

Women and gender studies essay example

[Sociology](#), [Gender Studies](#)



Social Identity Formations in Transnational Culture

The film, *The Best Years of our Lives* is an indication of the cultural artifact of the formation of the social identity in the transnational culture. There are many hurdles, and one has to face several difficulties in order to gain, and then maintain its social identity in the transnational culture. It is also represented in the film, in which it is shown that the characters are facing difficulty to regain the social identity as civilian after the World War II. It represents some extraordinary and complex situations, and problems at the political unconscious level, within its wish to offer the closure and catharsis, though the greatest myth of generation has dissimilar ideological agenda. The film signifies a melodrama with happy ending that could not contain worries and anxieties, and has encoded as well as decoded the cultural artifacts in a way that it has encouraged the viewers and brought hope in them.

The film is, however, an artifact of the culture, which represents that it is something that has transmitted, and transported the values prevailing at that era across the time to be responded to, as well as to be examined. It has decoded in a way that it has informed the viewers how to understand and recognize their moment in the time. *The Best Years of Our Lives* is a political film that makes meaningful decisions in order to stand for particular points of views and not for the others. The film has represented a conflict that has resulted from the facing the challenges, and ultimately it has resulted in the communism. In *The Best Years of our Lives*, this can be analyzed for the Homer and Fred's aggressive and violent defense of their service worthiness in the World War II, not only their service, but also the

military service against Japan and Germany in general. However, such types of assertions at political level are the elements of the cultural artifacts. The most obvious thing in the film is the values, and ideas that are adopted in the film for the formation of the social identity in the transnational culture.

The film revolves around three servicemen that are coming back to their home in a location known as Boone City, and the difficulties they face in readjusting, and forming their social identity in the civilian life. Out of three servicemen, one is Fred Derry, a soda jerk in the movie; he is a low level employee at drugstore. Before the war, he has the primary responsibility of making root beer floats (Rayan). But, then he has risen to be an adorned captain in the Air Force of Army. On his return to the Boone City, he analyzed that his social status of civilian has, however, not changed, and modified with his success associated with military service. Furthermore, while he is in training, he is married to a lady, whom he barely familiar with and knows, and discovered that she is not suitable for him.

The second character in the film is Al Stephenson, with specific inversion of the disparity of the social class. Before the war, he was a banker, a sergeant means a non-commissioned officer in the pacific. However, he returns with the great compassion to the former recruited people, which have gotten him into the trouble at the bank. Moreover, he is also a drinker, the film represents it a wink-wink behavior so it suggests that his keenness for the alcohol is a harmless act. Third serviceman is Homer Parrish, who is a local boy, and got engaged to his girlfriend named Wilma. His has gotten engaged before he has left to join the Navy. The life of Homer has changed

significantly, because at the time he was serving an aircraft, he has lost both of his hands due to attack on the aircraft. But, he is conscious about such changes in his situation and circumstances, and also facing difficulty in accepting Wilma, who still wants to marry him.

However, there is also an interesting plot of developing romance between Peggy, who is daughter of Peggy and Fred, which is set against the suspension of loveless marriage of Fred, which is considered as the logline. These are the clear representation of the facts and difficulties that three characters have faced in order to re-adjust to the civilian life after World War II. Furthermore, emerging from the United States immediately after the war, however, it is not possible that the movie is not encoded with some definite mainstream and contemporary values.

According to Stuart Hall's encoding/ decoding model of communication, encoding and decoding are the representation of the facts that how the messages of media are produced, spread and consumed (Pillai). The encoding is, however, evident throughout the whole movie, particularly, in Al's family, where his son named Rob, with college going age, lives at home for attending school, and a daughter Peggy, who is older than Rob. Peggy works in a hospital, lives at home and she use to go out with boys. Her parents are conscious of the fact when she will be married. It is not that a good marriage is the one that she can aim to and aspire to, Marie, who is Fred's wife and Peggy both work but marriage, and then formation of a family are obviously and evidently are the things that she is supposed to aspire to. Furthermore, when Marie and Fred fall out, and have thought of moving away from the Boone City, this is the move, which is not acceptable

by the parents as well as by the film. The move is not for the purpose of searching something new but it is a representation of a fight.

However, a major premise of the movie is that Fred Derry has tried to get back to home on an airline operating commercially. It is, however, sold out, and Fred Derry is rudely dismissed by the woman desk clerk, so Derry takes his way in order to get his ticket. The scene however, underscores the contempt for the sensible and bourgeoisie, because Fred comes from the humble and modest origins. Furthermore, the desk clerk is vital, as the female sticks to the rules, and critical to the expectations of the males that are returning.

Moreover, this film is a representation of the cycle of the films that are dealing with the veteran's disempowerment in 1950s and the sexual frustration, alcoholism, hatred and depression about the world of job by men in general. The reaction in this film is simple and plain, but it is represented, encoded, and decoded in a way that it has pointed the contradictory characteristics of the postwar conventional and bourgeois life. The Encoding/decoding model of communication of Stuart Hall claims that the mass media present the messages to audience, and the messages are decoded and interpreted in different ways, which in turn depend on the personal experience, economic and social standing and the cultural background. For example, in the film, many audiences may support the thought of Fred and Marie to move away from Boone city, while the others may be against their thought.

Stuart Hall has also described about the representation that it is an act, and art of representing an already existed meaning. He has further described

that it is a way where meaning is given in order to depict the words, but the meaning of the representation changes with the change in the forms. This scenario can be applied on the scene represented in the movie, as it is evident in the movie that stresses linked with the moment have made Al a drinker. But actually, the origin of alcoholism can be examined with Al's drinking within dinner speech context, and it can be inferred that America has made him a drinker, the enforcement arm in the power of the state, and the capitalism prevailing in America has made him drink.

In a nut shell, the movie *The Best Years of Our Lives* is, therefore, significant as the cultural artifacts, because it enables the viewer to understand the way of thinking of people and their way of behaving. However, unlike several top movies, *The Best Years of Our Lives* has not represented the incomparable living styles and lives of the extraordinary personalities, it is not about the thrusting people into the extreme situations, rather, it has related the story of typical characters, which are facing typical difficulties and challenges in order to resume their lives after a long time of separation, individual growth and upheaval that is precipitates by the World War II.

References

Rayan, Maureen. *The Other Side of Grief: The Home Front and the Aftermath in American Narratives of the Vietnam War*. United States Of America: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008. Print.

Pillai, Poonam. " Rereading Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model." *Communication Theory*. 2. 3 (1992): 221-233. Print.