



Representation of The American Value in Elemental (2023) Film

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| Article Info | Abstract |
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| Article History Received: 2024-09-07 Revised: 2024-10-27 Published: 2024-11-09 Keywords: <i>American; Value; Cultural.</i> | The 2023 animated film Elemental is more than just a bright depiction of Elemental characters living in a fantasy world; it also represents deeply ingrained American values, particularly those that have shaped contemporary American culture. This article examines how Elemental's characters and narrative structure reflect Robert Kohls' key beliefs of individuality, personal success, and equality of opportunity. This research illuminates how American principles are reflected, both overtly and implicitly, in modern animation by closely examining the film's themes, character development, and symbolic components. The analytical approach combines literary analysis and cultural contextualization to highlight how Elemental not only entertains but also serves as a reflection of American society norms. This study emphasizes the significance of examining media to find the underlying principles that shape cultural products, demonstrating how popular culture can serve as a lens for better understanding society norms and standards. |
| Artikel Info Sejarah Artikel Diterima: 2024-09-07 Direvisi: 2024-10-27 Dipublikasi: 2024-11-09 Kata kunci: <i>Amerika; Nilai; Budaya.</i> | Abstrak Film animasi Elemental tahun 2023 lebih dari sekadar penggambaran karakter Elemental yang hidup di dunia fantasi; film ini juga mewakili nilai-nilai Amerika yang mengakar kuat, khususnya yang telah membentuk budaya Amerika kontemporer. Artikel ini meneliti bagaimana karakter dan struktur naratif Elemental mencerminkan keyakinan utama Robert Kohls tentang individualitas, kesuksesan pribadi, dan kesetaraan kesempatan. Penelitian ini menjelaskan bagaimana prinsip-prinsip Amerika tercermin, baik secara terang-terangan maupun tersirat, dalam animasi modern dengan mencermati tema-tema film, pengembangan karakter, dan komponen simbolis. Pendekatan analitis menggabungkan analisis sastra dan kontekstualisasi budaya untuk menyoroti bagaimana Elemental tidak hanya menghibur tetapi juga berfungsi sebagai cerminan norma-norma masyarakat Amerika. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya meneliti media untuk menemukan prinsip-prinsip mendasar yang membentuk produk-produk budaya, yang menunjukkan bagaimana budaya populer dapat berfungsi sebagai lensa untuk memahami norma-norma dan standar-standar masyarakat dengan lebih baik. |

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is a broad and multidimensional notion that encompasses both written and spoken works that express creative and artistic concepts. The term "literature" can be defined broadly. Academics define literature through many views. Literature refers to all written expressions, albeit not all recorded items meet this criteria (Herawati & Fithratullah, 2023). The combination of literature, language, and visual media provides a valuable tool for understanding society's underlying beliefs. (Schirato, 2020). Through narrative, whether written or visual, storytellers embed deeply ingrained cultural conventions, ideas, and values that impact how people perceive themselves and their surroundings. Films, particularly animated films like Elemental (2023), have become important

cultural artifacts in the twenty-first century because they portray a simplified and often stylized representation of contemporary standards. In this perspective, evaluating the American ideals portrayed in such films is critical for understanding how culture is transmitted, perpetuated, and sometimes challenged through media.

Language, as the vehicle of culture, is critical in this process. (Bonvillain, 2019). Film narratives are rich in value language—those nonverbal, symbolic, and thematic aspects that convey deeper meanings about what a culture values. (Wollen 2019) As a result, cultural and media studies have increasingly focused on the portrayal of national ideals in popular media, making it a key subject for literary and cinematic analysis. This research aims to contribute to the

larger discussion regarding the function of media in reflecting and molding public attitudes by examining how American values are shown in *Elemental*. In American values, there are several values that Americans generally believe. According to Althen (2003), several American values include individualism, freedom, competitiveness, and privacy, equality, informality, the future, change and progress, the goodness of humanity, time, achievement, action, work, and materialism and, the last is directness and assertiveness.

The research is based on Robert Kohls' concept of American values, which identifies a collection of essential beliefs connected with the American cultural identity. Individualism, the emphasis of personal achievement, equality, and a focus on the future are all qualities that Kohls emphasizes. These ideals provide a framework for interpreting *Elemental*'s character dynamics, themes, and moral overtones. Kohls' theory, widely recognized as one of the most important investigations of American cultural values, will lead the analysis, providing for a more systematic understanding of how these principles emerge in the picture.

The research approach used in this study combines textual analysis and cultural contextualization. (Bail, 2014) Textual analysis will provide a careful examination of the film's narrative structure, symbolism, and character development, and cultural contextualization will place the film into the larger discourse of American societal norms. By viewing *Elemental* within this dual framework, this thesis seeks to reveal how animated films, as cultural artifacts, sustain, challenge, or reinterpret American values for worldwide audiences.

In summary, this theory emphasizes the necessity of seeing media, especially animated films, as more than just entertainment. In many respects, they represent society's beliefs, goals, and contradictions. *Elemental* allows us to obtain a better understanding of how contemporary American values are portrayed and how they appeal with audiences both inside and outside the United States.

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method, which, according to (Merriam, 2015), is useful for observing, describing, and interpreting social phenomena. Qualitative research is well suited to investigating how cultural values are produced and expressed in media. In this context, it enables a thorough investigation of *Elemental*

(2023) to discover and analyze how American ideals, as defined by Robert Kohls, are interwoven in the film's story, themes, and characters.

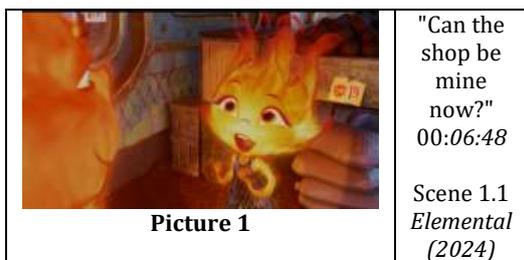
Data gathering entailed detailed observation and assessment of the film's content, with an emphasis on major topics such as individualism, personal achievement, and equality of opportunity. The fundamental goals of qualitative research are to explain and evaluate situations (Stake, 2010; Eklesia & Rido, 2020). Because the data consists of language rather than numbers, the descriptive qualitative approach is applied. Descriptive research collects data in the form of written or spoken words, images, and does not use figures (Cenita & Nurmaily, 2020). This strategy focuses on immersing the reader in the characters' world in order to comprehend the cultural signals communicated by their actions and interactions. By using this approach, the study aims to uncover the deeper societal values reflected in the film, offering a meaningful analysis of how *Elemental* represents core aspects of American culture.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Robert Kohls (1984) proposes 13 key principles that are fundamental to the American identity, providing a framework for understanding American behavior, cultural conventions, and institutional systems. These values shape how Americans approach life, relationships, and decision-making. In this study, we examine four main principles in the 2023 animated film *Elemental*: the pursuit of happiness, assertiveness/freedom of expression, future orientation, and individualism. The film provides a unique prism through which to explore these beliefs, as its characters face complicated personal and societal challenges that reflect larger American cultural norms.

1. Pursuit of Happiness

The pursuit of happiness is a pillar of American culture, deriving from the concept that everyone has the right to find personal satisfaction and fulfillment. The pursuit of happiness was used by litigants to argue for everything from the right to privacy to the right to pursue one's chosen occupation, and it was invoked by the Court to uphold the same (Conklin, 2015). This concept is ingrained in the United States Declaration of Independence and continues to influence American philosophy.



Picture 1

According to Picture 1, Ember's quest to establish her own happiness within family commitments exemplifies this idea profoundly. For much of the film, Ember is caught between her father's expectations for her to take over the family shop and her own ambition to pursue her potential. For example, when she says, "Can the shop be mine now?" she indicates both her desire to take on a leadership role and her internal turmoil. She feels pressured to conform to family expectations while yearning for more personal satisfaction and independence.

Ember's path exemplifies the pursuit of happiness, specifically the American belief that happiness is an individual's duty. As the story unfolds, she realizes that happiness does not always include following the road set forth by others, but rather pursuing what truly fulfills her. Wade, a character who is both emotionally open and supportive, serves as a trigger for Ember's quest of happiness, reminding her that she has the right to pursue her ambitions. His advice reflects a uniquely American attitude, emphasizing the concept that happiness is a personal journey that is frequently at variance with society or familial expectations.



Picture 2

According to Picture 2 despite the hurdles, Ember pursues happiness by falling in love with Wade, a water character. This is essential because her family has a deep distaste for water, which causes friction for her. When she replies, "I'm so lucky to have you," she expresses her heartfelt gratitude to Wade and the joy he brings into her life. It emphasizes her decision to follow her heart, even if it contradicts her family's views, demonstrating her pursuit of personal pleasure and uniqueness. This moment exemplifies her

willingness to pursue what makes her happy despite external circumstances.

The film also underlines that the quest of happiness entails taking risks and deviating from social standards. Ember's ultimate decision to seek happiness outside of her family's expectations is consistent with the greater American ideal of self-reliance and personal achievement, reminding the audience that true contentment frequently entails defying the norm.

2. Assertiveness/Freedom of Expression

Assertiveness is a behaviour that seeks to achieve a win win a satisfactory outcome for both parties (Potts & Potts, 2013). Americans appreciate assertiveness and freedom of expression, emphasizing the significance of speaking one's mind and standing up for one's beliefs. These ideals are enshrined in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which guarantees free speech and expression.



Picture 3

According to Picture 3, Ember's fiery demeanor shows this boldness, especially when she refuses to be tamed by her surroundings. Her assertion, "We will never be watered down by you!" is a strong example of her boldness and refusal to allow others degrade her individuality. She personifies the American ethos that holding firm to one's ideas is critical to personal integrity and cultural survival.

Throughout the film, Ember shares her ideas and frustrations, even if it puts her at conflict with others. This boldness is evident when she confronts Wade and other people, displaying her strong personality and refusal to sacrifice her identity as a member of the Fire community. Wade, on the other hand, exemplifies a distinct aspect of this principle by expressing his emotions freely and without fear of being judged. His emotional sensitivity, while seemingly at odds with Ember's fiery demeanor, is also consistent with the American concept of freedom of expression, which encourages people to be true to

themselves and express their feelings honestly. Wade's candor about his sentiments reflects the societal inclination in America to speak your truth, even if it involves unpleasant emotions.

The clip depicts assertiveness not only as a method of personal expression, but also as a means of defying cultural norms. Ember's outbursts, while sometimes frustrating, demonstrate her refusal to be quiet. Her assertiveness allows her to carve out a place where her voice is heard and appreciated, which is essential in her road to self-fulfillment.

3. Future Orientation

Future orientation is an important feature of American society, expressing a belief in growth, preparation, and foresight. Future orientation is a crucial part of identity formation. Identity has been characterized as a self-produced personality organization realized by integrating the self in time and social settings (Johnson, Blum, & Cheng, 2014). Americans frequently prioritize objectives, accomplishments, and success over traditional values, with a heavy emphasis on creating a better tomorrow.



Picture 4

According to Picture 4, this value is shown in Ember's determination to guarantee her future and the success of her family's business. She is continuously forward-thinking, as illustrated when she says, "Someday this shop will all be mine" Although initially motivated by familial obligations, this statement exemplifies Ember's forward-thinking perspective, in which she recognizes her responsibility in carrying on her family's tradition while simultaneously planning for her own vision of success.

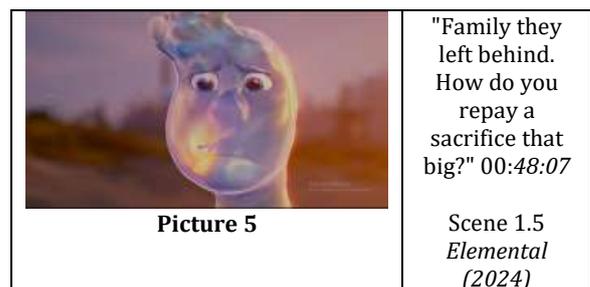
The story depicts future orientation not only in Ember's character but also in the film's bigger themes, with the protagonists preparing for challenges ahead and imagining what their lives could be. Ember sees the future as a source of both optimism and concern, as she balances her desire to uphold

her family's traditions with her own goals. The tension between conserving the past and creating a new future is a constant motif in *Elemental*, reflecting the American cultural emphasis on innovation and advancement while honoring the foundations built by earlier generations.

Wade's optimism and belief in going forward in the face of failures also reflects his future orientation. His encouragement of Ember to pursue her abilities and take chances reflects the American attitude of looking forward rather than backward. Wade's optimism serves as a reminder that success is founded on perseverance and forward motion, which is a core element of the American ideal.

4. Individualism

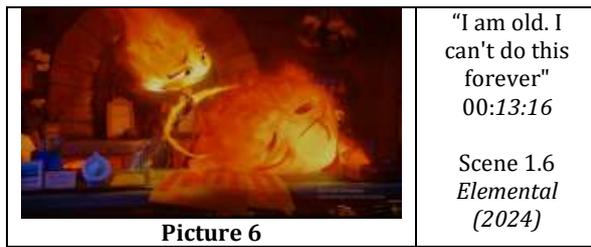
Individualism is likely the most defining American characteristic, emphasizing self-reliance, personal responsibility, and the conviction that each person can mold their own destiny. Individualism refers to a person's ability to pursue their aspirations and accept responsibility for their own actions, reflecting America's past (Fitratullah, 2021). So basically, self-reliance and individualism have been around for a long time in American history, so this value has been attached to most American society. Individualism is heavily highlighted in *Elemental* as Ember journeys to develop her own identity outside of her family's expectations.



Picture 5

According to Picture 5, her declaration, "Family they left behind. How do you repay a sacrifice that big?" reflects her empathy to break free from the communal identity placed on her and forge her own path. This represents the American philosophy in individual liberty, in which everyone is encouraged to shape their own destiny rather than succumb to cultural or familial restrictions. The communal situation where people thinking about themselves more rather

than the family. This is why she want to break free.



According to Picture 6, individualism as the part of excuses can be seen in this scene. "I am old. I can't do this forever." The character uttering this line recognizes their own limitations and the need for change, which is consistent with the individualistic belief that everyone is accountable for their own circumstances. This awareness emphasizes the concept that individuals must confront their own realities and make decisions based on their own circumstances rather than relying only on others.

Throughout the film, Ember struggles with her desire to assert her uniqueness while remaining loyal to her family. This internal conflict is widespread among many people in American society, where the value of self-expression frequently clashes with conventional or social responsibilities. Wade's position in the film emphasizes the value of individualism, as he continuously encourages Ember to forge her own path. His conviction in her potential and support for her to make her own decisions are consistent with American cultural values of autonomy and personal choice.

The film also promotes individualism as a means of self-discovery and empowerment. By the end of *Elemental*, Ember's capacity to stand on her own, make her own judgments, and pursue her own distinct desires exemplifies the pinnacle of individuality. She transitions from being defined by her family and community to defining herself on her own terms, a quintessentially American experience.

This extended analysis dives deeper into the examples from the film, showing how *Elemental* serves as a rich text for exploring key American values, with characters and narratives that mirror larger cultural ideals.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A. Conclusions

The 2023 animated film *Elemental* provides perspective on American cultural norms as stated by Robert Kohls' philosophy. The film skillfully communicates four essential American ideals through its characters, storyline, and thematic elements: the pursuit of happiness, assertiveness and freedom of speech, future orientation, and individualism. Ember's struggle to balance her personal goals with familial expectations, her aggressiveness in standing up for her convictions, her forward-thinking perspective, and her quest for independence all mirror the fundamental principles that have molded the American identity for generations. Not only the highlight on Amber but her whole family playing part to show the American Value inside the film, *Elemental* highlights how, by emphasizing on these values, it can be used to express and reinforce cultural norms. The film's protagonists represent the tensions and complexities of living by these ideals, making them sympathetic to audiences who understand the difficulties of reconciling tradition, personal growth, and societal expectations.

B. Suggestion

Suggestions in this study, it is hoped that this research can be developed by further researchers, because the research conducted by researchers is still limited.

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