someone who is sick; in Miss Sneezzy's case, we see the world through the eyes of someone who has, though involuntarily and indirectly, killed everybody who was in contact with her. Beyond having been locked up for carrying the disease, statements such as this

[the place is] called The Orphanage because—if you're here—your family is dead. Chances are, your teachers are dead. All your old friends are dead. Anybody who knew you, they're dead and you killed them. (*Haunted*, p.364)

show that she has tendencies towards survivors' guilt and also feelings of guilt for having caused the deaths of everybody she met, knew and loved. As a person, she is to us a complicated mix of the abject and the Other; she scares because she is a potential weapon of mass destruction, yet we pity her for what she inadvertently caused to happen to those around her. On top of this, we can add her fear of never finding love. She becomes, in a way, just another version of Frankenstein's monster; victim of unlucky circumstances, persecuted for something that was entirely not her own fault, and horribly punished for it. Just like the monster, she is a typical representative of the Other. However, not only is she like the monster, she is also kin to the doctor in how she feel remorse for her actions, even though they were never meant to harm anybody, due to the aftereffects of what she did; living her life like normal, not know that anything was wrong. This complexity, then, is something we can imagine Palahniuk having written into the character, in an effort to make us think. The fact is, people are often victims of their circumstances, and in this context, the author even states it;

There's people locked up here, people who did just one wrong thing. They sat next to the wrong stranger on an airplane. Or they took a long elevator ride with another person they never even spoke to—then all they did was not die. (*Haunted*, p.369)

Many work very hard to break out of what can be a vicious cycle. Others again never do, and their lives suffer greatly from it. While such an extensive message might feel out of order in

an example as small as the Miss Sneezzy case, this appears to be one to which Palahniuk appears to return repeatedly, as will I in this discussion.

Another sick person in this novel is Mr. Whittier;

One out of eight million kids develops Hutchinson-Gilford progeria syndrome. A genetic defect in the protein lamin A will make their cells fall apart. Aging them at seven times the normal rate. (*Haunted*, p.113)

His actions, coming across in the book, are perhaps quite natural for a boy his age when given the same chances and limits; he tries to make the most of his circumstances and tries to achieve as many of his goals and dreams as possible before he dies an early death. Looking, then, at what he considers the most important thing to do before he dies, we see something quite disturbing; he is a 13 year-old boy, and the purpose of his remaining life is twofold; sex and money. This, of course, touches upon a rather immense amount of contemporary issues, though two appear to stand out; teenage sexuality and media focus on sex. I shall return to these in chapter 3, but for now, the point here is that Palahniuk uses this disease, which by itself is scary enough, to show us how someone who tries to live life to its full extent shows the readers what he finds most important in life; and with the over-sexing that modern society is subjected to at the hands of media and society in general, this leads to some strange results, one of which is a supposed steadily increase in teenage pregnancies, which can only come as an increasing amount of underage sex.

Another side of Brandon Whittier's disease is the visual impact it gives the reader; as noted, Palahniuk's infectious diseases happen in hiding. If anybody looks like they are sick, they are already near-death, like Miss Sneezzy's victims. Whittier, on the other hand, "with his crowded teeth and big ears, his veined skull and bulging eyes, making his body 126 years old" (*Haunted*, p.113), gets a realistic and even surrealistic description, the reader's pity becoming a conflicted reaction as he blackmails his nurses for money and sex over his own lie when he stated that he was over the national age of consent.

2.4 Cancer

In recent times, there is perhaps one disease that has been universally acclaimed as the scariest one around; while common, it comes in many forms and shapes, all with varying degrees of severity. We are, of course, talking about ‘the big C’; cancer. In *Fight Club*, Marla thinks that she may have it, which leads to her, reacting quite severely;

This was it, Marla said. The tunnel, the light leading her down the tunnel. The death experience was so cool, Marla wanted me to hear her describe it as she lifted out of her body and floated up.

Marla didn't know if her spirit could use the telephone, but she wanted someone to hear her last breath. (*FC*, p.60)

In her case, we are ‘just’ talking about breast-cancer, which is one of the less deadly ones – unless it is allowed to spread. The severity of the surgery can range from a minor snip all the way up to having a whole breast (or both if tumors exist in both) removed. With that said, she never had a tumor in the first place, which shows the false panic these medical conditions can instill in people who are likely to overreact in the first place. The fact is that, while cancer used to be associated with certain death, it has now reached the level where most forms are, if not easily treated, at least containable, and the survival rates climb higher for every year, as medical experts get better at discovering tumors, perhaps at earlier stages, and treatments improve through research and experience. As Frank Furedi reports based on comparative figures, “the age-adjusted mortality rate for all cancers combined, except lung-cancer, has been declining since 1950 for all individual groups except those 85 and above”; the last group ballooning in size due to a lengthening of the average lifespan, and cancer rates increasing by age.¹² When it comes to breast cancer alone, the fear far outweighs the threat, as shown in a Dartmouth study; “women in their forties believe they have a 1 in 10 chance of dying from breast cancer [while] their real lifetime odds are more like 1 in 250.”¹³ Adding to this, we find that in cases like hers, it may be a fair claim that there are other factors perhaps even more intimidating than that slight lump in her breast. On one hand, we have the uncertainty and the suspicion that something might be wrong. The uncertainty is compounded by the fact that there is no way she can find out by herself or if there is a need for it, treat it herself.

¹² Glassner, *Fear*, p.23

¹³ Glassner, *Fear*, p.xvi

Furthermore, cancer is a complex disease in the way that it can spread throughout the body, so that if one tumor is found, there may be others. Beyond this, there is also the fact that Marla is alone, and when she notices the lump, she reacts, and has no one around to share it with who could also help her deal with the stress that is related to this fear. This leads her to contacting the guy with whom she has a love/hate relationship, even though each half of that person is only aware of one half of the relationship. In short; Marla is so desperate that she contacts a person that might as well hate her as anything else, but he is the only person that exists in her life that she can relate to. This side of the story talks about a strain of fear that may seem rather unique to contemporary society, having been born in the post-industrialization era; the fear of solitude, and the loneliness many feel, which makes them also feel like they are not even part of society. Marla appears to fit into this group, with most of her social interactions taking part in support groups where she does not even belong.

Additionally, there is one major fear that can be showed through this cancer-example; the fear of laying your life in somebody else's hands. This is a very contemporary fear, one which has gained a steadily increasing foothold with the development of technology; we have tamed wild animals, the oceans and the skies, but fears of these things and others still exist. While the hands of medical professionals have grown increasingly competent when it comes to surgical matters, at least if one compares to older treatment methods such as leeches and bleeding the patient, the fear remains in the subconscious, as all surgery carries inherent risk, and cases of maltreatment are regularly splashed across newspaper front-pages. Furthermore, this fear carries over into different areas of life and society, where people are usually in no real harm, but there are others in charge of what happens, and human errors are known to happen, which can cause for accidents.

As a man, I will claim it is an objective view, though it certainly is subjective as well, when I suggest that the cancer form suffered by Bob and the others in the support-group Remaining Men Together is more severe; testicular cancer. In this case, there is no treatment except for removing the tumor, and since the tumor is inside a vital part of the male reproductive organ, this part will be removed. Of course, a man with one testicle is still functionally a man, but in the case of Bob, both had to go. This is his problem; his identity as a man has been compromised by this scary disease, and he does not know what to make of himself now. What we find here is that all the different forms of cancer, while dangerous in different ways and influencing people in different ways, they also cast people in different roles. Bob went from a

steroid-using bodybuilder to a sobbing shell of a man when he lost his family jewels, and while losing a breast or two would make quite an impact on the lives of most women, breasts are not responsible for creating anything as important to the body as testosterone is to a male, and perhaps even more importantly, a woman is still able to reproduce without them.

The character of Bob becomes a tragicomic stereotype, perhaps even more so in the movie than in the novel, but even though he might be confused and frustrated, he tries to make the best of it, and play the cards he has been dealt. The funeral scene from the novel may be said to be symbolic in several contexts, but in this one we find a separate meaning of being a man; dying like a man – among men, for the sake of men, on a man’s terms. In a sense, we are inclined to think that while he did not have the physical balls of a man, he lived like one and died like one; he was still a man, and more will be said on that topic when I return to my discussion on gender.

2.5 An Insane Industry

Close to disease in this context we find insanity, and we can suspect Palahniuk of venting his feelings at the medical industry in *Survivor*, where the narrator becomes involved with a firm as a figurehead and a means to sell their copyrighted and named products that have yet to be invented. The entire exchange ends in a tell-all line, as the agent explains what their business plan is;

[the agent] opens his briefcase a crack and takes out a brown bottle. “Here,” he says, “take a couple of Serenadons. These are the best antianxiety treatment ever invented.”

They just don’t exist yet.

“Just pretend,” he says, “for the placebo effect.” And he shakes two into my hand.

(*Survivor*, p140)

It is, of course, not to be concealed that Palahniuk has some bad experiences with mental healthcare, and we can expect him to be especially influenced by one incident in his life; his father had found a girl, whose ex-husband had been imprisoned for physical abuse against her. When this man was released, his homicidal rage found an outlet on the couple, and this was allowed to happen even though he had been threatening to kill them for years.

According to surveys, there are nearly as many cases of mental disorders in the US as there are citizens;

when Jim Windolf, an editor of the *New York Observer* collated estimates for maladies ranging from borderline personality disorder (10 million) and sex addiction (11 million) to less well-known conditions such as restless leg syndrome (12 million) he came up with a figure of 152 million." ... "Windolf omitted from his estimates new-fashioned afflictions that have yet to make it into the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* of the American Psychiatric Association: ailments such as road rage, which afflicts more than half of Americans, according to a psychologist's testimony before a congressional hearing in 1997¹⁴.

While there is little questioning that these numbers come from psychologists and the medical industry that supplies them with medication, we are left either question the findings or the sanity of that nation as a whole. However, there can be no doubt that this is an area of treatment in which billions of dollars are up for grabs for whoever can find the right approach to the market.

2.6 Playing with the DSM

In Palahniuk's works, we can find more serious cases of insanity than is advisable in any society, in fact to such a degree that these numbers no longer seem inflated. The best example is probably the narrator of *Survivor*, who assumes mental disorders in order to give his caseworker something to do;

The book the caseworker gave me was called the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. We called it the DSM for short. . . . It got so the caseworker could throw the DSM on the floor and whatever page it fell open to, that was how I'd try to look for the week. . . . We were happy enough this way. For a while. She felt she was making progress every week. I had a script to tell me how to act. It wasn't boring, and she gave me too many fake problems for me to stress about anything real. Every Tuesday, the caseworker would give me her diagnosis, and that was my new assignment. . . . The caseworker cured me of a hundred syndromes, none of them real, and then declared me sane. She was so happy and proud.

She sent me out into the light of day, cured. You are healed. Go forth. Walk. A miracle of modern psychology. (*Survivor*, pp.207-206)

¹⁴ Glassner, *Fear*, Kindle location 224, paragraphs 4-6.

Ironically, he performs the roles of a selection of mental disorders one by one, letting her help him through them, in order to keep her from killing herself; “It’s the caseworker mixing me gin and tonics who needs some suicide intervention” (*Survivor*, p.173) due to her own mental disorder; a severe depression brought on by all her other clients dying one by one, first by suicides and later from murder. As we have already seen repeatedly; whenever Palahniuk enters irony into his writings, he is trying to tell us something. In this case, it would be fair to assume that he is trying to tell us something about mental disorders. What he is trying to tell us, however, is open to interpretation and debate. The two most likely topics would be that insanity is not something to take lightly and that it is at times being treated as such by medical personnel and clients alike, and that we have by now created so many forms of mental disorders and insanity, that most of us suffer from one or more on account of being alive and human. In the end, there are several reasons for giving people all these diagnoses. First of all, we have the money that you can earn from treating disorders that are so vaguely defined that it is hard to deem who is sick and who is not. The DSM, the book the narrator mentions, is a real book, and frequently criticized both over what it contains and what it excludes, just as it has added and removed various diagnoses as they are deemed real or not. Secondly, there is the power aspect of being able to tell someone what is wrong with them or others, and through this to be able to create a pattern of behavior that is acceptable as normal, that all people who strive to be normal will have to fit into. Through this, the norm is created as a system of exclusion rather than inclusion. Third, there is the power inherent in being able to subject others; to tell them what they are and what they are not. This Foucaultian power of subjection is inherent in the institutions that have often been named ‘the powers that be’, and is indeed to a great extent the source of their power. What Palahniuk is trying to say is that while there are indeed quite severe mental disorders from which many humans do suffer, the power of subjection that the ones who should be treating people are equipped with through their capabilities as the ones to discover new dysfunctions, the ones to find these cases in people and the ones to cure them are left with more power than many of them can handle. As such, the entire institution is equipped with the power to tell us what is normal and not, and what is indeed acceptable behavior in general. In effect, these powers become the watchers, and the question we should ask becomes, who watches the watchers?

2.7 Enter Tyler Durden

Perhaps the most famous case in Palahniuk's writings that deals with mental disorders is the narrator in *Fight Club*. His first problem is insomnia, which appears based on his lifestyle of stress and travelling over many time-zones. This in and by itself is not a severe condition., but it is often suggested to be a point from which other more serious disorders can develop or use as a catalyst. The main issue arises when he develops schizophrenia, manifested in his second personality better known as the character of Tyler Durden. Of course, the entire case of Tyler Durden is nowhere near as simple as to say it developed out of insomnia; the insomnia may perhaps have been a catalyst, but there is much more to it than that. In his case, the stress and jet lag that possibly caused the insomnia, may also have taken part in creating a separate personality. The fact that this all ended up in a character like Tyler, however, is perhaps much more interesting, and suggests that there are other more important reasons. The key to understanding this may lie in a very simple phrase uttered by Tyler to his alter ego;

"All the ways you wish you could be, that's me. I look like you want to look, I fuck like you want to fuck, I am smart capable and most importantly, I am free in ways that you are not."¹⁵

Quite simply, in many ways we can say that Tyler is his repressed self; all the things he could never make himself do, think or say become part of this Tyler persona, yet are still subconsciously vital parts his personality, though presumably repressed. Indeed, in the past we have had "onanism" and "frauds against procreation" and various minor or insignificant perversions diagnosed as psychiatric disorders through the 18th and 19th century¹⁶, and various types of sexuality have later been included in the DSM as diagnosable mental disorders, just as sex addiction is presumed to gain a place on that same list in a future version. As Foucault says, sexuality has been repressed since the 17th century¹⁷, and from that it follows that when a personality that embodies the repressed sides of a person appears, this might be one of the repressed sides. I will return to the discourse between these two personalities later, while treating gender and sexuality.

¹⁵ Quote from the movie

¹⁶ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol.1, p.30

¹⁷ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol.1, p.17

2.8 Addicted to Sex

Palahniuk actually discusses sex addiction in his novels, where *Choke* contains the prime examples. The support group, taking part in the Sunday school room of a church, has turned into a place where they can indeed find others who suffer from the same addiction, and assist each other in handling their sex addiction, at least temporarily;

"You people are in Room 234 tonight," the woman says. "The Sunday school room."”(P5PDF) ... “Halfway down the hallway to Room 234, Nico pulls me against the wall. She waits until some people have walked past us and says, "I know a place we can go."” ... “She pulls me the other way, toward a sign that says *Women*.” ... “In the women's room, Nico pulls me down onto the cold tile and squats over my hips, digging me out of my pants.(*Choke*, pp.10-12)

This happens at the same time as they attend the meetings in order to get their court-enforced treatment papers signed. This entire ordeal about sex and addiction to it is something that Palahniuk has returned to repeatedly; the short story ‘Guts’ in *Haunted* is built on an urban legend, and some of the same side-stories there are mentioned in various parts of *Choke* among a whole host of them. It does, of course, relate heavily to similar issues in contemporary life, in every manner from age of consent through all kinds of fetishes to addiction; a condition that was not diagnosed until the late 80s¹⁸, but which has in recent years become a popular mental disorder, found in anybody from Hollywood stars to American Presidents but also blue collar workers. Such infamy will necessarily cause a large amount of popular cultural references, such as what Palahniuk writes, and also a similar amount of academic writings, by people in any field that can even remotely be connected to such a culturally popular theme. In other words, not only the media believes that sex and sex-related subjects are among the best ways to sell your products – everybody does. This ultimately causes a spiral that appears ever-increasing when it comes to increased focus on sex and sexuality in society, something we can easily read into part 2 of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality volume 1*, as the repression causes a reaction in society, even as more is allowed out in public do other areas of sexuality become repressed.

¹⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexaholism#DSM> – it existed earlier and was included as a mental disorder temporarily in the DSM

To the world in general being addicted to something as natural as sex might seem obscure. To a selected few, however, the problem appears to be real and relevant, and as the entire world knows, sex sells. This in turn makes the entire notion of creating a mountain out of a molehill a financial masterstroke; if an average amount of sex already sells large amounts of stories and books, the addiction would lead to more sex, more sales, and indeed more money. This, of course, brings us back to what I wrote about Mr. Whittier, and how he in his short lifetime had gotten the notion that sex was what the world was about, and indeed, how this view is not as uncommon as one might assume or hope; it is a spiral-effect that Palahniuk has pointed out. If sex sells, more sex equals higher sales, and the more you mention it, the more people will think about it – the more they think about it, the more their lives will revolve around it, which will create more fuel for the writings, and even more money from purchases and treatments related to it. As far as self-fuelling spirals go, it may be the perfect business idea.

2.9 Victimization

I will return to these and other mental disorders later, as they show up in ways that threaten society more directly. For now we can notice that these have one thing in common; they have victims. The multiple personality disorder of the narrator in *Fight Club* seems to the patient as the worst victim of his own disorder, but another that suffers at the hands of it is Marla, as pointed out earlier. Similarly, sex addiction in these novels results in the addicts being unable to form permanent close bonds and relationships, as the concept of monogamy requires some amount of self-restraint that they seem unable to command. On the other side of this, we have the people who try to form such relationships with them, who are left abandoned and betrayed, and also the people who they use to satisfy their needs. In fact, one might actually commend the sex addicts of *Choke* for their extracurricular activities surrounding their group therapy meetings, as they use each other and avoid collateral damage from their activities, as such reducing the consequences their addiction has for society in general.

When reflecting on both the physical and mental illnesses through the reactions that they cause both in the novels and in real life, we find that they scare and unsettle people for mainly two reasons; the fear of them happening to you or someone you care about, and the fear of becoming a victim through this, directly or indirectly. However, we also notice that the fear seems to be drummed up by the media and professionals who earn money on cures and protection, and who also gain power through their authority in saying what should and should

not be, and their ability to twist facts and stories to help make their points. From this we should learn that our trust should perhaps be harder to earn and deserve for people who have rather obvious financial interests vested in how they can make us react. Common sense should survive even when faced with loud voices of authority that suggest it should take a back seat.

3 Violence and Self-Abuse

When writing on an author most famous for a novel titled *Fight Club*, the subject of violence is one that can never be avoided, though most of the interesting cases are not found in this novel. In the writings of Palahniuk, violence comes in different forms and as a tool to tell a spectrum of stories. In total, I will suggest that the different faces of violence are found at the four points where these intersect; physical and mental abuse, brought on by others and one-self.

The unsettling effect of physical harm is rather commonly observed, and can be suggested to be deeply rooted in both the human experience and evolution itself; physical harm can end a life or remove all chances of reproduction. In addition to this, many people find the entire notion that others will partake in fights and thus expose themselves to potential physical harm disturbing, and similarly, they worry that people they care about can be exposed to such situations.

3.1 Something to Fight for

The prime example of the unsettling surrounding physical violence in this authorship is probably the legendary fight club. Here we see Chuck debating the changes that have happened to American society over the recent century, with regard to gender- and family roles, and also rituals surrounding growing up, not to mention becoming or being a man. As such, the entire fight club becomes an outlet for maleness. The full background for the club can be derived through the words of Tyler Durden:

“Man, I see in Fight Club the strongest and smartest men who've ever lived. I see all this potential, and I see it squandered. God damn it, an entire generation pumping gas, waiting tables – slaves with white collars. Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need. We're the middle children of history, man. No purpose or place. We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our great war is a spiritual war. Our great depression is our lives. We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd all be millionaires, and movie gods, and rock stars, but we won't. We're slowly learning that fact. And we're very, very pissed off.”¹⁹

Furthermore, as the narrator so pointedly puts it, “What you see at fight club is a generation of men raised by women”(FC, p.50). The effect of all this, when combined, is a generation of

¹⁹ While this speech is from the movie, it draws together many of Tyler's statements throughout the novel, and carries the same theme, though in a more pointed fashion.

men that are genuinely confused; their fathers had different patterns in life; a world less technologically evolved, in which manual labour was still honest work done by men, and women mostly related to the softer values. The new generation has no universally accepted set of ideals to live up to, as the old ideals no longer appear valid. This confusion is at its most apparent in the case of the narrator; Lynn M. Ta quotes Susan Faludi in saying that “the aftermath of World War II saw the transition from a manufacture-based economy to an information-based market, thereby transforming white middle-class working men from a vehicle of production to a womanish receptacle of consumption.”²⁰ This is the exact trait that the narrator displays before Tyler changes his life; “you’re trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you.” (*FC*, p.44) As such, he is a perfect example of what Tyler means when he says he wants to “blast the world free of history” (*FC*, p.124) – which is what he does to the narrator and also what is attempted done when Project Mayhem tries to blow up “the world’s tallest building” (*FC*, p.12), while at the same time “the space monkeys in the Mischief Committee of Project Mayhem are running wild, destroying every scrap of history.” Indeed, what Ta discusses rings true again in the words of Durden when he talks about the goal of Project Mayhem; “The goal was to teach each man in the project that he had the power to control history. We, each of us, can take control of the world.” (*FC*, p.122)

Since the fight club is mostly made up of young white males in unfulfilling jobs, and Project Mayhem even more so, we can to an extent understand the development of his last statement in this threat;

"Remember this," Tyle said. "The people you're trying to step on, we're everyone you depend on. We're the people who do your laundry and cook your food and serve your dinner. We make your bed. We guard you while you're asleep. We drive the ambulances. We direct your call. We are cooks and taxi drivers and we know everything about you. We process your insurance claims and credit card charges. We control every part of your life.

"We are the middle children of history, raised by television to believe that someday we'll be millionnaires and movie stars and rock stars, but we won't. And we're just learning this fact," Tyler said. "So don't fuck with us." (*FC*, p.166)

²⁰ Ta, Lynn M. 'Hurt So Good: *Fight Club*, Masculine Violence and the Crisis of Capitalism' in *The Journal of American Culture*, p.266

While the gender role change is a point I shall return to later, violence is, in nature, the central way in which to establish who is the more alpha of males, and while humanity has to a certain extent developed beyond using this, it is questionable whether or not it has been completely removed from what makes us what we are. As such, a club where, presumably, any man can beat any other, in which they are all to a larger extent anonymous, levels the field of play between the members. This results in the members, who already feel like they are among the dregs of society, gaining a feeling of solidarity and equality with others; they are men amongst men, and the simple act of partaking in the fights gives them worth, in both their own eyes and those of their co-members. Chuck develops this point further in the story about the ‘space monkeys’ of Project Mayhem, where the participants leave their entire identities behind when donning the suit, going as far as “shaving their heads” and “using lye to burn off their fingerprints,”(FC, p.157) effectively removing all means of identification in order to become as one. The ambiguity of this is perplexing; in their jobs, they had no identities, no hopes and no belief in the future. As space monkeys, they intentionally lose their identities, and their hopes and beliefs are in the sayings of Tyler, rather than a corporate figurehead. I suggest that the only real difference between their tasks in Project Mayhem and their actual jobs is faith in the project; in their jobs, all they did was create values for others while in Project Mayhem the end goal is to destroy these same values; "We're going to break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world." (FC, p.208)

3.2 Loneliness

Project Mayhem ties in well with several other aspects in his writing, among others the story about Marla and her loneliness, as it shows how much many feel like they are all alone in society, and to what extents they go to find companionship. She hangs around with a man who loves her and hates her, sleeps with someone who wakes up as a completely different person. However, as Tyler says; “I look like you want to look, I fuck like you want to fuck, I am smart, capable, and most importantly, I am free in all the ways that you are not²¹ “. This makes him free to sleep with Marla, though he does not even know it.

I call Marla from my Seattle motel room to ask if we've ever done it. You know. Long distance, Marla says, "What?" Slept together. "What!" Have I ever, you know, had sex with her? "Christ!" Well? "Well?" she says. Have we ever had sex? "You are such a

²¹ From the movie

piece of shit." Have we had sex? "I could kill you!" Is that a yes or a no? "I knew this would happen," Marla says. "You're such a flake. You love me. You ignore me. You save my life, then you cook my mother into soap." (*FC*, p.159)

It is often suggested that this feeling of loneliness is a symbol of the modern time, with long distance communication having become simple, and people always staying in touch without every saying much. Perhaps we have become a society of people who all know each other without really caring enough to notice when something is wrong; "You saved my life. The Regent Hotel. I'd accidentally attempted suicide. Remember?"(*FC*, p.160) The question we might ask is which of the narrator's personalities actually care about Marla, or perhaps how each of them does. The Tyler personality was the one who rushed over to save her that day, yet he frequently treats her very poorly. The other personality talks to her like a normal human being, yet does not have sexual feelings about her. This is hardly a question that can be answered without a digressing discussion, and would require much more information than what is in the novel; it is just fair to say that all of the narrator's relationships are complicated, even his relationship with himself as he does not know who he is.

3.3 Workplace Violence

Fight Club also presents some other areas where Palahniuk uses violence as a tool to show issues in society that may be interpreted, by said society, in the wrong way. As such, they result in behavior that seems irrelevant or nonsensical when read in context to the behavior that it attempts to deal with. A good example of fear that has developed in society with what one can call a tenuous connection in the reality of the situation is so-called workplace violence, something that has been called an epidemic. Kimberly K. Larsen, a lawyer specializing on the subject, puts the numbers at "650 homicides, 2 million assaults, and 6 million serious threats reported each year in the workplace"²² according to The Insurance Information Network. The narrator in *Fight Club* takes good advantage of these numbers;

The manager said he didn't want me working here anymore, not the way I looked now.

...

And without flinching, still looking at the manager, I roundhouse the first at the centrifugal force end of my arm and slam fresh blood out of the cracked scabs in my nose. . . .

Help me, please

²² <http://www.mediate.com/articles/larsen.cfm>

Please don't hit me, again. . . .

right at our most excellent moment, the security guards decide to walk in." (*FC*, pp.116-117)

The result of him beating himself up and making it look like his boss was the perpetrator was, "[...]this is how Tyler was free to start a fight club every night of the week. [...] There was always money coming in." (*FC*, p.117) – quite simply blackmailing his boss with the threat that he could sue them over the supposed workplace violence. Knowing the sometimes ridiculous settlements and reparations that come out of lawsuits in the US, it is no wonder that the boss complied with his demands; “Out-of-court settlements for lawsuits arising out of workplace violence average \$500,000, with jury verdicts averaging about \$3 million.”²³

What is especially interesting in the case of Larsen’s checklist of what to look for as precursors to workplace violence is that her symptom list looks like it could belong to any number of other issues ranging from mental issues to various personal and professional problems. With items such as “noticeable decrease in attention to appearance and hygiene, decrease in productivity, inability to concentrate [and] unexplained increase in absenteeism”, something as simple as an alarm clock that is not doing its job right for a few days is enough to peg you as a potential killer. The list, in fact, is so long that any person with any kind of problem will look likely to lash out at a coworker after failing on several points. With that said, we can suggest that in retrospect, any person who assaults anybody in a workplace environment had the makings of a perpetrator. As such, we find that as an expert increases the amount of criteria or symptoms to look for, especially in retrospect, the ease with which one can find someone to blame for what has happened increases. While I will not make light of the entire concept that is workplace violence, the numbers and details in the writings of the expert seem to fall in line with what Palahniuk satirizes; workplace violence happens, just as any type of violence does, but there is no need to fear such things that will probably never happen to you, anybody you know or anybody you will hear about. However, Larsen allows that the California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Occupational Safety and Health’s guidelines as to which groups are at risk are quite pointed; people who work nights, with money and valuables, at night, with groups more prone to violence and as safety detail. This does not include the environment of Palahniuk’s narrator. Additionally, we can use Larsen’s numbers to calculate the likelihood of what happens; a stipulated 7% of attack

²³ <http://www.mediate.com/articles/larsen.cfm>

coming from bosses, translating to the likelihood of 7% of the 2.500 per 100.000 who by, her numbers, get assaulted; 0.175% of all employees are likely to get physically assaulted by their boss –meaning that her numbers suggest 175 out of every 100.000 people in any work setting will be on the receiving end of the kind of assault that the narrator fakes his boss committing.

However, all these numbers, even after having been reduced as I did, have their origin in a business that earns money on precisely that type of lawsuits and settlements. Reacting to the overwhelming number of stories about workplace violence, a supposed over 500 in newspapers during 1994 and 1995²⁴ some claiming extreme numbers such as “2.2 million people attacked on the job each year” and “murder the leading cause of work-related death for women”, Erik Larson of the *Wall Street Journal* did his own research. His expose was duly titled ‘A False Crisis’. Indeed, Larson presented the actual numbers behind my earlier suggestion on workplace violence related to at-risk lines of work. For example, the murder rate for cab drivers on the job is twenty times that of the national average, while that for doctors, engineers and other professionals is 1 in 467.000²⁵, and “about 90% of murders at workplaces are committed by outsiders who come to rob²⁶.” Furthermore, Larson deconstructs the numbers that gave the worst newspaper stories;

"the survey from which the number comes would not pass muster among social scientists, [...] the response rate is too low. Fewer than half of the people contacted responded to the survey, making it likely that those who participated were not typical of employed Americans as a whole."²⁷

This grade of survey results are quite common, especially on subjects are of a much greater interest to those who have been involved in relevant episodes than to those who have no interest what so ever in the subject, and shows us exactly how a media-built case of epidemics can be constructed.

3.4 Real Fights

Indeed, Palahniuk points it out himself in another context in the same novel; “each guy on the Assault Committee has to pick a fight where he won't come out a hero” . . . “This is harder than it sounds. A man on the street will do anything not to fight.”(*FC*, p.119) This is for the reason I stated at the beginning of the chapter; fear of being harmed. Additionally, a fight with

²⁴ Glassner, *Fear*, Kindle location 902, paragraph 4

²⁵ Glassner, *Fear*, Kindle location 903, paragraph 7 – location 930 paragraph 1

²⁶ Glassner, *Fear*, Kindle location 930, paragraph 2

²⁷ Glassner, *Fear*, Kindle location 930, paragraph 3

a random stranger would be versus a complete unknown factor. No matter who you are you might run into someone who is better, perhaps trained in combat, or even hiding weapons on their body; there is an inherent fear of escalation when engaging in an uncontrolled fight. While we can assume that the members of Project Mayhem suffer from no such fears, this entire assignment, makes the participants who get the task attempt to force random victims into confronting their presumed fear of the unknown that is physical violence. One way of interpreting this entire situation could be that all people who keep looking for, and ending up in fights, are those who have inner demons that they are fighting at the same time. As we look at the motivations behind the creation of the club, it becomes that there are deep and fundamental issues in the entire cultural construction that have created the need for this social setting that the club becomes.

3.5 Destroying Beauty

A type of more controlled violence can be found in the name-sake of the novel; *Fight Club*. However, some scenes are especially interesting. I will claim that Palahniuk has a penchant towards destruction of beauty. The most blatant case of such violence happens in the fight club;

“I tagged a first-timer one night at fight club. That Saturday night, a young guy with an angel’s face came to his first fight club, and I tagged him for a fight. That’s the rule. If it’s your first night in fight club, you have to fight. I knew that so I tagged him because the insomnia was on again, and I was in a mood to destroy something beautiful.” (*FC*, p.122)

Indeed, this scenario can remind us of what I said earlier; when you fight someone unknown, you never know what you get yourself into. In this case, the new member runs into the narrator; a man who has fought so many times before that "most of [his] face never gets a chance to heal, [he’s] got nothing to lose in the looks department" (*FC*, p.123) and also knows the tricks of the trade and how to cause severe damage;

"There's a sleeper hold that gives somebody just enough air to stay awake, and that night at fight club I hit our first-timer and hammered that beautiful mister angel face, first with the bony knuckles of my fist like a pounding molar, and then the knotted tight butt of my fist after my knuckles were raw from his teeth stuck through his lips." (*FC*, p.123)

It reads as basic destruction, intentional, methodical and planned, yet senseless and unnecessary; it is quite simply destruction for the sake of destruction.

From the language we can notice a distinct difference from that of the cases where we had diseases; this is graphically descriptive, pulling no more punches than the narrator does. This level of description enables the reader to imagine vividly what is taking place in the story, resulting in an unsettling effect quite different from what happens when we read about disease. While both are threatening, they lead us to thinking about different ways of being victimized, of being at the receiving end of changes to our bodies that we feel we could not predict and avoid; infections and violence are both more likely to happen to specific types of people, but no one is completely immune and secure from either.

Another case of destruction of what can be perceived as beautiful we find in a quite different fashion in the same novel; when Tyler blows up the narrator's apartment. "It took my whole life to buy this stuff" (*FC*, p.44) the narrator says, and when we see the detailed list of the things he owned, there is little doubt that he found them beautiful; beautiful to such an extent that "you're trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you." (*FC*, p.44) The motivation for the deed is easily explained later - "It's only after you've lost everything," Tyler says, "that you're free to do anything." (*FC*, p.70) The consumerist mentality that the narrator shows in his decoration and nesting shows distinct similarities with what Fredric Jameson talks about when he says that

our entire system of commodity production and consumption today is based on those older, once antisocial modernist forms [of religious practices]. [...]it can be said that the scandal of the death of God and the end of religion and metaphysics placed the moderns in a situation of anxiety and crisis, which now seems to have been fully absorbed by a more fully humanized and socialized, "culturalized" society. Its voids have been saturated and neutralized, not by new values, but by the visual culture of consumerism as such.²⁸

The notion that our consumerism has replaced religion is perhaps hard to accept, but beyond the surface, it is easy to agree with the suggestion in several ways. Where people before used to pay a tithe to the church, very many now spend that and more on furniture, decoration, refurbishing and remodeling of their homes. Tyler's idea of losing everything to break free

²⁸ Jameson, 'Culture and Financial Capital' in *Critical Enquiry*, p.257

from the ownership that your own consumption has over you is also not a new one; throughout history many types of figures have done this very thing, monks in many countries being a good example. That, however, brings them back around to the other side of worship, and leaves us wondering if humans just need somebody or something to worship to feel complete.

A question left at the end here is, what exactly Palahniuk is trying to say through this story. There is little doubt that the narrator becomes a victim here, but we hardly see it change him in a way that makes him take on the role of a one. That might however be the entire point; because the narrator does not succumb to taking on the role of the victim, he is able to break away from his past and get the fresh start he needs. Unfortunately there is no way for us to tell, as his new start comes under the tutelage of his alter ego, a man who's goal might not be the best place to start when we know his fancy for dynamite; "We're going to break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world." (*FC*, p.208)

3.6 The Ultimate Mistake

As we find further destruction of beauty in *Invisible Monsters*, in this case in the form of self-destruction, we may start to wonder if what Tyler says is a consistent factor throughout the authorship; "Self-improvement is masturbation. Now self-destruction..."²⁹ Brandy says repeatedly that she is hunting for the biggest mistake she can make, and starts out early; at age 15, still named Shane and male, he starts out by having a can of hair-spray blow up in his face. His entire family is blamed, by each other and by social services, but as Brandy he admits to it himself; "I did it. I was so miserable being a normal average child. I wanted something to save me. I wanted the opposite of a miracle." (*IM*, p.282) Incidentally this put him in the victim role at once, true to what Shannon wrote in his blood, "Everybody Just Loved You More After The Hairspray Accident." As a victim, Shane gained all the attention and love of the parents, leaving Shannon trying yet always being the second child. This is however nowhere near the most extreme case of self-destructive behavior done by Shane;

"It's not that I really want to be a woman." She yells, "Wait up!" Brandy yells, "I'm only doing this because it's just the biggest mistake I can think to make. It's stupid and destructive, and anybody you ask will tell you I'm wrong. That's why I have to go through with it."

²⁹ Quoted from the movie, as it sums up what the character says spread over the entire novel.

Brandy says, "Don't you see? Because we're so trained to do life the right way. To not make mistakes" Brandy says, "I figure, the bigger the mistake looks, the better chance I'll have to break out and live a real life." (*IM*, p.258)

With this in mind, we can see an obvious parallel to what Tyler Durden says in *Fight Club*;

"Only after disaster can we be resurrected." It's only after you've lost everything that you're free to do anything. (*FC*, p.70)

Nothing is static, everything is evolving, everything is falling apart. (*FC*, p.108)

In the self-destruction department, Shannon is not worse than her brother. She was feeling stuck in her life as a model,

tired of staying a lower life form just because of my looks. Trading on them. Cheating. Never getting anything real accomplished, but getting the attention and recognition anyway. Trapped in a beauty ghetto is how I felt. Stereotyped. (*IM*, p.286)

With the pattern established here, there is little questioning that something destructive was inevitably going to happen; "Shane, we are very much brother and sister. This is the biggest mistake I could think would save me." (*IM*, p.286) Shannon shot herself in the face, blew her jawbone to pieces, and one might say her catch-phrase through the rest of the novel was "birds ate my face"; they flew through the broken window and made off with the pieces of her face that were scattered around the seats.

The language of their self-destruction in these cases is graphic. When Shannon could focus again after her shooting, "there was my blood and snot, my drool and teeth all over the passenger seat" (*IM*, p.278) – a gory description, effective and horrifying yet also short and precise. In her case, the mistake was one short and swift action, for Shane it was a longer process, and we are doled out pieces of the road from man to woman, some worse than others. The surgical procedure is perhaps the most disturbing of them; "her trachea shave, her brow shave, her scalp advance, her forehead realignment, her rhino contouring to smooth her nose, her maxomil-liary operations to shape her jaw" (*IM*, p.198) This language describes a process of change that is indeed a case of abjection, and the question of what Shane is when his surgery is finished until he can afford the vaginoplasty procedure is open to interpretation, and as such I shall discuss it in my chapter concerning gender.

Shannon, on the other hand, is the invisible monster; her feeling is that other people want to say “Thank you for not sharing”(IM, p.24, p.200, p.247) in response to her hiding behind veils. Indeed, her mutilation makes her so unknowable that the only person to comment on it is a child; "Look Mom, look over there! That monster's stealing food!" (IM, p.55), a reaction that makes the other customers focus even harder on ignoring her existence. Ultimately we see Shannon reflect on the success of her project;

The truth is, being ugly isn't the trill you'd think, but it can be an opportunity for something better than I ever imagined.

The truth is I'm sorry.(IM, p.288)

Her apology is puzzling; all through the novel she says “sorry Mom, sorry God” for various reasons that appear related to her upbringing, though at the end she runs out of apologies. All the other ones are thematic and targeted, this one is not. However, one thing is clear; while paying a high price for it, Shannon appears to have gained the freedom that Shane is chasing. She has moved from an object of desire to an unknown; the veils leaving her with a threat of revealing something people do not want to be faced with, which is the very definition of the abject. Perhaps what she is, then is Othered rather than abject – as long as what is behind the veil remains hidden.

3.7 Who Hurts Who, Tyler?

While remaining on the subject of self-destruction, reverting to *Fight Club* shows the most famous example in all of Palahniuk's authorship; the relationship between the narrator and Tyler Durden, his other personality. "I want you to do me a favor. I want you to hit me as hard as you can"(FC, p.52) Tyler tells the narrator. This is how the fight club starts; the narrator pummeling himself in the parking lot of a bar. “You weren't really fighting me," Tyler says. "You said so yourself. You were fighting everything you hate in your life.””(FC, p.167)

While this shows how far his insanity had gone, how large the Tyler personality had grown without the narrator realizing he was both people, it remains on cue for the other key issue here. This fight was just another way to break free, to break free of the chains that his role in society had placed on him.

Two scenes of self-mutilation in *Fight Club* have been popular topics when discussing homoeroticism; the lye kiss and the shot. While the kiss seems to be something that Tyler places on several of his closest men, it had a distinct meaning; “This is the greatest moment of

our life”(FC, p.75) he says as the narrator weeps in pain, but more importantly, ““Congratulations, [...] You're a step closer to hitting bottom””(FC, p.78) afterwards. This torture is just another step on the way to hitting rock bottom and becoming free. The time-lapse nature of the novel has it ending with the next sequence of the opening scene, but in a different fashion; “Tyler's pushing a gun in my mouth and saying, the first step to eternal life is you have to die”(FC, p.11) becomes "To God, this looks like one man alone, holding a gun in his own mouth, but it's Tyler holding the gun, and it's my life"(FC, p.203 and results in ““I'm not killing myself, I yell. I'm killing Tyler”(FC, p.205) as the narrator becomes aware of what has happened. Hopefully, for his sake, he accomplishes what he wants to do;

Of course, when I pulled the trigger, I died.

Liar.

And Tyler died.(FC, p.206)

We hear no more from Tyler, so it is impossible to tell. One thing we might derive from this, though, is that the narrator must finally have hit rock bottom as he was finally able to exorcise his demon, leaving him open to find a fresh start. Furthermore, since Marla confesses to liking the narrator, and it appears nobody died at the end, we might have a happy ending looming. However, Palahniuk appears no fan of writing out the endings of his novels and leaves it up to the reader. This would be on par with what he confessed to doing for *Survivor*, which I will explain shortly.

3.8 Tender is Confronted

Mostly separate to the cases of physical abuse, we find mental abuse. On this topic, Chuck raises several highly relevant issues, which sort through different categories that I will explain. The most unique case is probably that of the narrator in *Survivor*; Tender Branson. His romantic interest in the book, the psychic Fertility continuously mentions the ways in which she finds him unappealing, as she confesses to his suicide hotline;

"This guy is pretty intensively ugly. He has his terrible haircut with these long sideburns that come down almost to his mouth. It's not like when guys use a little topiary facial hair the way women use makeup, you know, to hide the fact they have a double chin or they don't have any -cheekbones. This guy just doesn't have any good features to work with. That and he's queer."(Survivor, p.235)

Being psychic, she is fully aware of who she is speaking to, and how the story will pan out. The fact, then, that he to a large degree changes into her ideal by force of his agent and a team of consultants when he becomes famous is something that was inevitable as he survived long enough to be the sole survivor of his cult. This, in turn, means that her behavior was nothing short of mental abuse, setting the foundation of their future relationship on shaky ground. While the story actually does have a secret ‘happily ever after’ ending, this is certainly not the best way to start a long life together³⁰. In other words, I suggest that Palahniuk has a motive behind this this story; trying to fake who you are for someone else will not change who you really are or what you came from. Even in Tender’s case, his past came back to haunt him in form of his brother. This story can be said to be a tribute to, and parody of the self-help-mentality that seems predominant in the US and several other regions of the western world; courses, literature, assistants, and numerous other ways in which smart people take money from insecure individuals who seek to improve themselves. This is also something the agents use Tender to do in the story, where his name is used for products like the Book of Very Common Prayer – a book with prayers that ring more true to the contemporary world than those of ancient religions; “The Prayer to Delay Orgasm”, “The Prayer to Lose Weight”, “The Prayer to Stop Smoking”(Survivor, p.125) and other mundane areas of life in which people feel they need divine assistance. While this all sounds like a cynical get rich quick scheme, Tender’s agent has a slightly more interesting thing to say;

"What's a prayer?" he says. "It's an incantation," he says, and he's yelling back at me over the phone. "It's a way for people to focus their energy around a specific need. People need to get clear on a single intention and accomplish it."(Survivor, p.126)

There is no doubting his words here, as self-help books frequently top best-seller lists in the real world too – this specific fictive book “sold two hundred million copies, worldwide.”(Survivor, p.127) In other words, it seem like humanity is at odds with the favored ideas of Tyler Durden and the siblings from *Invisible Monsters*; we like self-improvement rather than self-destruction.

3.9 Threatening Cults

Other abusive behavior can also be found in *Survivor*; the Creedish cult can be accused of taking a rather extreme stance in terms of prevention and repression of sexuality. In the cult,

³⁰ <http://chuckpalahniuk.net/books/survivor/ending-survivor>

there are four names; Adam, Tender, Bidy and Author; only the first born sons, all named Adam, get to marry and have a family – a married woman become an Author. Marriages are arranged by church elders. Those who are not intended married, however, are attempted traumatized and turned off sex;

"the elders took all the tenders and biddies in the district and made them watch. My wife screamed just the way they told her. She screamed, and the elders preached and wailed how the wages of sex was death. She screamed, and they made childbirth as painful as they could. She screamed, and the baby died. Our child. She screamed and then she died. [...]The elders made you watch every time anyone in the church district had a child."(*Survivor*, p.34)

Religion repressing sexuality is nothing new, and the notion here is to connect it with pain and death. The cause and effect in this novel, however, takes it to an extreme; "You'd never want sex because every time our mother had another child, [...]they made you sit there and watch. Because sex to you is just pain and sin and your mother stretched out there screaming."(*Survivor*, p.34) While I will return to the sexuality aspect of this when I reach that topic, I will rather focus on other sides of the same abuse now.

Staying in *Survivor*, Tender becomes a stereotype of something that has worried and scared many people throughout the last decades. This is from a televised interview;

The Teleprompter tells [him to say]: I WAS SEXUALLY ABUSED. SEXUAL ABUSE WAS COMMONPLACE AMONG THE CREEDISH CULT MEMBERS. INCEST WAS AN EVERYDAY PART OF FAMILY LIFE. SO WAS SEX WITH ALL SORTS OF ANIMALS. SATAN WORSHIP WAS POPULAR. THE CREEDISH SACRIFICED CHILDREN TO SATAN ALL THE TIME, BUT NOT BEFORE ABUSING THEM LIKE CRAZY. THEN THE CREEDISH CHURCH ELDERS KILLED THEM. DRANK THEIR BLOOD. THESE WERE KIDS I SAT NEXT TO IN SCHOOL EVERY DAY. THE CHURCH ELDERS ATE THEM. WHEN THERE WAS A FULL MOON, CHURCH ELDERS DANCED NAKED, WEARING JUST THE SKINS OF DEAD CREEDISH CHILDREN.(*Survivor*,p.106)

It is, of course, easy to accuse a cult where nearly all the other members are dead. The inner workings of cults have always frustrated outsiders, and the Creedish cult was accused of various types of abuse before the mass-suicide(*Survivor*, p.170-169). It would not have been anywhere near the first time a small cult had engaged in sexual abuse and incest, so the fear is

built on a foundation, though in this case the abuse took on other forms. The mass-suicide is another fear based on real incidents, and that certainly took place in this novel. There is an acceptable fear that someone you know might get wrapped up in a dangerous cult or sect, a fear that has developed so far, it has led to a term; “drinking the Kool-Aid”³¹ based on the 1978 Jonestown suicide-massacre. The lack of critical examination evident in such episodes is disturbing in and by itself, and one cannot help feeling sorry for those who appear so lost in the world that they could succumb to such measures.

3.10 Scared Asexual

Returning to the fashion in which the Creedish scared their children away from sex, we find a disturbing story from *Snuff*. The adoptive mother of Mr. 72 walks in on her as he is masturbating to the image of a porn-star on whom he is obsessed; faced with the sexuality of her son, the mother chooses a drastic response that will scar him for most of life;

The kid's adopted mom starts yelling, asking if he knows who that woman is. Does this kid know who he's fantasizing about? Does he have any idea, any inkling about the identity of that slut? [...]

"She's yelling," the kid goes. "She's screaming: "That's your birth mother."

His adopted mom's yelling how he's pounding pud to pictures of what's probably his own

conception. (*Snuff*, p.79)

This represses his sexuality and damages him to such an extent that he suffers erectile dysfunction until the day he finally meets his presumed genetic mother, and finds out that the story was a lie. While the story is one of extreme situations and extreme measures, it is actually a highly relevant example of how troubled parents are when faced with teenage sexuality, and also of what kind of fall-out the wrong treatment of such episodes can have. I will extend upon this when talking about sexuality. For now, we can read a comment from *Haunted* into the context; “You can't unfuck a kid. Once you bang a kid, there's no getting that genie out of the bottle. That kid's pretty much wrecked for good.” (*Haunted*, p160) This works for literal intercourse but also for mental issues; once you have scrambled the minds of a person, it takes a lot of time, patience and effort to undo the damage.

³¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drinking_the_Kool-Aid

3.11 Doomsday Destruction

The mass-suicide of the Creedish cult was a typical doomsday happening; “when the apocalypse was imminent, celebrate, and all Creedish must deliver themselves unto God, amen.”(*Survivor*, p.229) All members were to kill themselves in order to join the Deliverance and go to heaven, or stay behind and go to hell. "It's easy to imagine a killer, just one person or a hit squad of church members out to make sure you all get to Heaven together," the caseworker says. "It sounds silly and paranoid, but it makes perfect sense."(*Survivor*, p.223) This one person happens to be the brother of our Tender, who realizes that

Adam Branson is roaming the country, killing survivors, to take us all to Heaven, or to show the world Creedish unity, or to seek revenge on whoever blew the whistle on the labor missionary movement, I don't know.(*Survivor*, p.85)

In the end, however, we find that Fertility has learned the truth; she can after all predict the future accurately.

Adam wanted to die because he knew the way he'd been trained, he could never be anything but a Creedish. Adam killed off the surviving Creedish because he knew that an old culture of slaves couldn't found a new culture of free men. Like Moses leading the tribes of Israel around in the desert for a generation, Adam wanted me to survive, but not my slave mind-set.(*Survivor*, p.24)

This is reminiscent of the stories from *Fight Club* and *Invisible Monsters*; even the suicide cult outcast can be freed when he reaches rock bottom, and there is hardly a more obvious way of going from top to bottom than by going through cosmetic surgery, dieting and all sorts of treatment in order to be a national celebrity, then blowing it all to become the most outcast person in the nation;

“Tender Branson, Mass Murderer. Tender Branson, False Prophet. Tender Branson, Super Bowl Despoiler. Tender Branson, who abandoned his lovely bride at the altar.

Tender Branson, Antichrist.”(*Survivor*, p.11)

However, this frees him from all his obligations, allows him to fake his own death together with Fertility and start life anew. As far as Palahniuk's characters go, this is the happiest ending imaginable; only Shannon achieves something similar, and that at a significant cost.

3.12 Just Too Perfect

Haunted contains many and varied stories about violence but one of them stands out; ‘Speaking Bitterness.’ (*Haunted*, p.258-268) In this story we find Miranda, a woman that appears so perfect, she is presumed to be a man’s artificial dream. Miranda means the others just need “a little makeover. To pretty yourself up” (*Haunted*, p.262), but they insist that she has had more than a slight makeover herself; they make her strip off her top, grabbing a breast, “forcing it up against the pearl necklace, so we can look for a surgical scar underneath.” (*Haunted*, p.263) Then they make her strip completely, studying her vagina in detail;

“The skin too frilly. The wet-flower look a stylist works hard to get in *Playboy* or *Hustler*. Still, the flesh doesn't look soft enough, and the color's too pale, not pink or light brown. Surgical scar tissue. The pubic hair trimmed and waxed down to a thin stripe. Perfumed. Not the way a pussy is supposed to look. The longer we look, the more we agree it's not real.” (*Haunted*, p.265)

It all results in Miranda being raped with a flashlight while held down by the entire group. The women have become what fear the most; “Some of us were molested. Some of us, raped. All of us, ogled, groped, undressed by male eyes. It's our turn, and we don't know where to begin.” (*Haunted*, p.265)

The language of this story is consistent with that of most other worrying stories in *Haunted*; graphic and detailed when dealing with violence. However, in the same sense it is detailed when dealing with her beauty;

“The perfect big round breasts. The hard muscle of long thighs. The mouth, a perfect pout, greasy with lipstick. The pink leather skirt too short and tight for anything but sex. He speaks with the breathy voice of a little girl or a movie starlet.” (*Haunted*, p.260)

Her appearance sounds quite simply like something out of Hollywood or the very best of fashion magazines; representing body ideals propagated by an industry based on surgical enhancements, style-and image experts, and perhaps more importantly, image manipulators.

Miranda propagated this ideal in such an extreme that she became the Other, but only to those who perceived her as such. To a one, their own behavior was exactly that which they

complain about in their “bitch session”(*Haunted*, p.261), and this is the crux of the story. When fear takes over, you might easily become what you fear the most. Palahniuk seems to be trying to say something about rationality and fear with this story, showing exactly how bad it can go when irrational fears are allowed to take over. Additionally, once again we find him unable to avoid abusing that which is beautiful.

3.13 Irreversible Damage

This issue of looking at the underlying causes for destructive and self-destructive behavior is also evident in the case of Cassandra from *Haunted*, who goes through a stint of disturbing behavior after falling victim to an incident that led her to lose all faith. We can interpret this to be Palahniuk's opinion, which is also expressed through several examples in his writings, and one that is also a topic of Glassner's *Fear* when concerning children. "You can't unfuck a kid. Once you fuck a kid, you can't get that genie back in the bottle." (*Haunted*, p160) In the context of Glassner's book, we find this mostly to be related to sex and sexuality, but this also works on the subject of Cassandra, the daughter of Mrs. Clark in *Haunted*. This child, however, is 'fucked' in quite a special way. Cassandra is almost certainly named after a character from Greek mythology who is blessed by Apollo with foresight, yet also and cursed for shunning Apollo's advances so that with no one ever believes her prophecies. She peeks into a magical box, and loses all will to live. According to the only character to see inside the box and live to speak about it;

One look, Rand says, and your life - your preening and struggle and worry - it's all pointless....

All your problems and love affairs.

They're an illusion.

"What you see inside the box," Rand says, "is a glimpse of the real reality." (*Haunted*, p.222)

Cassandra is, as her namesake, cursed with knowledge more significant than anyone can imagine, yet no one would ever believe her - the nature of what she knows is impossible to believe to all but those who saw it. As such we can almost imagine ourselves understanding her - and we can also feel the creepiness of it all. How she becomes the Other in herself is

understandable; she becomes a being trapped in a life she no longer believes in. The fact that she then runs away to the writer's retreat, like the other characters in this novel later do, might mean that she is making an attempt at transcending what is known as 'a Cassandra effect', perhaps hoping to write out what she saw and make humanity believe and understand it.

The story of Cassandra has several chapters, and several ways to unsettle the reader. In a chapter of his book, Barry Glassner writes about 'Monster Moms'. His focus is on single mothers, as Cassandra's mother is, but his take on it all is different; he focuses on the lack of a father rather than on the existence of a mother. In Cassandra's case, we see that she means the world to her mother. After the Nightmare Box episode, she is severely changed, turning completely apathetic, and after the visit to the writers' retreat, even more so, but also mutilated. Her mother gives up - perhaps she realizes that her daughter is no longer really her daughter; she is so far Othered from the person she used to be, that she is barely recognizable as human anymore. "“I'm sorry, but you should've stayed missing. When you came back, you weren't the same.” [Mrs. Clark] says, “I loved you so much more when you were gone...””(Haunted, p.353)

Mrs. Clark saw her child changed to such a degree, she committed what she presumably felt was a mercy-killing; "I did it with sleeping pills." The moment she noticed that the police had found their perpetrator, she ran off to the writer's retreat, thus following in her daughter's footsteps and later becoming a victim of the retreat herself.

Indeed, I will suggest that the entire writer's retreat is a factory for victims – they all go there with their stories and their past, but the goal for each and every one of them is the same; "We'd turn our lives into a terrible adventure. A true-life horror story with a happy ending. A trial we'd survive to talk about.”(Haunted, p.85) In the same way, the novel reads as an extreme reality TV show; the participants die one after another, and as the narrator says, “the best story we'd bring out of this building would be just how we survived. How crazy Lady Baglady died cradled in our weeping arms. Still, that story would have to be good enough. Exciting enough. Scary and dangerous enough. We'd have to make sure it was.”(Haunted, p.100) They all do their worst to create the victim roles, self-harm, self-sabotage, and various terrible acts. All in the hope of becoming famous for surviving the ordeal, all in the hope of becoming public figures due to their victimization at the hands of whoever they can place the blame on, whoever dies at the right time to be the monster of the story.

Ultimately, when violence is concerned, there will always be victims. The roles of the victims in these stories show us that the victim role is what you make of it; you can choose to be subjugated or you can overpower the negatives – or you can sell the story and make millions.

4 Gender and Sexuality

When it comes to sexuality, it is hardly a stretch to claim that Palahniuk's writings often focus on rather abstract and obscure episodes rather than normative behavior, and when it comes to genders, he treats them as his playthings. After a series of unfortunate incidents, it became public knowledge that Palahniuk is gay³² and living with his partner of many years, which has in retrospect changed the views of some on his writings, yet we notice that his more gender-focused stories were published before his sexuality was public knowledge.

4.1 Nesting

A topic I touched upon earlier was the male gender role in *Fight Club*; a good example of what has changed here is in the nest that the narrator calls his home; "I wasn't the only slave to my nesting instinct. The people I know who used to sit in the bathroom with pornography, now they sit in the bathroom with their IKEA furniture catalogue."(*FC*, p.43) As said earlier, he is owed by his possessions, and while being receptacle of consumer society is no feminine trait, nesting is. The things men used to buy that were supposed to be examples of macho culture have lost all meaning and sense of purpose; muscle cars are no longer a good idea being expensive to buy, maintain and fuel, and they still look weak and wimpy if they end up standing next to the SUVs driven by soccer moms. Big screen TVs are such a common commodity that they are no longer sexualized at all and can be found in a teenage girls room just as well as a bachelor pad. With such things out of the window, the only thing left to the narrator is to buy the right design items to show off his style and his wealth, however much that is. The end result of all the bachelors showing their identity by buying stylish interior is, "we all have the same Johanneshov armchair [and] Rislampa"(*FC*, p.43). Additionally, the jobs they have no longer consist of physical labour in which the genetic advantages of the male gender make a difference; they sit in offices, where females often do better due to the advantages they have. The apartments and houses of these men have turned from homes into nests, with the added insinuation that you are not worth more than the value of your things. Their prayers at the altars of commercialism leave them as uniform as any other homogenous behaviour, and this is the type of behaviour they break out of in the fight club. "What you see

³² http://www.glbtc.com/literature/palahniuk_chuck,2.html

in fight club is a generation of men raised by women"(FC, p.50) Tyler says, and this is the mould they try to break out of.

In the fight club we see a revenge on the commodification of the physical appearance of males that has run rampant through western society in the last decades. Here we have men that are no longer slaves to skin treatment and spending their evenings in the gym – here they are men, showing up as they are, fighting with what they have, leaving with bruises and scars as visible evidence of what they have gone through. This commodification of male beauty is often linked with the feminising of society, seeing as this same focus has existed when it comes to women for centuries if not millennia.

4.2 Bob's Plight

Through the flight club and later Project Mayhem, we see a man that has fallen on hard times; Big Bob. Previously a body-builder with his own gym and endorsement deals, he suffers after-effects of doping; having used too much testosterone he develops what they call "bitch tits", and the steroids have resulted in testicular cancer that forced them to remove both testes.(FC, p.21) In a way I will suggest that Bob has gone from one type of the Other to a complete opposite way of being othered. People find bodybuilders unsettling in various ways, not just their physical appearance that can go beyond what is considered natural into what might be more like a caricature, where every single fibre of the their bodies is blown out of proportion but also the spirit and dedication required to get to that level. Additionally, stories exist of how some cheat, use steroids and enter a mental state commonly known as 'roid rage'. The unbridled rage of someone who has trained compulsively in order to be as strong as their human bodies allow is perhaps worthy of fear, but certainly not something that happens very frequently. Furthermore, the bodybuilder stereotype can also consist of 'more muscles than brains', where the athlete is only good at one thing and that is what he focuses all his time and effort on. From this stereotype, the change is quite extreme over to where he is when he meets the narrator; a crying shell of a man, lacking vital reproductive organs and having grown breasts. Readers of the novel as well as viewers of the movie all seem to take pity in Bob. He appears to have tried his best and become a victim of side-effects that happen to some but not all; between his choices and the outcome, he drew a poor lot in life, and suffered to the very end.

Having hit rock bottom, he regains a sense of his self through the fight club, and becoming one of the die-hard members of Project Mayhem brings him a sense of purpose, a sense of freedom by being part of a system where he has chosen to take part. In the end, he gains complete freedom in death;

“In every fight club, tonight, the chapter leader walks around in the darkness outside the crowd of men who stare at each other across the empty center of every fight club basement, and his voice yells:

"His name is Robert Paulson." [...] Only in death will we have our own names since only in death are we no longer part of the effort. In death we become heroes.”(FC, p.178)

His qualities as a man seem change greatly throughout his life, but when he is finally set free through death he gains complete recognition from all of his peers.

4.3 Emasculation

Similarly, the entire support group where the narrator finds Bob, Remaining Men Together have the very same problem. This is a therapy group for men who suffer from testicular cancer, and as such suffer issues related to their gender and sexuality due to the physical nature of their disease. In effect, their issues approach abjection from two sides; the concept of emasculation and that change in the body as a threat to the self and reproduction, and also that of a potentially lethal disease developing inside the body. Because the narrator himself does not have the diseases involved in these therapy groups, and they are not infectious, he himself is not abject like them, and to him the victims of these diseases are Othered, which presumably appears to be the treatment to his insomnia.

This is not the only case of emasculation in *Fight Club*. In a scene that could be drawn from the worst nightmares of most men, the narrator is threatened at knifepoint; ""if anyone ever tries to shut down the club, even you, then we have to get him by the nuts."(FC, p.187) The narrator, unlike the Remaining Men, gets away unharmed, but the graphic detail with which this scene is described makes every effort at being unsettling; the short journalistic language, the crescendo building to a climax that never arrives;

The warm hand is cupped under you. The cold tip of the knife. An arm wraps around your chest. Therapeutic physical contact. Hug time. And the ether presses your nose and mouth, hard. Then nothing, less than nothing. Oblivion.(FC, p.191)

Additionally, we find that Tyler has assigned this type of missions to his Space Monkeys; "We called a special homework assignment," Tyler says. "We said, 'Bring me the steaming testicles of his esteemed honor, Seattle Police Commissioner Whoever.'"(FC, p.164) Because he had attempted to shut down the fight clubs, he was held at knife-point;

If even one fight club has to close, we'll send his nuts east and west. One goes to the *New York Times* and one goes to the *Los Angeles Times*. One to each. Sort of press release style.(FC, p.165)

What we find at the end of this topic is that no matter the threats, even Tyler Durden appears to have one step to which he never appears to go. He will threaten with emasculation, and the threat appears to always be enough. It is unremarkable that no men stand tall when faced with this extreme threat, so we will have to wonder; is that the one step to which Tyler would not go? He will blast the world free of history, but he will not actually castrate anyone.

4.4 Split down the Middle by the Libido

Returning to the split personality of the narrator again, what is often suggested is that Tyler is the manifestation of the narrator's lost or subdued manhood, or male libido; the lost male identity of the middle class. We see that the group that makes up the fight clubs are, as Tyler says, "God's middle children [...] with no special place in history and no special attention"(FC, p.141). They cannot define consumer society in the same way the upper classes can, and they cannot ignore it the way the lower class is forced to; they are just evenly distributed throughout the part of society that are just forced to go with the flow. This is where they are also forced to lose their identities, as everybody becomes the same by wearing the same things, buying the same furniture and attempting to create the same images of how their lives are. This is also exemplified in the fight the narrator has with his boss, the representative of these upper classes that have a choice. Ta quotes Faludi as follows;

Men have no clearly defined enemy who is oppressing them. How can men be oppressed when the culture has already identified them as the oppressors, and when they see themselves that way? . . . In an attempt to employ the old paradigm, men have

invented antagonists to make their problems visible, but with the passage of time, these culprits—scheming feminists, affirmative-action proponents, job grabbing illegal aliens . . .—have come to seem increasingly unconvincing as explanations for their situation Nor do men have a clear frontier on which to challenge their intangible enemies.³³

I suggest that Faludi goes too far; all men have not got the same identity as oppressors. At this point in time, there is no one group of men; there are many smaller fragments. Separated by race, religion and sexual orientation, not to mention which tier of society they grew up in and what type of education they have. The men in the fight club, however, are very much in her target group; “the middle children of history, raised by television to believe that someday we'll be millionaires and movie stars and rock stars,” (*FC*, p.166) men in menial jobs with dead end careers and nothing to look forward to. We can then reflect on the fight that starts the entire fight club; the narrator is really fighting himself. This just further exemplifies the confusion of the white male middle class; all other groups have stood up to fight the oppressors, and they're the only ones that are left.

4.5 Sex Substitute for Sale

Another way in which some modern men can be intimidated is seen by Tyler when he rescues Marla from her overdose;

On the dresser, there's a dildo made of the same soft pink plastic as a million Barbie dolls, and for a moment, Tyler can picture millions of baby dolls and Barbie dolls and dildos injection molded and coming off the same assembly line in Taiwan. Marla looks at Tyler looking at her dildo, and she rolls her eyes and says, "Don't be afraid. It's not a threat to you." (*FC*, p.61)

One might suggest that sexuality has become yet another victim of commodification; orgasms for sale – even with warranties for success. While Tyler appears self-confident, both media and internet are full of men who question how they can compete with the magic that comes off assembly-lines. One cannot help wonder about the process of industrialization that started with looms, continued with Henry Ford's assembly-line production of cars, and has reached the point of sex toys that appear as home design; perhaps this will be the next 'it' item for a

³³ Ta, 'Hurt So Good', p.175

nest-home like the of the narrator. However, there is little doubt that also this sex-based industry has become very large, resulting in products like Marla's dildo in feature commercials even during primetime TV. Since sex sells, more sex sells more products, and when we cannot get real sex, it appears we will hunt for good substitutes.

4.6 Shane's Journey

A male that does not suffer from this sort of gender role confusion is Shane of *Invisible Monsters*. His efforts at finding the biggest mistake lead him into a long and painful process, though which he is Brandy Alexander, into his last surgery, vaginoplasty, where he becomes, in name and mostly appearance, his own sister. "Let my brother be Shannon McFarland," (*IM*, p.296) the real Shannon says as she gives up her identity. After starting his chain of anti-miracles with intentionally disfiguring himself, he found that it only cast him as a victim to be loved and protected, his second mistake was taken more seriously; at the age of sixteen, "[He] Got Gonorrhea From A Special Contract Vice Operative And [His] Family Threw [Him] Out." (*IM*, p.281) As gonorrhea attacks the areas that are involved in the sex-act and the infection risks are significantly higher for the person who is on the receiving end of penetration, even more so in the case of two men having intercourse³⁴, there was little question. The reaction this caused from previously supportive and loving parents show how quickly he became a negative stereotype; Othered through a quick consultation with a doctor.

Through the story, Shane has taken on many roles. As Brandy, he says;

““I’m not straight, and I’m not gay,” she says. “I’m not bisexual. I want out of the labels. I don’t want my whole life crammed into a single word. A story. I want to find something else, unknowable, some place to be that’s not on the map. A real adventure.”” (*IM*, p.261)

This shows us the core of the issue when the theories of Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* meet the established norms of society³⁵. Breaking with the established binaries, we see what the system the traditional values represent is capable of doing. In the end, it might be suggested that Brandy Alexander, in finishing the transgender surgery, conforms to the traditional ideals, and thus shows just how hard it is to break with a system so embedded in global standards.

³⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gonorrhea>

³⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, ch.1-2

On the other hand, we have the mistakes and the stories;

“I'm making the same mistake only so much worse, the pain, the money, the time, and being dumped by my old friends, and in the end my whole body is my story.”

A sexual reassignment surgery is a miracle for some people, but if you don't want one, it's the ultimate form of self-mutilation.” ...

"Not that it's bad being a woman. This might be wonderful, if I wanted to be a woman. The point is,[...] being a woman is the last thing I want. It's just the biggest mistake I could think to make."(*IM*, p.259)

The entire process becomes a story; Shane, Brandy and Shannon become a single victim of one person's desperate attempt at going beyond the established standards. However, when you go too far over the horizon, you appear closer to where you started; Shane is now a slightly manly version of his own sister. The journey Shane goes through though, shows that there are roles to be played out – they just exist on the fringes of society. This would be a problem that Butler also discusses in how there is no acceptance for the unconventional roles. Relating back, we realize that these established roles go back for many thousand years, embedded in culture, institutions and family. In short, they represent a staggering amount of power, and hold sway over vast amounts of people who conform to these rules; the people who make up the mainstream of society.

4.7 The Three Transgenders

The same kind of role as Brandy's plays pans out differently for Manus and Evie; Evie had her sex-change surgery at a much younger age, and is thus used to being a female and performing the part; though she cannot quite match Shannon for modeling jobs, she appears female through and through. Brandy, however, grew up as a boy, resulting in what we can perceive as an alpha-male in a female version; acting like the leader of her groups of outsiders, though now with boob implants and a sixteen-inch waistline;

"The doctors, they took out the bottom rib on each side of my chest." Her hands rub where, and she says, "I couldn't sit up in bed for two months, but I had a sixteen-inch waist. I still have a sixteen-inch waist."(*IM*, p.196)

Manus' story is quite different from this; starting as another alpha male – an undercover Vice-detective with model-like looks. This turns out to be just another performance, as he turns out to be gay. Reading the text closely, we find that his relationship with Shannon turns out to be built on a homosexual foundation; he likes her because she looks like her brother (*IM*, p.253), which happens to be the young man he took advantage of and gave gonorrhea to (*IM*, p.251). When he in the end gets a sex-change operation does perhaps not surprise the reader; his behavior throughout the book may appear outrageous to many, especially as the Vice detective that takes advantage of young boys. However, later in the novel, as he throughout a long period has had his hormone balance severely disturbed;

[Shannon writes]: I've Been Feeding Ellis Island Female Hormones For The Past Eight Months.

And Brandy laughs blood. "Me too!" she says. (*IM*, p.282)

We can understand that he deserves a little leeway. This is also a point that could unsettle the reader but might not be so easy to read through; this novel form of poisoning would be virtually undetectable to the recipient. Additionally, in the last decades we have used hormones and growth hormones in food production, which has at times survived into our food; while it is extremely improbable, your beef could be full of steroids. Athletes have blamed their positive doping tests on this, and for all we know it could be true.

However, by these characters this is also the area where the abject is attempted hidden, in a sense reflecting the real world. The concept of performing something that is not outside of the binary matrix in order to gain acceptance is one that is often done, quite simply in order to live in peace with society. Palahniuk has also been criticized of doing just this; since he always appeared to present himself as a married straight man of a certain sort may easily invite such accusations, but the interesting fact is that he never specified gender. He did not lie, but interviewers presumed that when nothing was specified, he belonged to the system that they expected.

4.8 Abject Anal

“Go figure, but Texans seem to be a lot more comfortable around disastrous house fires than they are around anal sex.” (*IM*, p.276)

This quote describes the events of the wedding quite well; with a burning house, the bride walking down the burning stairs with a loaded shotgun, and the sounds of gay sex – there appears to be no question which of the three the Texan audience reacts to. Abjection speaks volumes; somebody who has grown up in highly religious surroundings, yet with plenty of guns around, will necessarily react more to two men having loud sex in the pantry than somebody walking down the stairs with a cocked shotgun. The gay men, one of which is the groom-to-be, that are having their way loudly, are completely unacceptable in this setting. We can almost expect them to be ignored to the same extent as Shannon is when she steals the turkey. They might as well be invisible monsters.

The fact that they are described as thinking it still more disturbing than the fact that the house is burning down around them, however, goes to describe the extremity of the scene. Looking closer at it, we also realize that this abjection of Shane is why his parents could not cope with him – he was no longer the object they had recognized as their son; he was abject and could no longer fit into their world. As Kristeva writes, when the abject becomes object, by being understood and being defined, it “draws me toward the place where meaning collapses”³⁶, and Shane’s sexuality makes no sense in his parents’ world – his meaning has collapsed.

4.9 Sexualized Teenagers

Another aspect of sexuality that Palahniuk frequently visits is teenage sexuality; from the early ages of the addicts in *Choke*, through Shane as already discussed and further on to various characters in *Haunted* and *Snuff*, we find it a repeated topic. While this topic is one that traditionally worries and scares parents, we see that scaring the children might not be a good way of dealing with it; good examples already show in the Creedish cult of *Survivor* and Mr. 72 from *Snuff*; repressing sexuality in such an aggressive fashion might cause severe aftereffects. The children of the cult had a varied selection of issues based on their upbringing, so their sexuality worries did not stand out; Mr. 72 on the other hand had only that one big problem.

"There are kids who get conceived during adult movies. I mean, when those movies get made."

Mr. Bacardi shakes his head, saying, "Urban legend." . . .

³⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.2

[Mr. 137 says,] "No, wait." He says, "Rumor is, there was a kid conceived during The Blow Jobs of Madison County."

Mr. Bacardi says, "No." Shaking his head, he says, "She terminated."

And Branch Bacardi asks me, "Who, then? Can you name even one performer who had a pornbaby?"

I point up at a video monitor, where Cassie Wright's wearing rice powder on her cheeks and inkblackgeisha eye makeup, playing a lovely demure Japanese-American heroine in *Snow Falling on Peters*. Cassie Wright, I tell them. She had a child. . . .

My point is, these kids aren't a joke. Or an urban legend. . . .

Tapping the tip of my gun finger to my chest I mouth the word "Me."

I'm not a joke or a legend.

I am that porn baby. (*Snuff*, pp. 58-61)

After being told that his favorite erotic dream, the blow-up doll that he has buried his member in, is actually his birth mother, (*Snuff*, p.87) he does not have an erection until he is called up to do his scene in the movie. At this point he has taken an erection inducing pill, and he gives his presumed mother all he has; only afterward does he discover that his entire nightmare was a lie. The words from *Haunted* come back to haunt us again; "You can't unfuck a kid. Once you bang a kid, there's no getting that genie out of the bottle. That kid's pretty much wrecked for good." (*Haunted*, p.160) This kid, however, appears to have hit rock bottom inside his presumed mother. In true Palahniuk fashion, you need to hit rock bottom in order to get a fresh start, and it does not take long until he seemingly ends up with the real daughter of his favorite porn star; the real porn baby.

In 2005, American TV journalist Katie Couric reported "horror stories of kids" on the topic of sexuality³⁷ in her news special 'The 411: Teens and Sex'; afterwards her network conducted a survey that instead described low numbers of teenage sexuality; seven out of ten teens aged thirteen to sixteen have not gone beyond kissing. By 2008, numbers had been created that dwarfed these; forty percent of kids aged eleven and twelve reported on friends in verbally abusive relationship and nearly three in four say that boyfriend/girlfriend relationships begin

³⁷ Glassner, *Fear*, Kindle location 4029, paragraph 1

before the age of fifteen.³⁸ When studied, these numbers turned out to have been twisted and doctored beyond recognition; 1% of the eleven- and twelve-year-olds have done more than kissing, and 7% of thirteen- and fourteen-year olds. Similarly, the two percent of these children that answered they had been verbally abused in relationships had somehow become nearly three out of four as the report hit the TV screens. Confusing though the math was, one thing was impossible to hide; the report was commissioned by a group behind a National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline.³⁹

In this chapter, Glassner writes about several other cases in which similar numbers and stories have been reported, mostly as results of cases where unreliable number crunches or journalists have been creative with the numbers they have been given, or reports are based on unreliable witnesses; here meaning teenagers who aim to protect themselves. There is ultimately little doubt that teenage sexuality and pregnancy is a topic that interests and worries adults.

On the other side of this story we have the teenagers, and Palahniuk tells us about two of them. First we have Miss Sneezy of *Haunted*; having been put in an isolation chamber before getting past second base, she is told by her night guard that a second carrier of the same virus has arrived.

“Chances look good you might get laid in this lifetime . . .”

Just admitted this week, Shirlee says is another Type 1 Keegan virus carrier. This new resident, he's asymptomatic, and, better yet, he has got a huge dick. (*Haunted*, p.364)

Having these two reproduce is also a case of ulterior motives – a plan within a plan;

Shirlee says, next time I talk to Dr. Schumacher, I should ask about starting a breeding program. To see if we can give birth to a generation of babies immune to Type 1 Keegan. Another scary possibility is, this boy and me, we have different strains of the virus, and we'd just kill each other.

Or we'd have a healthy baby . . . and we'd kill it with our germs.

“Slow down,” Shirlee says. “Forget babies. Forget dying.” She says what's important is getting me deflowered.

³⁸ Glassner, *Fear*, Kindle location 4029, paragraph 6

³⁹ Glassner, *Fear*, Kindle location 4029, paragraph 9

This boy and me, the two of us locked up in a room, together. Both of us virgins. The video camera behind the mirror, watching, the staff hoping we'll breed a cure the government can patent. Those crafty drug-company people. Still, a cure wouldn't be bad.

And sex, that wouldn't be bad, either. (*Haunted*, p.371)

The notion of using two victims to exterminate a disease that never really existed is obscure, and using humans as breeding animals is content that belongs in nightmares. Breeding sick people is ultimately so unsettling, it leads them to a new case of abjection. The disturbing nature of their incredible lethal disease matches the uncertainty of the outcome, creating a completely unpredictable situation; they could cause mutual destruction just as they could live happily ever after; they could have a baby that dies near-instantly due to their virus or they could create one immune to the disease they carry, thus possibly creating a cure for the disease that has destroyed their lives so far. Ultimately, though, she says it herself. Sex wouldn't be bad. She is a virgin and is afraid of dying as one, and considers the risk of dying trying worth it for getting laid.

With nearly the same mentality, we have Mr Whittier of *Snuff*. Through the early part of his disease, he did anything in his power to exploit the people around him and have sex with them; nurses and volunteers or others that came to pity him, his story being told in 'Dog Years'. With great detail, the strategy of seduction and lies is explained, and the intercourse even more so;

He'd started missionary-style, then had one of her legs in the air, splitting the reed. Then both her feet, gripped tight around the ankles and framing his panting face. . . . Viagra-hard, he rode her on all fours, doggy-style, even taking himself out and poking at her ass until she said to stop. She was sore and stoned, and as he bent her legs to force her feet up, behind her head, by then her bright, fake angel's smile had come back. (*Haunted*, p.115)

The dual nature of this detailed story provokes mixed reactions; the detail a mix of geriatric sex and youthful exuberance, and the disturbing lies he comes up with in order to bed his angel. While the notion of people lying to each other in order to get them into bed is as old as we can imagine, the other part is original. By its astounding nature, Brandon Whittier becomes a clear symbol of abjection; the disease is both rare and disturbing when left alone,

but when mixed with the other aspects of the situation it goes beyond understanding and reasonable senses of purpose have collapse.

Between all these conflicting teens and with the background we find in Glassner's numbers, we can reflect on what I suggested earlier; it is a self-perpetuating spiral. As reported in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, "the mass media are an important context for adolescents' sexual behavior"⁴⁰ The conclusion is undeniable;

Adolescents who are exposed to more sexual content in the media, and who perceive greater support from the media for teen sexual behavior, report greater intentions to engage in sexual intercourse and more sexual activity. Mass media are an important context for adolescents' sexual socialization, and media influences should be considered in research and interventions with early adolescents to reduce sexual activity.

A worrying effect of this is that the more journalists talk about how bad it is that young people engage in sexual activities the more likely it is that they do. This in turn results in more TV shows, news reports and articles on the topic, leaving the next group of adolescents feeling even more pressured into it by the mass media.

In truth, we can also say that the media tend to go out of their way to make spectacles out of cases that contain signs of teenage sexuality; an example is how several TV networks have series about young mothers; *Young Mothers*, *Teenage Mom*, *Sixteen and Pregnant*, the list goes on and varies from country to country. One would hope that these shows would scare teenagers away from situations where they could be in danger of having children.

Unfortunately, this seems to not be the case; it just feeds into the report just quoted.

4.10 Following the Lead

In *Snuff* we find another case of a teenager who gets caught up in her sexuality; Cassie Wright – the star of the show. Mr. 600 stands as the accused;

⁴⁰ *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Volume 38, Issue 3 , Pages 186-192 , March 2006 / Abstract at <http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X%2805%2900200-4/abstract>

“you raped this kid's mother. You drugged her and ruined her life.”(*Snuff*, p.132)

[However] Mr. Bacardi says, "It was Cassie wanted to shoot a porn loop to escape her folks' house. Cassie asked could I score her something to help relax."(*Snuff*, p.140)

Now, we can probably not say that his exact thing is a common fear, but not too far from it we find a current trend. The media has realized that teenagers send naughty pictures back and forth, some of these ending up online and in seedy collections; people find themselves exposed on the internet in images sent to people they were once intimate with, some even find themselves taped having sex. The ease with which we have access to technology that lets us do these things nowadays makes it just one of those things that people do, but when the products end up getting into the wrong hands, the results can be dire. Careers have been spoiled and even suicides have happened. As to why people do this, we have to look no further than to their role models; celebrities appear naked or scantily dressed all the time. Sometimes it is an accident, sometimes an old or jilted lover realizes he can cash in on proof of what happened, and sometimes they leak things for the sake of publicity. Other times they are just paid very significant sums of money. Furthering this point, we can look at the rise to fame of recent A-list celebrities like Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian; neither were household names before the entire world found out that the daughters of American's richest were caught on tape having sex. Now they are also millionaires in their own right, after having landed contracts for TV shows and various types of merchandise. In the same pattern, several young girls that were found due to appearing without much clothing in images online have been given contracts for modeling in men's magazines and similar jobs where the only requirement is that they are eye candy.

4.11..And Men?

It must be said that also male celebrities have been found lacking clothes on various occasions; be it due to paparazzi, indiscretions surrounding racy home recordings, or actually having starred in pornographic movies. Yet, there seems to be no similar sequence of outrages concerning nudity with regards to teenage boys. However, Palahniuk fields one of these celebrities in *Snuff*; Mr.137 aka Dan Banyan. He is the point in case when Palahniuk writes about the genie being out of the bottle once you've banged a kid; as he leaves his home town, his father attempts to give him 'the speech', which results in this;

“I told my father I was an Oklahomo.” . . . "It's a misunderstanding, you being how you figure. . . . It's on account of somebody doing something evil to you when you was little. . . . It was me."(*Snuff*, pp.117-119)

Banyan turned into a TV-star but never broke with his past, and when his show was cancelled, he decided to profit; “Porn, he says, is a job you only take after you abandon all hope.”(*Snuff*, p.107) However, he puts an interesting spin on gay porn; "The biggest irony is that most of the men," the Dan Banyan guy says, "in the movie with me, most of them were straight. Doing it just for the cash."(*Snuff*, p.109)

4.12 Amateur Pornography

Indeed, in *Haunted* there is a couple who fall victim to this very trend; in the short story ‘Post iProduction’, we find that: “It was him who said the only way they could afford to have a baby is by making an adult video”(*Haunted*, p.141). There is little denying the immensity of the adult video industry, professional or amateur, and as such we can almost understand their belief and also how they realize they can kill two birds with one stone;

The Clarks thought a lot of couples got rich by making adult movies. The home-video industry is only popular because video porn created the demand. Couples all except them were making extra money in their spare time. Other married couples weren't just wasting their sex, unwatched, unappreciated by strangers. First, they'd rent a camera and the editing deck. They'd find a distributor for the movie. Since they were married, Nelson said, it wouldn't even be a sin.(*Haunted*, p. 141)

Following a pattern here, we see that Palahniuk continues working with the principle that sex sells. The industry is gigantic, and it is perhaps not that unreasonable that a naïve couple will see the money that they could potentially earn, and since they take it all seriously and go the distance in preparation such as “Nelson shaving away the hair around the base of his dick, to make it look bigger” and “Tess got breast implants as big as her spine would support”(*Haunted*, p.142), their hopes of cashing in can perhaps seem reasonable; after all they are in their prime, look their best and have arranged to do everything professionally.

However, coming to editing they realize that “the difference between how you look and how you see yourself is enough to kill most people.”(*Haunted*, p.144) In the end, Palahniuk manages to show us just how abject they appear throughout the entire situation;

No amount of aerobic exercise or plastic surgery would ever make them look the way they'd imagined they looked before they watched that tape. All they saw were two almost hairless animals, hairless and dark pink and proportioned all wrong, the way mongrel crossbreed dogs look, with short legs and long necks and thick torsos with no definite waist. They were grinning big bear-trap smiles at each other while their eyes darted at the camera to make sure someone was still paying attention. They sucked their stomachs flat. (*Haunted*, p.144)

It reminds us of a reoccurring theme in *Invisible Monsters*; Shannon and Evie are both models and show us the absurdity of staged scenarios and photo-shoots. In this case, the Clarks find out that is fake can rarely be pawned off as real, and real humans rarely holds up in the face of a full HD recording. Relating this to a previous case; not only did Mr. Clarke vanish from his wife after this, they conceived the baby that they wanted; a porn baby. Her name was Cassandra and we have already heard of her misfortune.

Ultimately, what I suspect that we are being told is a rather simple message; only real love is real, and when you fake emotions they tend to come back to haunt you. One cannot help to feel sorry for Mrs. Clarke; sure she was stuck in a get-rich-quick scheme, but what she wanted to profit off was her love for her husband, and their pride in their appearances both each on their own and together, while at the same time they desperately wanted to become parents – one of the most natural instincts that nature ever produced. While pride is one of the cardinal sins, procreation is anything but that.

Furthermore, we see in retrospect that Cassandra was doomed from her very conception; due to her unconventional beginnings and her location in Palahniuk's writings, she could only have gotten out alive if she had broken free of the restraints that were placed upon her, and between her conception and the Nightmare Box, this proved too much. She was born cast into the victim role, and was not long for this life. Meanwhile, this entire ordeal made a victim out of her mother too. Mrs. Clarke went from a happy wife in a loving relationship, though not rich on money they appeared to be very happy with each other. Through enhancement surgery and post-production jadedness, she also lost her husband, later became a mother, mother of a lost daughter, mother to a dead daughter, murderer of her own daughter. The downward spiral is quite drastic, and we are left wondering if something this dramatic could actually happen in real life; and we have to admit that it can. Due to the way media enjoy portraying the victims, anyone who picks up a magazine or follows the news will see how hard life can be on the

unlucky few. As such, Mrs. Clarke appears to use as a worst case scenario and slightly over-exaggerated, yet still plausible seeing as she merely appears to be a victim of circumstances and her own choices.

While there's little telling exactly what sexuality those actors have, one cannot help notice what his point really was; they're in it for the money. Rarely has there been any doubt that sex sells; Palahniuk's entire *Snuff* is about the selling of said product. Sex and sexuality has always interested humanity, in every way from passive to active, and it appears that all the different tools that are used in attempts at mellowing down this interest work towards just highlighting it even more. Attempted repression has the same effect on human sexuality as telling a child what he can't have; he'll just want it more. In the same way, telling people which types of sex are unacceptable will make large amounts of people want to try it to see if they like it. To the human mind, sex has the makings of a perpetual motion machine; while unstable it is unstoppable, while complicated it is extremely simple. No matter what is said or done about it, more is the only thing we want. This goes to such an extreme that people who do not feel the same way are considered just as much if not more outside of the norm than those who take part in the most taboo of styles that are known.

5 Conclusion

When reflecting on all that has been written, by Palahniuk and everybody who throws numbers and fears at the public, there is no wonder that people are afraid, and indeed become victims of their own fears; it is a wonder that people can walk out the door in the morning without being afraid of anything from road rage on the way to work, violent coworkers and clients while there, perhaps then finding yourself having been infected with something gruesome while you were outside, and when you come home, you know that most accidents happen in that exact location.

However, one of the key messages I have tried to bring across is that fear already makes victims out of people, and as Palahniuk shows, you can choose what to do when you are the victim. You can choose to let it break you, or you can choose to break free. Some of his characters work very hard to break free, victimize themselves and break Lacan's mirror to let the themselves be seen in new light, yet end up being subjected again the moment they break free; of this the best example must be Shane, who after his stint as Brandy Alexander ends up with a near-identical body to that of his sister, but more importantly her name; from subject to object and abject, and back to subject again.

As I have shown, the numbers that are behind many of the reports scaring us, the background stories for the most viral reports of epidemics and the surveys behind various experts and institutions telling us what to fear and how to fear it right; they are not always to be trusted. Quite often we find that somebody is interpreting numbers with flourishes and trickery that would make them fit in on a magician's stage in Las Vegas rather than at the news desk in a TV station. There is no denying that bad things happen to people; sometimes because they challenge fate, sometimes because they just deserve it, but just as often because they are in the wrong place at the wrong time. The effect on us appears to be that these people get to tell their stories; their stories get sold to the media and both the victim and those who relay his story to us earn money on the disaster. This necessarily leads to awareness of issues that happen so rarely that there should be no need to be afraid of them, but both media and institutions know that their money and their power is based on making people assume that it could happen to them too; you could win the lottery and you could be eaten by a shark. Both things earn money for people who are involved such as lottery commissions and media.

Palahniuk shows another way in which we allow ourselves to be scared by the media; we believe, on varying levels and in varying degrees, the stereotypes that we are fed. This point relates back to the statistics too, as we tend to believe what we hear if presented with plausible reasoning and credible-sounding numbers to back it all up; Palahniuk's best example is probably the death of Shane to AIDS, a disease that does not discriminate even though it was easier for the parents to believe it as they presumed him gay. Similarly, Shannon's main reason for wanting to become an invisible monster was that nobody ever managed to go beyond her appearance; stereotypically speaking, a model with a brain is an oxymoron. Then, when no one can see your face, you suddenly become a person again. Developed further, Miranda was taken to be even more beautiful; so beautiful that it could not be real – the assumption that a fantasy based design-body would be the only way to achieve that kind of perfection shows what people are indeed used to. The knowledge that some go to whatever extremes they can in order to achieve what they consider perfection, no matter if it is all based on lies, to them justifies their behavior. While there is no arguing that Palahniuk's extremes are beyond what we can expect to find in the world outside of literature, the concepts and ideas are familiar.

On the topics of gender and different types of sexuality, between Palahniuk's writings and all the theory, the question of why people are afraid of this has yet to be answered. While some of the things that exist outside of the binaries can be unsettling and confusing, one has to wonder why people bother with what goes on in the bedrooms of others. Conservative values and old fashioned mentalities are usually the explanation, but those values also used to suggest that you should respect the privacy of others. This double standard actually seems par for the course for many who are critical of things beyond their understanding or acceptance; the world moves on and they refuse to. Presumably, this was why Palahniuk did not want to come out of the closet in public. He wanted to stay an author rather than become a gay author; different standards apply. Furthermore, books like *Fight Club* and *Invisible Monsters*, dealing with gender roles and sexuality in the way that they do, would have had different receptions if they had arrived from an author with a presumed homosexual agenda, which would have caused for them to have been seen in a completely different light. One cannot help wonder if *Fight Club* would have become the same grade of blockbuster movie if the novel had been released under a known gay identity.

Ultimately, perhaps there is only one thing we can take from this entire discussion, and that is something that has been said for centuries. Nearly everybody will become a victim of something for one reason or another. It can be unreliable genes or an unfortunate mutation in a few cells of the body, it can be a sexual tendency that someone finds unusual or it can be someone else that has that tendency and wishes one to join in, or it can be the simple bad luck of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In the grand scheme of things, it is nearly impossible to go through life without becoming a victim of something or other. The sum of this means that we cannot go through life waiting for- and being afraid of that near-inevitable incident; we would be wasting our lives by being afraid. When we learn to let our fears of being victimized slip away, we will also be less likely to let the smaller incidents influence us in any significant degree, as such allowing us a greater chance of not being victimized in the first place. Nature has left us with instincts such as fight or flights and those have worked for thousands of years; why should we change now. To paraphrase Coleridge; going through life in fear, that is the real folly. Roosevelt made a bigger miscalculation; we should not fear fear, we should conquer it and live free.

Sources

IN PRINT

Butler, Judith, *Gender trouble : feminism and the subversion of identity*, 2006, Routledge, New York

Foucault, Michel, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1995, Vintage Books, New York

Foucault, Michel, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 2009, Routledge Classics, London

Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality : Volume I: An Introduction*, 1978, Pantheon Books, New York

Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, 2003, Penguin, New York

Glassner, Barry, *The culture of fear : why Americans are afraid of the wrong things*, 1999, Basic Books, New York

Jameson, Fredric, 'Culture and Financial Capital' in *Critical Enquiry*, Vol.24, No.1, (Autumn, 1997), pp.246-265, 1997, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago

Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror : An Essay on Abjection*, 1982, Columbia University Press, New York

Lacan, Jacques, *Écrits : a selection*, 2002, Norton, New York

Palahniuk, Chuck, *Choke*, 2003, Vintage Books, London

Palahniuk, Chuck, *Fight Club*, 2005, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York

Palahniuk, Chuck, *Haunted*, 2006, Vintage Books, London

Palahniuk, Chuck, *Invisible Monsters*, 2003, Vintage Books, London

Palahniuk, Chuck, *Snuff*, 2008, Doubleday, New York

Palahniuk, Chuck, *Survivor*, 2003, Vintage Books, London

Sartain, Jeffrey A., "'Even the Mona Lisa's Falling Apart": The Cultural Assimilation of Scientific Epistemologies in Palahniuk's Fiction', in *Stirrings Still – The International Journal of Existential Literature* , Fall/Winter 2005, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp.25-48, Binghamton University, New York, 2005

Ta, Lynn M. 'Hurt So Good: *Fight Club*, Masculine Violence and the Crisis of Capitalism' in *The Journal of American Culture*, Vol.29, No.3, pp.265-277, 2006, Blackwell Publishing, Inc., Massachusetts

VISUAL

Fight Club, Fincher, David, 20th Century Fox, 1999, Film.

Postcards from the Future: The Chuck Palahniuk Documentary, Dir. Chaplinsky, Josh, Kevin Kölsch and, Dennis Widmyer, Kinky Mule Films, 2004, DVD.

DIGITAL

Glaister, Dan, 'I dare you',

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/mar/13/fiction.chuckpalahniuk> - last accessed 15.11.2012

Glassner, Barry, *The culture of fear : why Americans are afraid of the wrong things*, 2010, Basic Books, New York. Kindle ebook file.

Hari, Johann, 'Chuck Palahniuk predicts destruction',

<http://johannhari.com/2003/11/10/chuck-palahniuk-predicts-destruction/> - last accessed 14.11.2012

Hari, Johann, 'Fighting talk: how Chuck Palahniuk became the Marilyn Manson of the literary circuit', <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/fighting-talk-how-chuck-palahniuk-became-the-marilyn-manson-of-the-literary-circuit-450867.html> - last accessed 29.07.2009

Larsen, Kimberly, 'Workplace Violence: Paranoid or Prepared?',

<http://www.mediate.com/articles/larsen.cfm> - last accessed 14.11.2012

L'Engle, Kelly Ladin, 'The mass media are an important context for adolescents' sexual behavior' in *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Volume 38, Issue 3 , Pages 186-192 , March 2006, abstract at <http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X%2805%2900200-4/abstract> - last accessed 14.11.2012

Obama, Michelle, 'I'm Tired of Being Afraid',

<http://autisticbfh.blogspot.no/2007/10/michelle-obama-im-tired-of-being-afraid.html> - last accessed 15.11.2012

Palahniuk, Chuck, 'The Ending of Survivor', email from the author to his fanclub,

<http://chuckpalahniuk.net/books/survivor/ending-survivor> - last accessed 13.11.2012

Soniaydong, 'The Town Where No one is Allowed to Die',
<http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/featured/the-town-where-no-one-is-allowed-to-die/4118> - Last accessed 8.11.2012

'Drinking the Kool-Aid', encyclopedia entry,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drinking_the_Kool-Aid - last accessed 13.11.2012

'Gonorrhea', encyclopedia entry, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gonorrhea> – last accessed 14.11.2012

'Palahniuk, Chuck', encyclopedia entry,
http://www.glbtq.com/literature/palahniuk_chuck,2.html - last accessed 14.11.2012

'Sexaholism', encyclopedia entry, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexaholism#DSM> – last accessed 14.12.2012