Manhood in Crisis: Powerlessness, Homophobia and Violence in *Fight Club*

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ABSTRACT

The following study will explicate how in Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, the narrator is in a certain crisis of manhood as a result of his contradictory experiences of power under the impositions of hegemonic masculinity, also aggravated due to a sense of disparity between his lived experiences and his inherited language of masculinity. As a response, the narrator sets out a nostalgic backlash to grapple with the outlets of the crisis—buried feelings, homophobia and aggression. While the backlashes materialize as transgressive assertions of manhood, the narrator becomes eventually disillusioned with his struggles and opts, instead, to come to terms with the crisis of manhood by forming an affectionate bond with Marla Singer, the only female character in the novel.

Keywords: Masculinity, power, repression, homophobia, aggression

INTRODUCTION

During the course of the following study, it was realized that men are doomed to be isolated and powerless in their struggles to match up to the ideals set by hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, the formation of heterosexual masculinity in the post-war and absent-father families have led to certain predicaments in gender for men. In this manuscript, the coupling of such complications is referred to as the crisis of manhood: a twofold concept which lies at the core of the scope for this argument.

The following is a study of masculinity in terms of such crisis on the protagonist of Palahniuk's (1996) *Fight Club* with the proposed thesis that the struggles with masculinity of the anonymous narrator of the novel are in fact nostalgic attempts to overcome the crisis of manhood. Palahniuk (1996), in *Fight Club*, depicts such nostalgic efforts through hyper-masculine reactions like violence so that the narrator can empower his emasculated sense of manhood. Finally, it is argued that such struggles do not resolve the crisis of manhood, and the partial tone of relief that eventually conclude *Fight Club* is the aftermath of embracing a more nurturing masculinity, along with forming an affectionate bond with Marla Singer, the only female character in the narrative.

In regard to the body of past studies, the following study has a status of its own. A notable portion of research on *Fight Club* is placed within a framework of Marxism. While Jordan (2002) has read the novel as an ironic take to blame contemporary culture for "a crisis in masculine identity" (p. 368); Clark (2002) blamed consumerism as the emasculator in

Fight Club in which "heterosexist isolationism" is depicted as a cause to the "current economic and environmental woes." Ta (2006) has read the masochism in *Fight Club* as a consequence of capitalist social order to seek "recourse in victimhood" (p. 265-7), and Walters (2004) has interpreted the narrator's transgression as an attempt "to replace himself ideologically outside of consumer culture" (p. iii).

Although such findings are reasserted in the following scholarship, the study stands out from a Marxist framework because our character study aims at an exclusive male experience. In other words, although the following study holds that the patriarchal and capitalist social order is responsible for the initiation of the crisis of manhood, its major concerns are how the narrator grapples with the crisis on an individual level of experience, and in what ways the predicaments challenge the private sphere of the narrator's life. Therefore, the following research is more an analysis of an individual experience of masculinity than a mere study of how consumerism has emasculated the narrator (Clark, 2002).

The significance of the following study, from a perspective of men and masculinities, is that the character study of *Fight Club* is enhanced by a wider lens of gender which encompasses the power-oriented predicaments in masculinity along with gender predicaments of "silence", which are rooted in the discrepancy between the lived experiences of men, and their "inherited language of masculinity" (Rutherford, 1992). The focus of the study, through such lens, is exclusively on the narrator. Hence, the study of his schizophrenic split personality, Tyler Durden, as a distinct character is demoted for the sake of a narrower investigation on the narrator himself.

Additionally, the following scholarship, in its reading of *Fight Club*, takes one step further to investigate whether the crisis of manhood finds a resolution in the novel. In regard to the previous takes on *Fight Club*, the question to ask is whether Hall's (2004) cycle of "remasculation," Delfino's (2007) quest for "testicular masculinity", Alexander Boon's (2005) struggle between effeminate and testosterone-based masculinity, lead to a resolution for the predicaments in masculinity. The following study argues that the partial tone of relief that concludes *Fight Club* is in fact a sign of coming to terms with the crisis rather than an ultimate catharsis.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

On one level, the crisis of manhood is caused as a result of men's paradoxical experiences of power under the shadow of hegemonic masculinity. Kaufman (1994) has believed much of what is associated with masculinity, on an individual level, "hinges on a man's capacity to exercise power and control" and while patriarchal masculinity is in fact a "privilege" for men, the way they "have set up that world causes immense pain, isolation, and alienation" (p. 142). Men, hence, fall into a gender realm of "contradictory experiences of power" in which while measuring up to the ideals of manhood would be impossible, the individual powerlessness would "maintain a powerful and often unconscious presence in [men's]...lives" (p. 144).

As Kimmel (2005) has stated, the impossible ideals of manhood, originally rooted in the emergence of Capitalism, precipitated the tragedy of "American Everyman" which is a tale of "striving to live up to the impossible ideals" of "Market Place Manhood," eventually leading to "chronic terrors of emasculation, emotional emptiness, and... gendered rage" (p. 29). In other words, Kimmel (2005) believes that the American man's struggle to measure up to hegemonic masculinity is "a relentless test" and "a defensive effort to prevent being emasculated" (p. 29-39).

The second aspect of the crisis of manhood that is sought to be read in *Fight Club* has to do, preliminarily, with the post-feminism fascination of men with "a reflexive concern with identity," and, primarily, with the "new ideologies of parenting" (Rutherford, 1992, p. 4-13). During post-feminist era of victimization

(of heterosexuality) men were left with a new concern with their masculinities for which there was no language of feeling. All this then led to "this disparity between men's lived experiences and their inherited language of masculinity" (p. 9).

Apart from the tie of gender relations, it was also the new "ideologies of parenting" characterized by the absence of the father, which in the atmosphere of post-war booming "service oriented consumer capitalism" precipitated "men into a state of uncertainty in their relationship to the private sphere" (Rutherford, 1992, p 13-5).

The post-war legacy of "failed paternity" turned out to be a costly experience for men since it "produced a growing institutionalization of women and children into a dyadic bond" which turned out to be "a far from positive" experience (Rutherford, 1992, p. 20-1). In other words, the "generation of men raised by women" depicted by Palahniuk in *Fight Club,* suffered not only from the legacy of failed paternity but also from exclusive mothering. According to Rutherford (1992), "the image of the doting, smothering mother increased masculine anxiety already beset by the ambivalence of its paternal role" and during the 1950s, this image was "merged with the icon of the dutiful mother to produce a motif of social conformity" (p. 23).

In studying Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club,* the struggles of the protagonist in dealing with his crisis—attempts which include attending support groups and the institution of male bonding activities like *Fight Club* and Project Mayhem—are read, in this study, in the light of what Rutherford (1992) has called "nostalgia," which is a reaction to a "disturbance within male subjectivity" (p. 127). In other words, the narrator's backlashes are nostalgic endeavours to appease the buried pain of men in order to resolve the crisis of manhood.

As the crisis of manhood was unfolded previously, it was mentioned that the first aspect of the crisis is the acquisition of patriarchal power and its "contradictory experiences" for men under the shadow of hegemonic masculinity. A significant question is what is the price that men ought to pay for this way

of acquiring masculine power? In fact, "... the acquisition of hegemonic masculinities is a process through which men come to suppress a range of emotions, needs, possibilities, such as nurturing, receptivity, empathy, and compassion, which are experienced as inconsistent with the power of manhood." Consequently, men's exercise of power has shaped today's "sense of manhood" which is in fact "a form of alienation" and an ignorance of "emotions, feelings, needs, and potential for human connection and nurturance" (Kaufman, 1994, p. 148-51).

In a prognosis, highly significant to this study's reading of *Fight Club*, Kaufman (1994) states that "men might direct the buried pain against themselves in the forms of self-hate, self-deprecation, physical illness, insecurity, or addictions," in order to "experience a momentary sense of power and control" (p. 150). Meanwhile, Fight Club and Project Mayhem, by asserting manhood, act as mediums of experiencing "a momentary sense of power and control," the masochistic emergence of Tyler Durden, the narrator's split personality disorder, is a form of self-inflicting pain which designate the narrator's "self-hate" and his insecurity with the egoist life that he leads under the impositions of hegemonic masculinity.

The expressions of power for men in a social milieu of patriarchal competition and of restricting emotions lead to a form of "fear" for men that is "experienced as homophobia" (Kaufman, 1992). Kimmel (2005) looks deeper into "homophobia" and reads it as a symptom of masculinity in a framework of "homosocial" enactment. In other words, men's accomplishments are always measured in masculine scales. Even heterosexuality, as Tyler Durden's behaviour in *Fight Club* suggests, becomes a form of homosocial enactment since it becomes an act of conquering women in order to prove one's manhood. It is such behaviour, Kimmel concludes, which results in homophobic drives among men.

The narrative of *Fight Club* develops toward a backlash against the crisis of manhood and the efforts of the narrator are directed toward a nostalgic response to the crisis. In other words,

the narrator takes part in support groups and then establishes fight club and Project Mayhem to confront his buried emotions. These efforts could also be read in a framework of responding to homophobia as a form of male intimacy through violence. According to Kaufman (1992), "[m]any institutions of male bonding... are a means to provide safety for isolated men who need to find ways to affirm themselves, find common ground with other men, and collectively exercise their power": a sense of power which is already lost on an individual basis (p. 151).

The rifeness of violence among men is the result of their "surplus repression" of sexual and emotional desires, and since masculinity "involves the construction of 'surplus aggressiveness," it is inevitably prone to the phenomenon of "surplus repression" as well (Kaufman, 1992, p. 28). Referring to masculinity as "one half of the narrow, surplus repressive shape of the adult human psyche," Kaufman (1992) has stated that one way to combat the doubts aroused by the fragile gender of masculinity is actually "violence."

According to Kaufman (1992), while homophobic drives among men are originated in "repression," the surplus amount of it may lead to "aggression." Therefore fight club, being an institution of male-bonding in which aggression is the ruling force, is a significant representation of "surplus repression" among its members. Significant to this argument's reading of *Fight Club,* Kaufman (1992) has stated that the expression of affection and male-bonding always comes with some act of violence to maintain "the active/passive equilibrium" through "an active assault" in the relationship (Kaufman, 1992, p. 41).

Whether such hyper-masculine expressions of power lead to a catharsis of the crisis of manhood is the eventual concern of this study. As Kaufman's (1994) study of men's powerlessness, along with Rutherford's (1992) analysis of men's silences demonstrated, men's struggle might materialize as efforts to "experience a momentary sense of power" (Kaufman, 1992, p. 150) as well as to fulfill "fantasies of…omnipotence" (Rutherford, 1992,

p.130). However, toward the conclusion, this thesis argues that the power-driven nostalgia of "phallic masculinity" (Flanning-Saint-Aubin, 1994) gives way to disillusionment and it is then that the narrator opts to come to terms with his crisis by embracing a less "phallic" conception of masculinity. According to Kimmel (2005),

> ....*men's lives are structured around relationships of power and men's differential access to powwer, as well as the differential access to that power of men as a group. Our imperfect analysis of our own situation [as in Fight Club] leads us to believe that we men need more power, rather than leading us to support...efforts to rearrange power relationships along more equitable lines* (p. 40).

This study acknowledges Kimmel's remark by reading the gradual disillusionment of the protagonists of *Fight Club* with his struggles as the realization of the fact that emphasizing the hyper-masculine power of heterosexist aggression cannot resolve the crisis of manhood.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The anonymous narrator in *Fight Club* is a perfect example of a man who faces the individual loss of power. In fact, while the narrator enjoys the patriarchal privileges of manhood as a white collar employee in a major American corporate company, the tone of individual dissatisfaction permeates the novel. The narrator is isolated, lives alone, cannot healthily connect with others, and does not even bear a name throughout the novel. Such are images which designate the fact that the narrator does not have a lot to offer on an individual basis.

Furthermore, the narrative of *Fight Club* develops toward the backlash of the narrator against his pain, isolation, and alienation. Such issues could be studied through a wide lens of striving to measure up to the ideals of manhood. In other words, the first aspect of the crisis of manhood which I intend to trace in *Fight Club*

is basically generated in the narrator's struggle with the hegemonic masculinity. Upon reading the very first chapter of the novel the reader encounters a fragmented man, about to explode a massive credit card building on a national museum. Hence, the novel begins with a transgressive tone of anarchy, ironically against what apparently empowers and privileges men collectively.

Interestingly, it is at the end of the novel's first chapter that the narrator reveals that the cause of all this "anarchy" and "explosion" is Marla Singer, the only female character of the main plot (p. 14). This remark should primarily be read as a statement that the narrator is at odds with his heterosexual orientation, bestowed upon him by hegemonic masculinity.

Moreover "emotional emptiness" and the sense of emasculation, reflected by Kimmel (2005) as the consequences of measuring up to the ideals of manhood, are apparent in the narrator of *Fight Club*: from the absence of his father that arguably leads to his "silence" (p. 49), to his inability to communicate with Marla (p. 14), from identifying his career as a paternal figure (p. 186), to his being a senseless slave to his consumerist "nesting instinct" (p. 43). Such issues gain more significance under the impositions of hegemonic masculinity because of the ensuing alienation. This is intensely depicted in the sixth chapter of the novel in which the narrator has just established his first fight club and is pondering on the frailty of the ethics of hegemonic norm of manhood during a meeting with the representatives of Microsoft.

One revolting idea behind the sixth chapter of the novel is materialized in the narrator's final attack against one particular representative of Microsoft, Walter. The narrator who is now looking from the perspective of fight club, a position of so-called empowered masculinity, describes Walter as an archetype of the emasculated and powerless men in crisis, without a paternal figure, and indoctrinated by the masculine hegemony:

[Walter is] a young guy with perfect and clear skin and the kind of job you bother to write the alumni magazine about getting. You know he

was too young to fight in any wars [to prove his manhood], and if his parents weren't divorced, his father was never home (p. 55).

Arguably, Walter seems to be one of the "complete" and "unblushing" men whose failure at measuring up to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity could result in an "unworthy, incomplete, and inferior" rendered self image (Goffman, 1963, as cited in Kimmel, 2005, p. 29), that is a situation of powerlessness which is already observed in the resisting narrator of *Fight Club*.

According to Kimmel (2005), "...men's lives are structured around relationships of power and men's differential access to power, as well as the differential access to that power of men as a group" (p. 40). As it will be discussed throughout this argument, the question in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* is whether gaining more power is the answer to the narrator's complications. Before that, however, it is important to read the novel in terms of the second aspect of the crisis of manhood.

The narrator in *Fight Club* could be studied as a phenomenal representation of "silence". While his persistent insomnia is said to be "the symptom of something larger" suggesting his inability in identifying the true cause of his troubles (p. 19), the narrator's incapability at interacting directly with the outside world is so much that his linguistic representations primarily consist of long and hallucinatory monologues along with a great number of indirect representations of feeling that utterly put a distance between his identity and his feelings. Such are the narrator's statements like "I'm Joe's Boiling Point," expressing anger in chapter six; and "I'm Joe's Broken Heart," expressing dejection in chapter fourteen. In addition, the narrator's excessive use of action (as in fight club) rather than language in establishing a relationship with his peers are images which represent his sense of discrepancy between his "lived experiences, and his inherited language of masculinity" (Rutherford, 1992, p. 9).

Moreover, there are various suggestions in *Fight Club* that the insecure men in the novel, including the narrator himself, experienced

ambivalence fatherhood during their childhoods (p. 49, 50, 141). While the narrator is one among the "generation of men raised by women" (p. 50), he is also a victim of consumer capitalism which was not only the aftermath of post-war masculinity as Rutherford suggested, but also of hegemonic Cold-War masculinity according to which men "were expected to define themselves through their identities as consumers" (Corber, 2004, p. 162). Here, a relevant reference to *Fight Club* would be the narrator's remark that, "…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 with their IKEA furniture catalogue" (p. 43).

After tracing the crisis of manhood in the narrator of *Fight Club,* it is important to take one step forward and ask in what ways the crisis materializes and finds its way into representation in the life of the protagonist. In the novel, the crisis appears through a series of deviant tests of manliness which take the bulk of the narrative. Such are nostalgic efforts that are built up from the narrator's need to appease the pain of repressed emotions and his homophobia. The attempts develop toward the assertion of masculinity in an aggressive sense of masculinity in order for the narrator to experience "a momentary sense of power and control" (Kaufman, 1994, p. 150).

A lack of ability in connecting with others is a major concern for the narrator. A chronological reading of the plot reveals that the narrator joins a number of support groups as the first effort to confront his buried pain of repressed emotions. The support groups are clubs for the sick and the dying in which the narrator fakes to be an invalid so that he can feed on the nurturing energy that goes on. Take, for example, the following passage which expresses the narrator's response to the support groups; "I loved the support groups so much, if people thought you were dying, they gave you their full attention. If this might be the last time they saw you, they really saw you (p. 107).

After the support group experiences, the narrator moves on to create an all-male institution called fight club which is an institution where men beat each other with bare knuckles to prove that maybe "self improvement [under the rules of society] isn't the answer" and that "self destruction" might be (p. 49). The major purpose behind fight club is that its members, who are struggling in a world of cold emotional barrenness, shall feel livelier. As the narrator proclaims, "[y]ou aren't alive anywhere like you're alive at fight club" (p. 50).

Homophobia is another driving force in *Fight Club*. The tone of tension in an all male atmosphere is a dramatic effect that lies beneath the narrative. It is no coincidence that the only female character of the main plot is Marla and that the narrator's work place is an all male social environment. Furthermore, the psychic emergence of Tyler Durden is more proof to the narrator's homophobia, and his tendency to identify with Tyler shows his need to evade it.

Take, for example, the second chapter of *Fight Club* which begins at the height of male-bonding during a cancer support group where the narrator is able to cry in another man's arms without any shame. Attempting to confront his homophobia, the narrator finds further solace in fight club and Project Mayhem. However, before taking the analysis any further, it is necessary to deal with a question: why is it that with the establishment of fight club, the assertion of masculinity as an effort to confront the crisis of manhood leads to more acts of aggression? The answer lies in Kaufman's (1992) analysis of "surplus repression" leading to "surplus aggression" which was previously illustrated.

It is the accumulation of "surplus repression" which justifies the emergence of violence in the novel. Therefore, I argue that fight club appears as a response to the "surplus repression" of the narrator and as a result of his life-long conformity to hegemonic masculinity and also as a consequence of his homophobia. The violence of the club is then an effort to offload the inevitable "surplus aggression" of the narrator in the company of a group of men who are ironically his patriarchal competitors in the work place. In other words, as the name of the institution suggests, it is both a place to fight and offload the "surplus aggression" and also a club

so that men can gather around and denounce homophobia. Fight Club is hence the expression of "affection and the need for the other boys" accompanied and balanced by "an active assault" (Kaufman, 1992, p. 41).

Let me reread the following passage which represents an aggressive all-male, power-driven, and homophobic struggle; "You saw the kid who works in the copy centre... [who] was a god for ten minutes when you saw him kick the air out of an account representative twice his size then land on the man and pound him limp until the kid had to stop" (p. 49).

It is the image of the narrator's naive colleague in the copy center turning into a whole other person in fight club that sheds light on our argument that the nostalgic and transgressive assertion of phallic masculinity, here offloaded as a response to "surplus repression," is the backlash of men against the crisis of manhood. Unloading the burden of "repression" through the act of violence is so gratifying that "[a]fter a night in fight club, everything in the real world gets the volume turned down. Nothing can piss you off. Your word is law" (p. 49).

As Fight Club approaches its final pages, the reader realizes the narrator's disillusionment with Tyler and with the masculinity that is cherished in fight club. Our study of Fight Club ends with an analysis of the final treatment of the crisis of manhood in the concluding chapters of the novel. The question to bear in mind is whether the narrator's efforts to appease the crisis of manhood eventually find resolution. If not, what is it that makes up for the partial tone of relief that concludes *Fight Club*?

When *Fight Club* begins, the narrator starts searching for a new definition of manhood via "masculinism" or a resistance against all which designates the feminine (Kimmel, 1995, p. 117). So the narrator, who initially comes to idolize the ideal masculinity of Tyler, is threatened by Marla. Such nostalgic efforts of the narrator, as it was previously argued, initially seem to resolve the predicaments of power, emotional troubles, and homophobia. However, with the gradual development of the narrator's disillusionment toward such nostalgic confrontations, Marla's role in the novel becomes more significant, and

her relationship with the narrator becomes more intimate and less intimidating.

Early in the novel, Marla is referred to as the cause of all "the anarchy" and "the explosion" (p. 14), and it is Tyler who happens to represent the ideal with whom the narrator can cure himself of the crisis of manhood. However the narrator's disillusionment begins half way through the novel.

Chapter thirteen of *Fight Club* marks the first intimate encounter of the narrator with Marla in which he attempts to assert his caring, empathic, and receptive attitudes to Marla in comforting. The same tendency continues in the next chapter in which the tone of affection is bred when Marla is cherished. Meanwhile, disillusionment with Tyler grows so much that the narrator feels separated and rejected from him (p. 134). In other words, while Tyler is busy destroying the civilization, the narrator is alone and ignorant of what is going on (p. 130). Instead, the hours with Marla become more intimate and less intimidating when they talk about "everything except Tyler Durden" (p. 132).

Eventually, it is in the twenty sixth chapter that the narrator becomes utterly disillusioned with the way he has confronted the crisis of manhood thus far when he tries to rule out the authority of Tyler in Project Mayhem but in return finds himself being castrated by his fight club peers. This symbolic and epiphanic event underlines a significant conclusion to the narrator's efforts to evade the crisis of manhood because at the end of the twenty sixth chapter, the narrator finds himself being literally castrated by the very same men with whom he once tried to regain and empower his lost manhood. This utter disillusionment precedes the most important encounter of the narrator with Marla in the twenty seventh chapter during which he finally tells her that he likes her (p. 197).

Fight Club ends with the narrator's symbolic attempted suicide in the twenty ninth chapter in which the narrator, Tyler, and Marla stand at the top floor of a skyscraper, just about to explode it as a finale to Project Mayhem. As the narrator's ironical proclamation of his amazing "will to live" suggests (p. 202), the attempted suicide depicted at the end of Fight Club is

actually a symbol signifying the burning of the old self. This symbolic finale to the novel is complemented with a most romantic turning point:

> "It's not love or anything,' Marla shouts, 'but I think I like you, too.'
>
> One minute.
>
> Marla likes Tyler.
>
> 'No, I like you,' Marla shouts. 'I know the difference [between you and Tyler].'
>
> And nothing.
>
> Nothing explodes." (p. 205)

While Marla's claim that she knows "the difference" between Tyler and the narrator suggests that they have finally managed to establish a healthy bond without the schizophrenic presence of Tyler, the bond with the narrator can symbolically prevent the explosion. Let us not forget that while she eventually comes to prevent the explosion (p. 205), Marla was initially considered to be the cause of all "the anarchy" and "the explosion" (p. 14).

In *Fight Club*, the crisis of manhood is not eventually resolved. In fact, as the thirtieth chapter reveals, the narrator is institutionalized in a mental hospital, is confused, and still receives fan letters that plead for the return of Tyler Durden (p. 208). However, what remains is a receptive bond with Marla Singer in the final page of the novel as "...if there were a telephone in Heaven, I would call Marla from Heaven and the moment she says, 'Hello' I wouldn't hang up. I'd say, 'Hi. What's happening? Tell me every little thing" (p. 207).

Furthermore, the narrator's self-diagnoses of his crisis throughout the narrative are all concluded oppositely. For instance, Marla who was the source of all the anarchy and explosion (p. 14), metaphorically prevented the explosion in the end (p. 205); the narrator's initial verdict that "self improvement isn't the answer" but self-destruction is (p. 49), had the opposite representation in the end; and finally the narrator's remark that "...I'm wondering if another woman is really the answer I need" (p.

51), eventually turned out to be wrong.

As it is suggested in the final pages of *Fight Club*, the crisis of manhood persists, but there is an obvious tendency on the part of the narrator to come to terms with it, rather than confronting it transgressively to experience "a momentary sense of power and control" (Kaufman, 1994, p. 150).

Pertinent to the efforts of the narrator throughout *Fight Club,* Kaufman (2005) suggested that acts of asserting power could not eventually help those men for whom power is a vital element of their gender identities. Coming to terms with the crisis of manhood, as it was just explicated, highlighted the narrator's positive efforts to establish a bond of affection which is read in this study, as a positive act of rearranging the relationships of power.

CONCLUSION

In this study, it was realized that the way to appease the crisis of manhood is actually to redefine the order in a new framework where masculinity is tested in regard to new touchstones such as empathy, receptivity, and love, instead of with patriarchal politics of power. Furthermore, Palahniuk's (1996) bleak satire in *Fight Club* on the assertion of phallic masculinity as a way to evade the crisis of manhood revealed how such struggles do not eventually lead to the catharsis of predicaments. A suitable conclusion to this argument comes from Palahniuk (2001) himself who, in his novel *Choke*, wittily stated that "[u]pper body strength, abstract thought, phalluses – any advantage men appear to have are pretty token. You can't even hammer a nail with a phallus" (p. 118-9). The worldview of Palahniuk in general, and his attitude toward the crisis of manhood in particular taught me to realize that the very act of trying to build an unknown order out of chaos is worth the effort and much more rewarding than actually creating more chaos as a response to predicaments. Although there might not be an eventual catharsis of the crisis of manhood, most times the very effort to healthily come to terms with it is close enough.

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