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Masculinity in 1990's Post-Cold War American Thriller Films

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Introduction
While the 1990’s marked a period of relative peace and tranquility in the United States, a re-emergence of the crisis of masculinity heavily influenced films during this time. Many of the decade’s most critically-acclaimed films, including Fight Club, Se7en, and In the Line of Fire, dealt with themes of powerlessness that men felt toward large institutions like the government, military, and media. This monotonous middle-class male struggle was highlighted in a way that was otherwise mostly ignored in the mega-action films of the 1980’s. Focusing specifically on intense films of the thriller genre, I set out to analyze these new representations of masculinity and suggest why these visions of masculinity became prevalent during this time.

Methods
• Analyzed masculinity in thriller films from the 1990’s
• Read and interpreted related academic literature
• Compared critical film reviews
• Discussed my personal opinions, along with those of experts, to generate conclusions

Conclusions
With many of the decade’s finest pieces depicting common ideas of masculinity as under attack from a changing world, the crisis of masculinity was at the forefront of the motion picture industry in the 1990’s. Ranging from the psychological genre to murder-mysteries to white-collar office dramas, thriller films during this time period consistently called into question what it meant to be a man. Further, the theme of rebellion against the established order was frequently presented as the best solution for the common man to regain this “lost” societal power. Whether it was a cubicle office worker quitting his nine-to-five desk job to find greater satisfaction or a government agent ignoring the commands of his superior to do what he felt needed to be done, the thriller films of the nineties routinely portrayed masculinity as a trait that the relatable average man had to reclaim by taking matters into his own hands.

Works Cited

Brad Pitt exudes nihilistic masculinity as Tyler Durden in Fight Club (1999)
Ice Cube, Mark Wahlberg, and George Clooney defy orders by helping Iraqi rebels safely cross the border to Iran in Three Kings (1999)
Clint Eastwood must outsmart a deranged ex-CIA agent to prevent a presidential assassination in In the Line of Fire (1993)
Michael Douglas’ “D-Fens” violently lashes out against the wrongs he sees in society on his way home from work in Falling Down (1993)
Edward Norton plays a reformed neo-Nazi who discourages his younger brother from making the mistakes he did in American History X (1998)
Brad Pitt and Morgan Freeman track a serial killer who commits crimes inspired by the seven deadly sins in Se7en (1995)
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