

IDENTITY in FULL METAL JACKET

FMJ RESPONSES!



An individual's **IDENTITY** is derived from the world around him.

"Everybody hates me now." -Gomer Pyles

"You're not a writer, you're a killer." -Hartman to Joker

Our first sense of identity comes from our early identifications with the persons around us. This is why positive role-models are considered important in the lives of young people. As older children, we look around and see what the world shows us. Some things in the world appeal to us more than others; that's because some things attempt to show us something about what's missing in our own lives. So, from all the things that appeal to us in the world, we create images of how we want to see ourselves, and then we set about making ourselves "seen" in the world so our images can be reflected back to us through the desire of others.

No matter how much effort a person puts into his or her image, it's all a **fraud**, psychologically speaking, because so much of our lives is **unconscious** – we change subtly according to our environment.

www.guidetopsychology.com/identity.htm

"The deadliest weapon in the world is a marine and his rifle." -Hartman

"Marines are not allowed to die without permission." -Hartman

The first half of 'Full Metal Jacket' can be noted for the way that Gunnery Sergeant Hartman uses his forceful personality to try and change the identity of his 'raw recruits'. A constant barrage of sustained in-your-face shouting and abuse gradually begins to de-humanise Joker and the other trainee Marines. The first twenty three minutes of this film are devoted almost entirely to Hartman's unrelenting barrage of insults and put-downs.

"You little maggot! You make we want to vomit!" -Hartman

As training continues we can see the recruits' personalities start to change. Pyles becomes a liability and an object of hate as his co-recruits get punished for his shortcomings. The 'Marine way of life' begins to seep into the identity of these individuals, and as a consequence they lose their individuality. They become clones, types – killers who are able to act on order, without questioning – exactly what a soldier needs to be.

From a literary perspective, they go from being complex characters, to static ones; they lose their personality and identity, giving way to the Marines' identity and way of thinking.

"Today you people are no longer maggots. Today you are Marines. You're part of a brotherhood." - **Hartman**

The two characters of note in the first half of the film, Joker and Pyle retain their individuality to a degree (not entirely). Joker is intelligent enough to cloak his personality during his training, to yell what needs to be yelled at the right time – though he is still influenced by his environment. Pyle becomes a tragic casualty of war before it even begins for him: unable to conform in an environment where only the fit survive, he descends into lonely madness before becoming an ugly embodiment of what the Marines' Basic Training tries to do to a person – rid them of their humanity in order to turn them into killing machines. Pyles decides however to kill the cause of his misery, Gunnery Sergeant Hartman.

"I...am... in a world... of shit" - Private Pyle

The repetition of mantras such as the one below allow us just how easy it is to change a person's identity. Like brainwashing.

"This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine. My rifle is my best friend. It is my life. I must master it, as I must master my life. Without me, my rifle is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. I must fire my rifle true. I must shoot straighter than my enemy, who is trying to kill me. I must shoot him before he shoots me. I will. Before God I swear this creed. My rifle and myself are defenders of my country. We are the masters of our enemy. We are the masters of our enemy. We are the saviors of my life. So be it....until there is no enemy, but peace. Amen." -Troops Rifle Prayer

Such a significant change of personality must affect an individual. We see the effect in the second half of the film. Raw, fresh recruits become a motley collection of mercenaries with little or no consideration for others. They have lost their humanity – their identity.

There are persistent stereotypes about Vietnam veterans as psychologically devastated, bitter, homeless, drug-addicted people who had a hard time readjusting to society, primarily due to the uniquely divisive nature of the Vietnam War in the context of U.S. History. 'Full Metal Jacket' allows us to see exactly how an individual can become a broken man thanks to the loss of identity and individuality.

DISCUSSION POINT/Written TASK:

A person's identity is their sense of who they are, what they believe in.

At which point in the film would you imagine that both JOKER and PYLE significantly lose a part of their old identities? DESCRIBE the point in the film where this occurs and EXPLAIN why this event causes change.