



No : 025/Celt/XI/2004  
Re : Abstract Acceptance (LoA)

Semarang, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004

### LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE

Dear Ms. Ekawati Marhaenny Dukut,

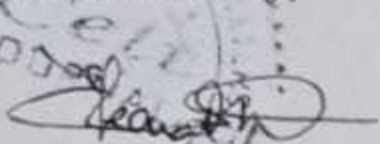
We are pleased to inform you that your abstract, "**Exploring Cultural Values through Representation of American Popular Culture Products**" with ID 044, has been accepted to be presented in our event, An International Seminar: Culture English Language Teaching and Literature which takes on the theme of "Representations of Cultural Values in Language and Literature".

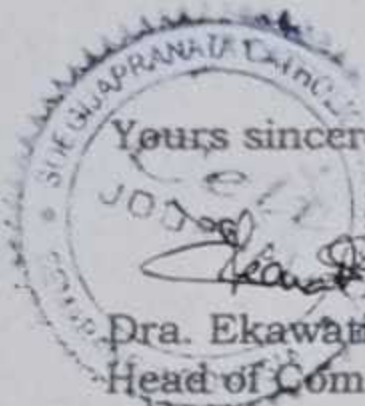
The seminar will be held in Semarang, Indonesia from 13-14<sup>th</sup> January 2005 and is hosted by the English Department, Faculty of Letters, Soegijapranata. Its venue will take place in the Theatre room, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, Thomas Aquinas Building. Please confirm to us your participation by November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004 to which we will send you a schedule draft and paper template to be written up in the seminar's proceeding.

We remind you that payment of participation as a parallel speaker can be sent to NISP kas Unika Soegijapranata acc. No. 035-130-00019-5 by December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004. Also, if you need assistance reserving a hotel, we recommend the Grand Candi Hotel or Gracia Hotel. Please call us and inform the choice of your hotel to the Celt committee at +62-24-8441555 extension 110.

Thank you. We look forward to your earliest confirmation of participation!

Yours sincerely,

  
Dra. Ekawati Marhaenny Dukut, M.Hum.  
Head of Committee





Representations of Cultural Values in Language and Literature  
13 - 14 January 2005

No : 014/Celt/XII/2004  
Re : Paper Acceptance (LoA)

Semarang, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2004

## LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE

Dear Ms. Ekawati Marhaenny Dukut,

Thank you for sending us your full paper entitled "**Exploring Cultural Values through Representation of American Popular Culture Products**" with ID 044. Based on our reviewers' evaluations, it has been accepted to be included in our proceeding: Representations of Cultural Values in Language and Literature, published by Soegijapranata Catholic University Press, ISBN: 979-8366-72-7.

Your paper will be organized under the sub-theme: American Culture. Please see enclosed the laid-out draft. Please confirm to us any changes if necessary to [sastra@unika.ac.id](mailto:sastra@unika.ac.id) by January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005 to which we then re-arrange your paper before we finally send it to the publisher.

If you would like to order a hard copy of the proceeding, please inform us. We will then send you information on the publication cost. If you have any questions regarding the proceeding, please call the Celt committee at +62-24-8441555 extension 110.

Thank you. We look forward to meeting you soon!



Dra. Ekawati Marhaenny Dukut, M.Hum.  
Head of Committee

## **16. EXPLORING CULTURAL VALUES THROUGH REPRESENTATIONS OF AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE PRODUCTS**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Most Indonesians would agree that someone is considered modern only if she has educated herself with a sound knowledge of English, either in reading, writing, listening and most importantly in speaking. Take for example radio announcers and television hosts who consider English as the top ranked communicative tool to attract audiences who thirst for educative and intelligent talk shows. In almost every interview with a well-known politician, film star or researcher, English vocabularies somehow springs out from their Indonesian based talks. It comes of no surprise, therefore, that an Indonesian is judged modern, educated and intelligent if she can speak in English fluently. It is for this reason then that English courses in Indonesia seem to have no end in flourishing in great numbers with the classical motive that it is for the betterment of education. In Yogyakarta alone – which is known as the city of education – there are more or less 30 English courses already listed in the local telephone book. The institutions, universities and teaching colleges or academies that also offer a faculty or program mastering on the English language, have not even added this number.

Although the English language has so many varieties, i.e. Hispanic, Irish, Scottish, Australian, British, and American English to mention a few – most Indonesians are only familiar with the British and American English. Indonesians regard that if someone can speak English with either a British or American accent or variety, then she is considered to already master the language. The programs such as the BBC and VOA radio programs as well as office box films may be products, which influenced the establishment of the phenomena.

It is interesting to note, however, that Indonesian speakers of English have purposively or accidentally acquired some cultural values of the origin of the English language. For example, those frequently using the English language tend to be more open to discussing things such as pre-marital sex, which to most Indonesians used to be considered as a taboo. Another example is in the kind of futuristic fashion as

though from outer space, which someone suddenly chooses to wear for music performances to symbolize that she is ready to tackle any frontier with her unique music.

Why do these happen? What is the explanation behind this with regards to the relationship between language and culture? This article discusses how Indonesians can appropriately apply the cultural values while actively speaking the English language. I believe it is important to give an attention to this, since it will become very irritating to know that an Indonesian having a minimum knowledge about the English language's cultural values may be misusing too many English vocabularies or expressions that are used in the wrong context of culture – just for the reason of trying to become a modern and educated-like person.

### LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN TEFL

The word culture comes from the Latin word *cultivare* from which the English 'cultivate' is also derived. Based on this concept, McOmie (1990:178) defines culture as "the result of the mass cultivation of a certain way of seeing, thinking, assuming, believing, and behaving in the members of a society". According to Wilson (1995:4), Gordon (1984:39) and Geertz (2003) culture is "all of the customs and practices" handed down from generation to generation such as the "churches, the state and the media,... standards of behavior, laws and conventional practices and customs. Understood also as the "texts and practices of everyday life" (Storey, 1996:2), according to Moran (cited in Zacharias, 2003:262) culture interrelates 5 (five) elements, i.e. products, practices, communities, perspectives and persons that cannot be separated with the dimensions of language. This is because language is used as a mediator in describing the five elements.

In TEFL, the teaching of the English language is seen as being intertwined with the teaching of the native speaker's culture. There is a recollection that "language as code reflects cultural preoccupations" (Kramsch, 2001: 4). In other words, language in itself is a culture because "culture is a vehicle by which cultural customs and ways of life are expressed in language (Bahri, 2003:155). Thus, it becomes a common knowledge to have the discussion of culture as a "feature entrenched in language teaching around the world" (Zacharias, 2003:261) in addition to the understanding that culture has become the "background" to the teaching of any language program that offers "speaking, listening, reading and writing" in English (Plastina, 2003:1).

### RECOGNIZING POPULAR CULTURE

As implied in the introduction, learning and using the English language necessarily means knowing the culture behind the English words used so that it will cohere with the context conferred. Kramsch (2001:3) supports this when she illustrates

that language as a system of signs transmits a certain cultural value. She means to state that, the way in which people use the spoken, written or visual medium have created meanings that are understandable only to the group they belong to. She further explains that only the group can understand thoroughly a speaker's tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures and facial expressions.

Because most Indonesians who do not decide to have a formal schooling learn English through the popular phrases heard or read from the advertisements of its popular culture's products, thus having insufficient knowledge of the culture it carries; it is best to know firstly about the meaning of popular culture. To begin with, according to Wilson (1995:5) culture is divided into the *elite* (the rich and the ruling classes) and the *common* (the culture of everyone in the society). During the Middle Ages, the caste system have separated the elite from the *folk culture* of street carnivals, tavern drinking and folk tales.

Because of political democracy in the nineteenth century, public education and the Industrial Revolution have ushered in the term of *popular culture*, which replaced the term folk culture. Because most popular culture of today are mass produced – the term, *mass culture*, has developed to refer to popular culture products that are mass-produced and/or shared through the mass media. Popular culture is everywhere. Petracca and Sorapure explain that it can be

absorbed at home watching television, listening to the stereo, or reading a magazine or newspapers; passing billboards or listening to the radio on the street; chatting over coffee at work; going out to ... fast-food restaurants, shopping malls and sports arenas; even noticing the graffiti that glares out at you on buildings and highway overpasses (1998:1).

Products such as popular music CDs, which apart from their variety stress on their individual personality (Frith, 1992:175); cheap paperback novels, soap operas and movies, which serve the ideally beautiful and rich heroine or strong, handsome and adventurous hero, and a myriad of advertised products from designer Levi's jeans that symbolizes the individual expression of living a rugged-free life, arches of McDonald's deliciously practical hamburgers to disposable razors that symbolizes modern technology have make up the icons of the contemporary popular culture (Wilson, 1995:6). Although products of popular culture are quickly eye catching and famous, they are transitory by nature, i.e. new images can appear on our TV screens, replacing the images of years or seasons before; new phrases supersede former favorites, for example the phrase 'guy' has been replaced by 'dude', 'stud' and recently 'funky'; and unknown entertainers become celebrities over night – like what happened to Indonesia's *dangdut* singer Inul and pop singers Mawar and

Ferry AFI. If these icons or symbols survive they can become high or elite culture, like what happened with Shakespeare's drama works and Elvis Presley's songs.

### AMERICAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND POPULAR CULTURE

The English language can be understood as a product of symbols arranged in a culturally systematic way. Symbols are words, pictures or objects that may be manifested in the products of popular culture have become the sources used to elicit meaning into the receiver of the message. Selecting the appropriate symbols for an idea or object is a very important step in the communication process because poorly selected symbols will result in a confusing and misunderstanding message. Consequently, it is crucial that care must be taken to choose the symbols that will elicit responses in the mind of the message receiver because they should be similar to those intended by the source.

A common finding about Indonesian people is the quick engulfment of anything, which suggests American for the sake of modernity. In order to become 'funky' most teenagers tend to dress, speak and act like their American idols that are 'carefree', 'easygoing' and 'open-minded' or 'independent' by not realizing the fact that there is a cultural background to why those values exist. The girls would come to school wearing Calvin Klein jeans that Brooke Shields have once promoted to infer "I'll be the object of fascination" (Petracca and Sorapure, 1998:70), combined with midi blouses which let others see their belly buttons and even wear make up to school that has 'whitening' lotions on them to support the idea that the user is western-like. Borrowing Chopkins' words,

There just seems to be a great desire to aspire to Western culture... Often an ad will be written in English because that is one way of flattering the audience: "You are smart, sophisticated and educated." I suppose that is also why the models tend to be white...(1998:111)

Whereas, the boys would dress themselves by applying gel to have 'spiky' hairstyle, or wear rolled up shirt sleeves, and smoke Marlboro cigarettes in order to show that they have an autonomous way of life. This independency and integrity of the individual is also in the minds of the teenagers when consuming Kit-Kat chocolate bars whose chiming advertisement says "Have a break – have a Kit Kat today" which is similar to McDonalds' products, "You deserve a break today... Set yourself free" and the American Express Visa's "You can have it the way you want it" (Fowles, 1998:70-71).

Another example is how four-'lovely'-letter English words; taught by Eddie Murphy in his comical movies, would often come out without shame to elders. Some

argue that it has influenced the quickly deteriorating traditional form of Indonesia's culture that ought to speak with others with respect. When asked why the young generation detaches themselves from the concept of being polite to those who are older or those having a higher rank and status, one of the cause they exclaim, is because both of their parents no longer have time to educate them. Parents are, nowadays, too busy with their work that the transference of 'polite' culture has never had the chance to be learnt by the teenagers. Unless being told about how impolite they are, the teenagers think there is nothing wrong with the way they act because it is like what they see on TV shows. Through his speech about the Family and Media Conference in Nashville, Tennessee; Bill Clinton expresses his views that the less time parents have with their children means that children are spending more time with someone else or something else, so that the media such as TV has not only exploded in its ramifications in our lives but also more access to more of our children's time that would have been the case 20 [or 40] years ago if all these technologies developments had occurred when the family and our economy were in a different place (1998:172).

In other words, popular culture can be easily absorbed (Petracca and Sorapure, 1998:4) through TV advertisements that Indonesians are potentially becoming consumptive with these American products. To suggest that Indonesians also hold highly the concept of friendship, they eagerly consume Coca-Cola whose theme is to have "a Coke and a Smile", or the importance of family togetherness by using Johnson's baby Powder and Hallmark cards as they bring in the "familial love" of grandparents, Dad, Mom and baby (Fowles, 1998:66). Quoting Saatchi and Saatchi, what is seen on TV and motion pictures are

...creating elements of shared culture. And this cultural convergence is facilitating the establishment of multinational brand characters. The worldwide proliferation of the Marlboro brand would have not been possible without TV and motion picture education about the virile rugged character of the American West and the cowboy [that penetrated through] increasing color TV (Chopkins, 1998:110)

Interestingly enough, the way these Indonesian teenagers act are not readily welcome by the people who originally created the four-letter words or street punk fashion. One reason is that the American films or scenes shown on Indonesian TV are, mostly a portrayal of the 1980s culture. So, a different kind of popular behavior, speech and fashion have superseded them and thus would make the Indonesian 'copy-cat' teenagers strike out or even become an outcast in the community of the

2000s. Another reason is that the teenagers do the 'American' things without really knowing the background values of why Americans have such a culture. Because of this, it is therefore worthwhile for us to know what values are actually behind the American culture that is expressed in the English language heard on the radio, behaviors seen on television, drama performances or read through novels.

### VALUES REPRESENTED IN AMERICAN CULTURE

In analyzing America's cultural values and patterns Stewart and Bennet (1991:61) claim that the components: form of activity, form of relations to others, and perception of the self, usually represent the stereotype of Americans who are judged as 'carefree', 'easygoing' and 'open-minded' or 'independent' people. The following background of the values can be a stepping-stone for Indonesians who want to better understand the reason for why an American culture stands out as they are today.

#### Form of Activity

##### 1) Orientation to Action in Achieving a Goal:

The orientation to action is frequently conceived as the act of *decision-making*. For Americans casual conversations about goals, summer jobs, and extended travel may be justified as deciding on a career. In a more formal sense, defining a goal of what to do in the future with its clarifications serve as a guide to effective actions for Americans to have the responsibility for setting their own directions. For them, clarity is more preferable than ambiguity and contemplation should lead to action. It is for this reason that American children are encouraged early on to believe that they are the judges of what they want and should do. Even if they are shown unable to decide on something, they prize the illusion that they can.

A scene from the play *Death of a Salesman* shows this concept when the main character, out of his impossible outreach for a job promotion decides to plant a seed at night on his limited apartment's land. This shows the act of still having the hope that there is a future for his unsuccessful career. Other examples are how the classic character of *Huckleberry Finn* sees that it is far more important to pursue his decision of going "west" rather than living comfortably yet disciplined by his aunt, and how in every episode, Captain Kirk of *Star Trek* decides that there is always another "western" area or frontier waiting for him and his crews in outer space to help find a better living space for mankind's future.

In making decisions, Americans are shown as people who do not hesitate to consult a teacher or expert of any kind, because they perceive it as seeking for an advice to help them make up their minds. The decision-making for the American culture is, however, localized in the individual. As a comparison, a typical formal or semiformal group decision made by Indonesians who are groping for a voice,



preferably that of a chairperson, who will express the group's consensus – is usually perceived by Americans as lacking leadership.

This most likely explains why in a classroom situation Indonesian students show their reluctance to express their individual opinion, whereas those having an American open mind would compete for a chance to speak. This competition business for Americans is one sure way to motivate the rest of the group to do something fruitful because “where there's a will, there's a way” (Stewart and Bennet, 1991:82). Unfortunately, for Indonesians the opposite situation usually comes up. The struggle for winning a basketball game, for example, may not be reached satisfactorily because the individual sacrificed his unique skills for the better performance of the group whose concept of togetherness is thicker – even though through this togetherness they fail to be the winner.

The action of “getting things done” (Stewart and Bennet, 1991:69) impinges upon the value of goal orientation, too. Hence, colloquial exchanges of the greeting such as “How're you doing?” “I'm doing fine-how are you coming along” exemplifies the American life that is affected by the predominance of doing. This is also the reason why heroes in American culture are always action-oriented or energetic people. The adventure-film actor, Clint Eastwood, Arnold Schwarzeneger, and Sylvester Stallone is a proven example of why they became the ‘most admired men’ by young Americans.

## 2) Work, Play and Friendship:

With the important concept of “doing something is better than nothing” as discussed above, Americans therefore, highly respects those who still work for a company during their retirement or old age. Yet, Americans see that there is a need in separating work from play, because work is done for a living; it is what people need to do though not necessarily enjoying it. Play, on the other hand, is “relief from the drudgery of the regularity of work” (Stewart and Bennet, 1991:71-72). It is pursued for enjoyment in its own right even though many engage on it with the same seriousness of purpose that they spend on work.

The American's various compartments of friendship that is usually kept separate have also influenced the value of separating work and play activities. A friendship that is centered on the office is made assured to not intrude into the relations with friends who participate in recreational activities. Consequently, Americans can perform their work activities with a professional standard.

‘Work and no play’ or similarly ‘play and no work’ is an American culture that is greatly valued by the people. Seldom do we hear the discussion about the work's activity during an outdoor family gathering although sitcoms which stars Eddie Murphy is never out of telling jokes. It seems, the Indonesians have engulfed the

culture as it is, because traditionally they feel that talking about work during their playtime and vice versa is a regular activity. Some even regard that working without giving out jokes will decrease their work creativity.

### 3) 'Time is Money' Management and Obligation:

Contemporary American values of time can be traced back to colonial days in Virginia where an early change in attitude toward time and labor occurred. The discovery of tobacco's profitable production in colonial Jamestown impelled agents of the Virginia Company to manipulate land and labor so they can maximize their production. By the 1620s, the concept of 'time thrift' and Benjamin Franklin's admonition, "remember that time is money" have, in particular, boosted the necessity of having clocks in every American households (Brown, 1976:43-44). Time thrift is the basis for measuring productivity by output per unit of time rather than by the quality of the product. As a consequence, Americans see the necessity of making sure they can always meet their own deadlines.

The orientation toward time is not culturally the same among different cultures. For example, Latin Americans orient themselves to the present time. Indonesians, by comparison usually orient themselves to the past and turn to tradition for guidance. The dominant Americans, often value the future more. In this case, Stewart and Bennet explain that the future for Americans is not measured in decades like the Brazilians but in a reachable projection (1991:74-75). Thus, it becomes customary for American employees to write out his own work objectives for the next year or so as a criterion to evaluate his performance. Americans are known to hold their obligations highly, which is why they usually set deadlines that are feasible.

The Indonesian's Javanese in this situation, in contrast, may be uncomfortable with this concept, since it is in opposite with the saying *alon-alon waton kelakon* – it's better to do things one at a time at a slow but certain pace in order to achieve a more qualified or satisfactory result. It is no wonder that American guests are often bewildered to know that Indonesians would come to gatherings later than the appointed time. Consequently, Indonesians who already know the value of time would make their best effort to come to meetings earlier.

### **Form of Relations to Others**

#### 1) Social Status and Equality :

Although sociologists speak of class structure and status obligation in American society, most Americans see themselves as members of an egalitarian middle class (Stewart and Bennet, 1991:89). There are variations in parts of New England and in the Southeast, where the status and position occupied in the social structure carry influence, but generally in the American society – social background, money or power bestow fewer advantages than any other major society.

The concept of all middle class structure allows Americans to value the motivation of bringing equality in their principles. Interpersonal relations are typically horizontal and conducted between presumed equals. When a personal confrontation is required between two persons of different hierarchical levels, there is an implicit tendency to establish an atmosphere of equality (Stewart and Bennet, 1991:90) For example, a commanding officer in the films *Pearl Harbour* and *Titanic* would not “pull his rank” nor “use his authority as a crutch”. When making conversations the officer is seated in an eye-to-eye level with his subordinate.

By contrast, the Indonesian majority would do just the opposite. Indonesians would not dare look in the eyes of their superior since it is impolite to do so. Unfortunately, some Indonesians who want to follow the American way sometimes overdo the idea of equality. For example, a student may be too frank and too friendly with his teacher that respect towards the teacher becomes minimal. Because of trying to achieve equality, some Indonesians may even deliberately or accidentally commit corruption and nepotism to obtain individual profit. In this case, Americans cannot see how the loyalty of members in an organization may be the principle that explains for unintelligible actions and promotions. This is because they believe that everyone has equal talent and ability, hence, the emergence of a promotion means waiting for the right opportunity instead of making advantages of a relationship.

Lacking obligations to class and social position, Americans nevertheless move easily from one group to another as they shift position or residence (Stewart and Bennet, 1991:93). For Americans, the move from one work place to another in every five-year period to obtain a higher position or even just to gain a new experience is highly valued by the community. In comparison, Indonesians prefer to stay in one permanent job until it is time for them to retire. So, if an Indonesian tries to use the American strategy of ‘always on the move’ or bargaining for a better position elsewhere, it is not a readily welcome action.

### 2) Informality, Directness and Friendship:

Based on the concept of equality above, when Americans exchange glances directly into each other’s eyes they are at the same time conveying informality, spontaneity and friendship. The Americans sense connivance and infer deception if eyes shift to avoid meeting those of the other. As discussed before, however, the direct eye contact for an Indonesian means impoliteness and failure of giving respect to those of a higher social rank. So, if an Indonesian teenager decides to follow this behavior when talking to their elders, it is considered unfriendly.

In conversation, American expressions of greeting are “brief and often perfunctory, points in conversation are pressed directly and quickly, and forms in communication representing social relations are few and loose” (Stewart and Bennet,

1991:99). When this method of directness or informality is used in Indonesia, the American can be considered as insulting or confusing. An example of this directness is in the early use of first names in a relationship. On the other hand, the flowery language, complex method of address or ritualistic manners that reflect the social structure of the Indonesian culture is considered too pompous or arrogant by the American.

The casual style of the Americans of for example, the habit of chatting casually with waitresses or strangers in public places is at the same time irritating yet also a behavior envied by other cultures. The British playwright, Tom Stoppard, have captured this in his *Dirty linen and New-Found-Land* as follows:

Americans are very modern people... They are open people too. They wear their hearts on their sleeves. They don't stand on ceremony. They take people as they are. They make no distinction about a man's background, parentage, [and] education. They say what they mean and there is a vivid muscularity about the way they say it. They admire everything about them without reserve or pretence or scholarship. They are always the first to put their hands in their pockets. They press you to visit them in their own home the moment they meet you, and are irrepressible, good humored, ambitious, and brimming self-confidence in any company... (1976, 59-60).

### 3) Competition, Cooperation and Fair Play:

In the event of obtaining a better future, Americans gear themselves into a competition that occurs within the context of cooperation. This is because competition requires considerable amount of coordination among individuals and groups. Stewart and Bennet elaborate that "the typical American ability to cooperate is one of the most important assets of advisors and managers" in foreign countries, where they often "act as catalysts in inducing others to work together" (1991:106). They are well known for this characteristic because they do not commit wholeheartedly to a group or organization. Instead they pursue their individual goals while cooperating with others who are willing to pursue their group's needs. This quality is possibly why, to the Indonesian mind, Americans are perceived to be strongly individualistic in reaching for their goals.

The separation between membership in a group and personal objectives allow the American to adjust his goal for a joint action with members of the group. The sense of urgency and the value of getting things done in meeting a deadline allow the American to show his ability in organizing complicated events. Each person in the group is not asked to throw their individual goals, but instead, each person is

asked to accommodate themselves to a joint action which is analogous to a 'Dutch treat'.

Americans believe that the compromise is fair for every individual. By perceiving that everyone has fairly used their strength and knowledge they will make sure that whatever was started would be finished professionally. It is for this reason that laying clear rules or job descriptions at the beginning is just as important as "including the other person's weaknesses inside the rule" (Mead, 1965:143), because any person in the organization may become a focus of power when equal opportunity is openly given to them. In America's music, this relationship is clearly seen in jazz music. It gives an opportunity for individual musicians to play their unique instruments.

### **Perception of the Self**

#### **1) Dimensions of the Self:**

As mentioned above, Americans value the uniqueness of the individual highly. In fact, "the form of individualism that is deeply ingrained and seldom questioned pervades action and intrudes into each domain of activity" (Stewart and Bennet, 1991:129). The film series of *Home Alone*, which show how a child can creatively lure his enemies or house thieves to finally have them captured by the police without any outside help, is an admirable example of what confidence in the self can do. Words such as 'me' and 'my' (Deese, 1965:205) indicate the unexamined privacy of self-references.

According to Stewart and Bennet (1991:130) Americans base their awareness of self on the assumption of doing. For instance, on a group discussion participated by two Germans, twenty Americans and ten Europeans, which asked them to formulate on the meaning of American individualism, most of the predominant Americans were satisfied with the definition of 'self-reliant' and 'independent' as 'each one doing his own thing'.

With regards to the individual as the sole decision maker, American advisors are usually bewildered when confronted with Indonesian students whose life decisions about their own career is influenced and even guided by family considerations. Americans cannot understand their reasoning that their family members are themselves.

#### **2) Individualism and Individuality:**

The word 'individuality' and 'individualism' is similar yet different in the following way. Individuality implies the cultivation of differences but at the same time acceptance of obligations in narrow but well-defined spheres. Individualism of Americans reflects a continuous frontier between the individual and the culture. With individualism, the self is the basic unit of the culture and the pressures from the

society are ill defined, but pervasive and uniform in all spheres of activity. The individualism of American culture does not prescribe specific obligations for the individual, but at the same time, it affords much less freedom of self-expression (Stewart and Bennet, 1991:136).

The American concept of an individual self is rooted in the seventeenth century English philosophical tradition represented by John Locke, who asserted that the biological individual is the basic unit of nature and is therefore appropriate if the individual be given the opportunity to develop his self-interests (Bellah et al, 1985:143). The term 'individualism' was firstly coined by Alexis de Tocqueville, in his study *Democracy in America* (1835) and epitomized in the writings of Benjamin Franklin who suggested that "God helps those who help themselves" (Bellah et.al., 1985:32-33).

The episode of an American mother who in the morning would place a baby daughter of less than one year old in a highchair and asks it to choose which kind of baby cereal (that are boxed and wrapped in two distinctive colors to choose from) illustrates how the mother stress on the baby's individuality as a concrete point of reference. In other words, Americans are encouraged from an early age to make decisions for themselves, develop their own opinions, solve their own problems, have their own possessions, ands in general, learn to view the world from the individual self (Stewart and Bennet, 1991:133).

In Indonesia this kind of family scene is not cultivated or even tolerated. Usually the mother would have her baby hunched up her back with a *selendang* or *kain* and give the baby the breakfast, which is considered best by her social norms. Indonesian children, therefore, at times suffer from culture shock when faced with the idea that they suddenly have to take care of their own meals, study habits, and other individual needs in a town far from their home to pursue for a respectably good tertiary education. For Americans, the culture shock is minimal because living in another town and overseas is just like their hometown.

### 3)Self-reliance, Mythic Individualism or Independence:

Of all the cultural norms associated with individualism, none is stronger than the idea of 'self-reliance'. Americans talk fondly of 'pulling themselves up by their bootstraps' to become 'self-made men'. This idea according to Stewart and Bennet (1991:136) is based on the myth of the Old west, where brave settlers carved out a new life without outside aid and lonely cowboys who shot straight imposed justice on equally lonely outlaws. This myth has lived on in the form of lonely detectives or irate citizens who are challenged personally by the system that imposes the law and order. Warner explains that heroes such as illustrated in the film *Rambo*, *Aliens* and *Robocop* almost

always entirely cut off from others, endures the most insidious forms of manipulation and pain, reaches into the primordial levels of the self, and emerges as a hero with powers sufficient to fight the system to the point of its catastrophe (1992:675).

The fierce, utilitarian self-reliance originally advocated by Ralph Waldo Emerson has, to an extent, given way to more expressive forms. For many Americans, the search of autonomy, self-actualization and personal growth has supplanted the mythic desire to save frontier towns single-handedly from outlaw bands. Although rugged self-reliance is only prevalently seen in movies, Indonesians often interpret it as the 'independent' way of living.

## CONCLUSION

Americans' way of life that is seen on the popular cultural products such as TV, films, advertisement and colloquial expressions that is heard on radio turns out to be a culture that cannot be blindly copied just for the sake of modernity. The American values of work, play, obligation, time management, equality, competition, cooperation, and fair play are supported by the goal orientation of having the obligation to achieve self-reliance and the motivation to become individuals who are committed to arrange their own qualities based on their own deadlines.

The open-minded and frank expressions of the Americans turn out to be the result of achieving a powerful self that has the ability to decide from an early age. It is consequently, understandable now for an Indonesian to see why in the American English language, there is at the same time an existence of the cultural themes of going west for better living opportunity, rugged individualism in Marlboro cigarette advertisements, the search for self-identity and equality in the heroes of the romance/adventure genre novels or films, as well as the direct eye-to-eye and to-the-point expressions in its conversations.

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