

**AMERICAN CULTURAL VALUES AS REFLECTED IN THE  
CHARACTER OF BRAD COHEN IN PETER WERNER'S MOVIE  
*FRONT OF THE CLASS***

**Karomah Widianingsih (NIM. 13020112120003)  
Sukarni Suryaningsih (NIP. 197212231998022001)**

**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
DIPONEGORO UNIVERSITY  
SEMARANG  
2016**

---

**ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on American cultural values reflected by Brad Cohen in *Front of the Class* Peter Werner's movie. *Front of the Class* movie describes some reflections of American cultural values depicted by the main character named Brad Cohen. The aims of this study are to describe the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the movie. The writer employs library research to support the data analysis derived from some references such as some related books, journals, articles, and encyclopedias. To analyze the intrinsic aspects, the writer uses some theories of narrative elements and cinematographic elements. To analyze the extrinsic aspects, the writer applies theory of personal and cultural values by Roy D'Andrade. Furthermore, the writer also involves some aspects of cultural values from Shalom H Schwartz's theory. The result of this study shows that, based on Roy D'Andrade's theory, the main character of the movie, Brad Cohen has applied *individualism*, *altruism*, and *industry* value aspects. In addition, the writer finds some similar American cultural values items of Roy D'Andrade's theory and Shalom H. Schwartz's theory. Those items are *choosing my own goal*, *being creative*, *treating people equally*, *being honest*, *enjoying life*, and *pursuing knowledge*.

Keywords: *value items, tourette syndrome, individualism, altruism, industry, mastery, egalitarian, intellectual autonomy, affective autonomy*

---

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Film is one of American cultural products favored by many people in every part of American regions. According to Bunche's research entitled *Hollywood Diversity Report 2015*, American society watch sixteen types of film genres in their daily life. One of the film genres preferred by American is drama genre. The percentage distribution of drama genre film in

America in 2013 reaches 66.3%. This percentage proves that in 2013, drama genre in America has become the most popular entertainments among others (Bunche, 2015:6).

Based on the explanation above, the writer chooses Peter Werner's movie which is entitled *Front of the Class* as the object of the writer's research. *Front of the Class* movie firstly aired in 2008. The story of the film is adapted from the book written by Brad Cohen and Lisa Wysocky entitled *Front of the Class*. The genre of this film is biographical drama. The story of *Front of the Class* movie exposes the true story of Brad Cohen's life. Brad Cohen, the main character of the movie is a successful and favorite teacher in Atlanta who has a *tourette syndrome*. He has proven to others that he could reach his dream though he has a disability.

---

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Cultural Value**

The term of cultural value is the compound meaning from the word "cultural" and "value". According to D'Andrade's perspective, value can be defined from many aspects such as: the number of some variable, the inclination toward effectiveness of something, the worth of something, the decency of something essential, and the grade that something is decently true (2008:11). In addition, Kluckhohn in D'Andrade's book, *A Study of Personal and Cultural Values* (2008:8), defines value as a systematic process of how people appraise something by using their perception until they get pleasure.

### **2.2 Individualism**

D'Andrade "individualism means value as a value orientation is based on values concerning personal exploration, expressing oneself, and determining one's own goals" (2008:36). There are some value items of *individualism* such as *self-fulfillment; choosing my*

*own goal; being optimistic; being relaxed and enjoying life; feeling about myself; having time alone; having fun; understand science; linking art and literature; living a life of adventure; right to abortion, gay right, etc; and resisting authority.*

### **2.3 Altruism**

*Altruism* is a kind of action conducted by a person toward other persons to achieve certain goals in society life (D'Andrade, 2008:38). Altruism consists of some value items like *being honest and genuine, avoiding war, respecting other's feelings, treating people equality, finding meaning in life, having close friends, living in harmony with nature, being able to adjust, controlling myself, and working for society improvement.*

### **2.4 Industry**

*Industry* is personal perception toward some criteria in searching for the pleasure of personal life. The aspect of *industry* consists of *being persistent, being responsible, planning for future, being practical and realistic, pursuing knowledge, having high standards, working hard, being orderly and regular, and being a leader* (D'Andrade, 2008:52).

### **2.5 Mastery**

*Mastery* indicates people's movement to reach their personal and their collectivity's dreams (Schwartz, 2006:152). Schwartz's theory explains there are some value items of mastery. They are *being capable, successful, ambitious, independent, influential, social recognition, choosing own goals, and daring.*

### **2.6 Egalitarian**

Based on Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2008), *egalitarian* is "believing that all people are equally important and should have the same rights and opportunities in

life". Schwartz classifies *egalitarian* into several aspects such as *honest, responsible, equality, social justice, helpful, loyal, and accept my portion in life* (2006:147).

## **2.7 Intellectual Autonomy**

*Intellectual autonomy* represents the self-regulating quest of plan (Gutterman, 2010:1). According to Schwartz's theory, *Intellectual autonomy* consists of some value items such as *creativity, freedom, broadmindedness, and curious* (2006:147).

## **2.8 Affective Autonomy**

*Affective autonomy* is a thought in which positioned people as independent people. People have their freedom to show up their thoughts, opinion, and talents in order to obtain the sense of their exclusivity (Schwartz, 2006:147). *Affective autonomy* includes some value items. They are *exciting life, enjoying life, varied life, and pleasure*.

---

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study focuses on the manifestation of American cultural values reflected by character Brad Cohen in Peter Werner's movie *Front of the Class*. There are two essential purposes of this study. The first purpose is to explain *Front of the Class* movie based on intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. The last is to explain the manifestation of American cultural values reflected by character Brad Cohen in Peter Werner's movie which is entitled *Front of the Class*.

The object of this study is a biographical drama film entitled *Front of the Class* Peter Werner's movie (2008). I employ a library research to find some essential supporting resources related to the research through printed media such as library books, national and international journals, newspapers, related magazines, encyclopedias and dictionaries. I also

use electronic sources like e-books and websites. To analyze the intrinsic aspects I apply the theory of narrative elements and cinematographic elements. Furthermore, to analyze the extrinsic aspects I apply a theory of personal and cultural values by Roy D'Andrade. Additionally, I involve some aspects of cultural values from Shalom H Schwartz's theory.

---

## **4. DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Characters in *Front of the Class* Movie**

*Front of the Class* movie describes the depiction major characters and minor characters. The major characters in the movie are Brad Cohen and Ellen Cohen. In addition, some minor characters like Norman Cohen, Jeff, Nancy Lazarus, Diane, Ron, Susan, Brenda, Principal Fowler, Principal Myer, and Hillarie Streick as the Assistant Principal of Mountain View Elementary School.

### **4.2 Setting of Time Depicted in *Front of the Class***

Setting of time in *Front of the Class* (2008) is in modern era. The setting of time of *Front of the Class* movie can be seen from the existence of computer, telephone, freezer, television, and internet used by Brad Cohen in his daily life (*Front of the Class*, 00:54:54, 00:55:29, 01:20:38).

### **4.3 Setting of Place Depicted in *Front of the Class***

*Front of the Class* movie takes some setting of places. They are Atlanta capital, Atlanta Regional Board of Education hall, Brad's mother boutique in Missouri, Ellen Cohen's house, Fat

Cats Bar, a name of Bar in Atlanta, and Mountain View Elementary School in Atlanta (*Front of the Class*, 00:02:43, 00:44:07, 00:09:38, 00:17:33, 00:26:36, 00:43:45).

### **4.3 Social Environment Depicted in *Front of the Class***

*Front of the Class* movie has presented the condition of American society in Atlanta. Based on the movie, most of Atlanta people have an excellent job, careers, and good education. They have they have a lot of money, car, private and great house, technology gadgets, and well-mannered clothes. In accordance with Tischler (2011:176), these conditions are called as upper-middle-class society. As a result, the setting of social environment in the *Front of the Class* movie is upper-middle-class society (*Front of the Class*, 00:04:23, 00:09:43, 01:32:31).

### **4.3 American Cultural Values Reflected by Character Brad Cohen**

According to D'Andrade's theory, some behaviors and attitudes of Brad Cohen, the main character of the movie can be analyzed by applying the three influential components of American cultural values dimensions especially *individualism*, *altruism*, and *industry*.

#### **4.3.1 Individualism**

In fact, Brad Cohen applies the manifestation of several value items of *individualism*. The first aspect of *individualism* is *choosing my own goal*. Brad decides his own goal to be the winner from *tourette syndrome* (*Front of the Class*, 00:24:47-00:24:51). Second aspect of *individualism* is *being optimistic*. Brad says that, "Dad could never understand my optimism" (*Front of the Class* (2008), 00:29:59). The phrase "my optimism" clearly demonstrates that Brad Cohen has acted as an optimistic person in his life. Third aspect is *being creative*. Brad Cohen has decorated his classroom by making some nice words and set many stars pictures on

the wall. Additionally, he also has brought a cute bunny named Waffle to his classroom. Another fact shows that Brad Cohen also has a creative way to teach his student in outdoor (Front of the Class, 00:59:43, 01:14:45, 01:26:30). Fourth aspect is *resisting authority*. Brad has ever bravely resisted the principal because the principal's statements has offended Brad (*Front of the Class*, 00:37:03-00:37:53). The last aspect of individualism is *enjoying life*. Brad has exactly enjoyed his life though he has *tourette syndrome* (*Front of the Class*, 01:32:59-01:33:37).

#### **4.3.2 Altruism**

The main character of the movie, Brad Cohen actually has applied some value items of altruism like *treating people equally*, *having close friends* and *being honest*. Front of the Class has presented the description showing Brad Cohen has been treating people equally. Brad has treat all his students equally (*Front of the Class*, 01:01:18, 01:03:12, 01:03:59). Brad Cohen actually has a close friend named Ron (*Front of the Class*, 00:06:11, 00:29:16, 00:58:22). In addition Brad Cohen has been being a honest person about his *tourette syndrome* toward other people (*Front of the Class*, 00:51:23-00:51:29).

#### **4.3.3 Industry**

*Front of the Class* Peter Werner's movie has depicted some value items of industry owned by Brad Cohen. They are *being persistent*, *pursuing knowledge*, and *working hard*. Brad Cohen actually has visited 24 schools in Atlanta just for finding a job as a teacher. He has been persistent in reaching his dream to be a teacher (*Front of the Class*, 00:40:13, 00:21:50, 00:25:25). Brad Cohen also has employed the manifestation of American cultural value called pursuing knowledge. Brad Cohen has a good education. He has pursued much knowledge

from the Elementary School to College University (*Front of the Class* , 00:23:06, 00:14:43, 01:12:48). Additionally, Brad Cohen's attitude has reflected the manifestation of one value item of *industry* named *working hard*. Brad Cohen has ever said "I worked very hard to become the best teacher I can be" (*Front of the Class*, 00:25:18). Brad's statement has proved that he has been working hard in order to become the best teacher.

#### **4.4 Conflicts Experienced by the Characters**

*Front of the Class* movie describes some external conflicts and internal conflicts experienced by some characters especially the main character, Brad Cohen and Ellen Cohen. The first external conflict depicts when Brad school friends attack and mock him in the school. Then his teacher comes to separate them (*Front of the Class*, 00:01:04). Second, Ellen Cohen has been angry toward Brad's school principal when the principal notices her about Brad Cohen's problems (*Front of the Class*, 00:16:47). The last, Brad's father has ever been angry when Brad could not control his self to become calmer (*Front of the Class*, 00:14:10).

Furthermore, *Front of the Class* movie also illustrates some internal conflicts. Brad cries when the principal says that he has lost control and often made any noises (*Front of the Class*, 00:15:29). Ellen Cohen has ever been sad because the doctor is not capable to cure Brad's illness (*Front of the Class*, 00:20:05). Another internal conflicts experienced by Brad Cohen is when he feels disappointed and frustrated, because he fails to get a job as a teacher (*Front of the Class*, 00:38:19).

---

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

Brad Cohen, the main character of *Front of the Class* movie actually has applied *individualism*, *altruism*, and *industry* value aspects. Brad Cohen obviously applies some value



aspects of *individualism* like *choosing my own goal, being optimistic, being creative, resisting authority, and enjoying life*. He also applies several value aspects of *altruism* such as *treating people equally, having close friends and being honest*. Additionally, Brad's attitudes illustrates that he also applies *industry* value aspects like *being persistent, pursuing knowledge, and working hard*. The writer also finds similar values of American cultural values dimension from D'Andrade's theory toward Schwartz's theory that are presented by Brad Cohen. Those are *choosing my own goal, being creative, treating people equally, being honest, enjoying life, and pursuing knowledge* value items.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aminuddin. Pengantar Apresiasi Karya Sastra. Bandung : Sinar Baru Argesindo, 2009. Print.

Altman, Rick. "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre." *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1984) : 6-18. Print.

Arikunto, Suharsini. Prosedur Penelitian Suatu Pendekatan Praktek. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2010. Print.

Barnet, Silvan, William Burto, et al. An Introduction to Literature- Fiction, Poetry, and Drama. Newyork: Pearson Longman, 2008. Print.

Braudy, Leo and Marshall Cohen. Film Theory and Criticism Seventh Edition. United States of America: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

Bunche, Raplh. J. 2015 Hollywood Diversity Report: Flipping the Script. Mutidisiplinary Research Annual Report. UCLA: Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies, 2015. Print.

Cohen, Brad. Class Performance.com. 20 November 2008. Web. 11 November 2015  
<<http://www.classperformance.com/2008/11/its-time-to-meet-jimmy-wolk-playing-brad-cohen-in-front-of-the-class/>>.

- D'Andrade, Roy. A Study of Personal and Cultural Values. United States of America: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.
- Guterman, Alan S. Shalom Schwartz Dimension of Societal Cultures. Organizational Management and Administration: a Guide for Managers and Professionals. United States of America: Thomson Reuters, 2010. Print.
- Harymawan. Dramaturgi. Bandung: CV Rosda, 1988. Print.
- Jannidis, Fotis, Gerhard Lauer, Matias Martinez, et al. Ed. Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis, et al. Characters in Fictional Worlds Understanding Imaginary Being in Literature, Film, and Other Media. Germany: Hubert & Co. GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen, 2010. Print.
- Laurenson, Diana and Alan Swingewood. The Sociology of Literature. United States of America: Paladin, 1972. Print.
- Mauer, Eva and Joanne M. Wegel. "Tourette Syndrome Chronicle Multiple Tic Disorder, Gilles De La Tourette Syndrome". Handout Document. Web. 14 June 2016. <<http://www.dcs-cde.ca.gov/rsc/tourettesyndrome.pdf>>.
- "Persistent". Merriam Webster Online Dictionary. Web. 04 April 2016 <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/persistent>>.
- Pratista, Himawan. Memahami Film. Jakarta: Homeric Pustaka, 2008. Print.
- Schwartz, Shalom H. "A Theory of Cultural Value Orientations: Explication and Applications." Comparative Sociology (2006): 137. Print.
- Sumarmo, Marselli. Dasar-dasar Apresiasi Film. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1996. Print.
- Thrall, William Flint and Addison Hibbard. A Handbook to Literature Revised and Enlarged by G. Hugh Holman. New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960. Print.
- Tishler, Henry L. Introduction to Sociology Tenth Edition. United States of America: Wadsworth, 2011. Print.
- "Tourette Syndrome". Online Medical Dictionary. 2013. Web. 12 November 2015 <<http://www.online-medical-dictionary.org/definitions-t/tourette-s-syndrome.html>>.
- Werner, Peter. Dir. Perf. James Wolk, Dominic Scott Kay, Patricia Heaton, Treat Williams. Front of the Class. CBS Television Network, 2008. Film.