

VALUE METAPHORS IN FILMS: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF CORE VALUES IN AMERICAN MOVIES

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Metaphors are pervasive in everyday communication, shaping our understanding of abstract concepts and reflecting cultural norms. This paper investigates the role of metaphors in conveying values in the American Movie Corpus (Forchini 2021–), a collection of manually transcribed dialogues of 50 movies produced in the United States. Building upon the definitions of values by Kluckhohn (1951) and Schwartz (1992), the study explores how films mirror and transmit cultural beliefs. The study has two main goals: firstly, to reveal the key values that American movies communicate through language, and secondly, to examine how these values are represented through metaphors. To identify the core values, the study employed the Personal Values Dictionary (Ponizovski et al. 2020). A corpus-based approach was then used to uncover and analyse metaphorical patterns underpinning those values (Stefanowitsch 2007). The results suggest implications for domains such as intercultural communication, translation and second-language acquisition where deep understanding of the way reality is perceived in a different culture is crucial.

Keywords: Metaphors, Values, Personal Values Dictionary, Film Language, American Movies

1. Introduction

Metaphors – whether in written or spoken discourse, or even in visual representations – are integral components of our everyday interaction. Beyond their linguistic significance, metaphors play a pivotal role in shaping and reflecting the way we comprehend abstract concepts, thereby weaving connections between language, cognition, and culture. As vehicles of meaning, metaphors not only bridge the gap between abstract concepts and concrete understanding but also serve as mirrors that reflect and reinforce cultural norms, beliefs, and ideologies, as highlighted by Winter and Matlock (2017).

This paper focuses on the conceptualisation of values in American movies through metaphors. Kluckhohn (1951, 395) defines a value as “[a] conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of action”. In a similar vein, Schwartz (1992) characterises values as desirable goals that a person pursues, and that remain unchanged across different situations that a person may be facing. Ultimately, values concern

motivation, not action and performance; they are the guiding principles in a person's life and each person assigns a degree of importance to each of these principles. Culture contributes to establishing the fundamental beliefs and ideals in an individual's life: culture shapes prescriptive behaviour, determining which actions are deemed commendable or reprehensible within a certain cultural community (Martocchio 2015).

Beyond their role in entertainment, films provide insights into the collective mindset of a society. Movies offer a valuable source for cultural understanding, shedding light on communication patterns, socially accepted conduct, and the foundational aspects of cultural principles. Language learners often turn to films as a means of enhancing language proficiency (Donaghy 2019; Forchini 2013, 2018), as they provide an authentic and engaging context for language use. Yet, films offer more than just a means of acquiring language skills: gaining a comprehensive understanding of the values underlying the movies can not only enhance language understanding, but also deepen cultural awareness (Tomlinson 2019).

This research addresses the crucial yet underexplored aspect of how values are intertwined with language in films. To this end, the study pursues two objectives: firstly, to shed light on the key values that American movies convey through language, and, secondly, to investigate how these values are conceptualised through metaphorical expressions. Understanding how metaphors conceptualise core values in American movies provides a unique lens through which to explore the representation of the cultural and social foundation of American society.

The study relies upon key concepts that stem from research in the fields of metaphor and film language. Section 2 and 3 explore two main dimensions respectively: first, the connection between metaphors and values, and second, the relation between films, values, and language. Section 4 presents the materials and the methods applied to carry out the study. Following that, Section 5 reports on the results of the analysis of key values portrayed in American movies and their recurring metaphorical patterns. Section 6 concludes by drawing final considerations regarding the fundamental aspects of the analysed values.

2. Metaphors and values

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) posits that metaphors serve as fundamental cognitive mechanisms that help us comprehend and reason about abstract concepts. In turn, these metaphors play a pivotal role in shaping our overall understanding of the world. As emphasised by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 7), metaphorical expressions offer profound insights into the underlying metaphorical foundations of the concepts that underpin our daily activities. This theory contends, therefore, that metaphors extend beyond mere ornamental linguistic constructs; instead, they assume a fundamental role in influencing our thought processes, reasoning abilities, and perceptual experiences of the world.

Due to their abstract nature, values are challenging to define and comprehend directly; therefore, we tend to conceptualise abstract notions like values by mapping them onto familiar and tangible experiences. CMT provides a framework to explore how metaphors

enable us to conceptualise values by grounding them in concrete, embodied experiences through which they can be understood and communicated.

One important aspect of this theory is the concept of source and target domains. The source domain is a familiar and concrete concept that serves as the basis for understanding or conceptualising another, usually more abstract, concept (i.e. the target domain). The connection between a source domain and a target domain is conveyed through an expression structured as TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN. For example, in the metaphor TIME IS MONEY (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, 7), *money* is the source domain, which is a concrete and well-understood concept. The target domain is *time*, a more abstract concept that can be difficult to grasp fully. We can understand and reason about *time* by mapping the attributes, experiences, and structure of the source domain *money* onto it. The process of mapping involves identifying correspondences between the source and target domains. In the TIME IS MONEY metaphor, for instance, we map attributes of money (such as value and scarcity) onto the concept of time. This helps us conceptualise time as a valuable resource that should be used wisely and efficiently. The process of mapping enables us to grasp complex concepts by associating them with more readily understandable notions. It permits us to use our familiarity with concrete ideas to comprehend and discuss abstract concepts effectively.

Metaphors not only offer cognitive and linguistic mechanisms for rendering abstract values more concrete but also mirror and reinforce cultural norms, beliefs, and ideologies (Winter, Matlock 2017). As Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 22) remark, “[t]he most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture”. Thus, metaphors are not universally fixed but can vary across cultures and linguistic communities; cultural variations play a significant role in shaping metaphorical conceptualisations of values.

Different cultures may prioritise certain metaphors over others or employ different metaphors to understand and express the same values due to variations in experiences, practices, and social norms. This can impact the way values are conceptualised and expressed within those cultures. For example, while the TIME IS MONEY metaphor is prevalent in many Western cultures, it is by no means universal. Another example is the conceptualisation of ‘more as better’, consistently with the MORE IS UP and GOOD IS UP spatialisation metaphors in the American culture (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, 22). This metaphor is grounded in our bodily experience of physical elevation connoting positivity. Generally, the primary orientations such as up-down, in-out, central-peripheral, and active-passive appear to be present across various cultures. However, the specific concepts aligned with these directions and the significance of these orientations can differ from one culture to another (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, 24).

3. *Films, values and language*

The other key consideration for this study concerns the relation between films, values and language. As products of mass culture, movies both reflect and shape social values,

cultural attitudes, customs and concerns (Beard 1994; Cloete 2017; Kubrak 2020). The representation of values in movies has long been a subject of interest within the domains of film studies, cultural analysis, and communication research (Kamei 2019; Jia 2014; Storey 2021; Supiarza et al. 2020). As Supiarza et al. (2020, 217) remark, “[f]ilm has become one of the most effective media in conveying ideological messages, [...] and values”.

Movies also shape people’s perceptions about other cultures (Bhugra 2003; Popa et al. 2021); thus, they can play a key role in the development of intercultural competence. The educational utility of films, particularly in teaching intercultural concepts and theories, has attracted significant attention from scholars (Bhawuk, Brislin 2000; Cardon 2010; Summerfield 1993). Researchers have focused on investigating the educational value of films while also exploring various ways in which films can enhance the process of learning. Cardon (2010, 151) remarks that “[f]ilms can be a valuable intellectual exercise in deciphering other cultures. Students observe plots and characters that can reveal communication processes, socially acceptable behaviours, and underlying cultural values”. As stated by Champoux (1999), films possess the capacity to captivate students, making them a potent tool to introduce complex theories and concepts in an entertaining manner. Films offer students the opportunity to engage with emotionally impactful experiences that diverge from typical classroom simulations. These experiences may even trigger a re-evaluation of personal values and self-perception (Champoux 1999).

Dunphy et al. (2008) emphasise that movies can effectively demonstrate, analyse, and potentially rectify behaviour and management within organisations. For instance, Gallos (1993) has emphasised the value of films in aiding the capacity to ‘reframe’ – that is, to thoroughly explore a situation from diverse perspectives. This concept has increasingly gained significance as a central focus within organisational and management education.

Visual arts and audiovisual media frequently employ metaphors, as demonstrated by various scholars (Bartsch 2010; Coëgnarts 2017; Forceville 2008; Kappelhoff, Müller 2011; Ortiz 2014; Yicai, Xueai 2021; Whittock 1990). In the study conducted by Dunat (2022), the focus revolves around exploring the conceptualisation of time within the context of film. Within the domain of Translation Studies, Alanisa and Munandar (2019) have investigated the translation strategies employed to render metaphors from English into Indonesian in the movies *Mulan* and *Moana*. In their study, Grabowski Aoki and Spagnol Simi dos Santos (2020) analyse the metaphors pertaining to leadership in the film *Chicken Run* and find that notions of freedom, teamwork, resilience, and leadership are conveyed creatively using metaphoric elements. Concerning the utilisation of metaphors in films as a means of conveying values and ideology, Basri and Ibrahim (2004) delve into the representation of women through metaphors in a selection of Malay films. Their work underscores that these films utilise metaphoric language to construct specific perceptions about women. From a communicative standpoint, the authors also contemplate the potential cultural implications of perpetuating metaphors that depict women in a manner that is misaligned with contemporary values.

As numerous studies on metaphors in movies have showcased, the impact of metaphors within films transcends mere verbal expressions. Coëgnarts and Kravanja (2012, 3) posit

that “filmmakers use embodied principles in the form of image schemas and conceptual metaphors to express abstract meaning to the spectator”. Notably, these metaphors are often employed to depict aspects of the human mind, thus offering viewers insights into characters’ thoughts and dreams (Reinerth 2016, 219). However, as the central aim of this paper revolves around examining the representation of values through metaphors in transcribed movie dialogues, this investigation will exclusively address metaphors conveyed through language, omitting other components like imagery and sound.

One key consideration for the present research concerns the relation between the language employed in movies and the language used in real-life interactions. Numerous studies (Al-Surmi 2012; Bednarek 2015; Forchini 2012, 2017, 2019; Quaglio 2009; Zago 2016) have demonstrated the linguistic and textual similarity between the language used in films and that of everyday conversations. Metaphors are a linguistic, as well as a conceptual phenomenon. Consequently, it can be assumed that the similarity existing between movie language and natural language extends to the use of metaphors.

4. *Materials and method*

The analysis was carried out on the American Movie Corpus (AMC) (Forchini 2021-), a corpus compiled by the AMC Team at the Faculty of Linguistic Sciences of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Milan). The corpus contains the manual orthographic transcriptions of the complete dialogues (560,473 tokens in total) from 50 movies produced in the United States of America. These films span various genres, including Action, Comedy, Drama, Romance, Fantasy, Thriller, and Animated films, among others, making them appealing to a wide range of audiences. Examples of films in the corpus are *The Blues Brothers* (by John Landis, 1980), *Forrest Gump* (by Robert Zemeckis, 1994), *The Devil Wears Prada* (by David Frankel, 2006), *Cars* (by John Lasseter and Joe Ranft, 2006), *The Avengers* (by Joss Whedon, 2012) and *Wonder* (by Stephen Chbosky, 2017)¹. The selection of movies for the corpus was random, covering a 50-year time span from 1959 to 2019. The chosen films aim to be representative of movie language, which is shaped in the different movies by geographical, cultural, social, and historical factors relating to the narratives and the characters. While American English is the predominant variety used by characters in the films, there are occasional instances of other varieties, such as British English, Indian English, and Australian English.

The analysis was conducted in two steps. First, the key values portrayed in American movies were identified. Subsequently, the metaphors associated with the key values were investigated. In the first step of the analysis, the study referred to the Personal Values Dictionary (PVD) (Ponizovskiy et al. 2020) to identify the key values expressed in the corpus. The basis of the PVD lies in Schwartz’s (1992) theory of fundamental human values. The theory outlines a classification system comprising ten distinct values: security, conformi-

¹ The complete list of the movies contained in the corpus and the transcription conventions are available at <http://www.americanmoviecorpus.net/>.

ty, tradition, benevolence, universalism, self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, and power (Schwartz 1992, 2012). Schwartz (1992, 2012) organises values along two opposite dimensions. The first dimension juxtaposes “openness to change” against “conservation” values (Schwartz 2012, 8). This dimension represents the tension between values that prioritise independent thinking, action, and emotions, as well as a readiness for change (e.g. self-direction, stimulation), and values that favour order, self-restraint, preservation of the past, and resistance to change (e.g. security, conformity, tradition). The second dimension involves “self-enhancement” against “self-transcendence” values and prioritises self-interest, success, and dominance over others (e.g. power and achievement) (Schwartz 1992, 43-44; 2012, 8). Hedonism encompasses elements of both openness to change and self-enhancement (Schwartz 2012, 8).

The PVD contains a total of 1,068 “value-laden words” (Ponizovskiy et al. 2020, 890) referring to the ten universal values identified by Schwartz (1992) and it is based on the notion that the words that refer to a particular value tend to co-occur in natural language when reference is made to that particular value, both explicitly and implicitly. As Ponizovskiy et al. (2020, 891) specify, “the [...] dictionary includes only those words that both theoretically represent the underlying value and consistently co-occur in natural language”. For example, the use and co-occurrence of value-related words such as ‘accord’, ‘adequately’, ‘appropriate’, ‘appropriately’, ‘authorities’, ‘authorization’, all point to the value of conformity (Ponizovskiy et al. 2020). The assumption at the basis of the PVD is that – when speaking or writing – people tend to refer more often to values that they personally consider more important (Bardi et al. 2008; Boyd et al. 2019; Tausczik, Pennebaker, 2010; Ponizovskiy et al. 2020). As Ponizovskiy et al. (2020, 898) point out, “the unprompted expression of values in language is a behavioural indicator of personal value priorities”. The PVD serves, therefore, as a tool for evaluating an individual’s value priorities by quantitatively analysing that person’s reference to values in natural language. The fact that the PVD was developed on American English makes it a particularly suitable reference tool for the present study. Moreover, the dictionary is designed for utilisation with word-counting software, which facilitates its integration with the Corpus-assisted Discourse Studies approach (Partington et al. 2013) used in the study. The online concordancer Sketch Engine (Kilgariff et al. 2004) was used to calculate the frequency of every value word in the PVD in order to identify the core values in the corpus.

To explore the conceptualisation of these core values, the next step of the analysis involved examining the metaphors associated with them. Within the context of CMT, a long-standing methodological concern has centred around the substantial dependence on researchers’ intuitions to compile expressions associated with a particular domain and subsequently categorise them according to their conceptual mappings. In order to limit this methodological weakness, the present study combines two methodological approaches: the Metaphorical Pattern Analysis method (MPA) introduced by Stefanowitsch (2004, 2007) and the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). The combination of metaphor identification methods was validated in a

study conducted by Muelas-Gil (2023), which analysed a corpus of economic reports in English and Spanish.

The MPA method is a corpus-based method of metaphor identification that relies on quantitative and qualitative analysis of recurring metaphorical patterns. A “metaphorical pattern” is “a multi-word expression originating from a specific source domain (SD) into which one or more specific lexical item from a given target domain (TD) have been inserted” (Stefanowitsch 2007, 66). This method prescribes that, by means of the analysis of corpus data, instances of the target domain under investigation (e.g. ‘anger’, ‘happiness’, ‘fear’) are extracted and, subsequently, the metaphorical patterns associated with them are identified (Stefanowitsch 2007). The significant advantage of using MPA is that this method enables the researcher to quantitatively assess the significance of specific metaphorical patterns for particular lexical items.

The Word Sketch tool in Sketch Engine was used to identify the recurrent patterns containing instances of value-related words selected on the basis of their frequency and distribution in the corpus. Word Sketch presented patterns comprising modifiers, verbs, and prepositions associated with the target word, along with their respective frequency and typicality score (LogDice). In order to include all the recurrent patterns containing the different word forms of the value-related word, the lemmas were considered.

Since not all multi-word expressions containing lexemes from target domains in the corpus instantiate a metaphor, the recurring patterns also underwent qualitative analysis to identify the metaphorical expressions. The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (Pragglejaz Group 2007) was adopted to analyse the linguistic patterns by considering the context around them. To facilitate the extraction of the relevant segments of text from the corpus, the tools employed included the KWIC function within the concordancers Ant-Conc (Version 4.2.0) (Anthony 2022) and Sketch Engine. Following the MIP procedure, the patterns containing metaphors were identified based on semantic tension, i.e. the cognitive discrepancy that arises when a word/phrase is used metaphorically, thus expressing a meaning that conflicts with its literal meaning. The Macmillan and Cambridge English online dictionaries² were consulted for this step of the analysis.

A further qualitative analysis was conducted with the aim of identifying instances of implicit metaphor, wherein the value word was replaced by a pro-form or a generic term. For example, in a sentence from the corpus, “no I think that was the first thing that crossed your mind actually”, the word ‘thing’ is used in place of ‘thought’, so the pattern was considered as an instance of the conceptual metaphor A THOUGHT IS A MOVEABLE OBJECT (see Section 5.3). Finally, for each conceptual metaphor identified, the corpus was investigated again quantitatively, in order to obtain the number of occurrences of each metaphorical pattern instantiating that particular conceptual metaphor. The next section presents the results of the analysis.

² The online version of the Macmillan dictionary is available at www.macmillandictionary.com - <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>. The online version of the Cambridge dictionary is available at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>.

5. Results

5.1 Core values conveyed in the AMC corpus

The raw frequency in the AMC corpus of each of the value-related word listed in the Personal Values Dictionary (PVD) was calculated. The total hits of all the value-related words referring to each of Schwartz's (2012) values (security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, universalism, self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, and power) was calculated. For example, the sum of the number of occurrences of the words 'afraid', 'alert', 'attention', 'barrier', 'calculation', 'calm', 'careful', 'catastrophic', 'caution', 'consequences', 'crisis', 'custody', 'damages', 'dangerous', etc. (Ponizovskiy et al. 2020) was calculated. The results provided an indication of how often the characters in the movies mention a certain value (e.g. in the case of the words above, to the value of security).

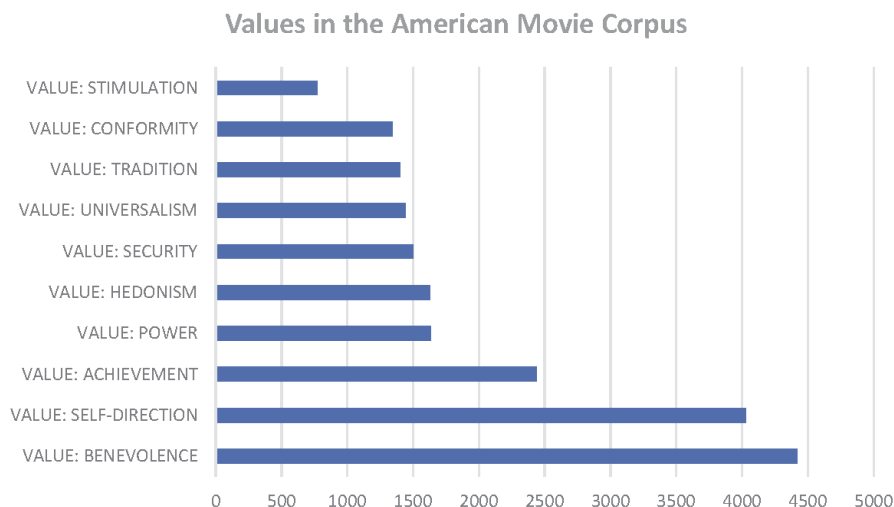
The results for each value based on the number of occurrences of the PVD value-related words in the corpus are reported in Table 1.

Table 1 - *Frequency of PVD words for each of Schwartz's (2012) values*

<i>Value</i>	<i>Frequency of PVD value-related words</i>
Benevolence	4,418
Self-direction	4,032
Achievement	2,441
Power	1,636
Hedonism	1,631
Security	1,500
Universalism	1,441
Tradition	1,399
Conformity	1,343
Stimulation	773

Based on the idea underlying the PVD, which posits that the spontaneous expression of certain value-related words is an indicator of individual value preferences, it was possible to calculate the relative significance attributed to each value in the corpus (see Graph 1).

Graph 1 - Reference to values in the American Movie Corpus



As Graph 1 shows, benevolence is the most frequently mentioned value in the corpus, accounting for 22%, closely followed by self-direction at 20%. In Schwartz's (1992, 11) definition, the underlying drive behind benevolence values is to maintain and improve the well-being of individuals with whom one frequently interacts on a personal level. Benevolence represents the higher order dimension of "self-transcendence", i.e. values that go beyond self-interest and advocate for the well-being of both nearby and distant individuals, as well as the natural world (Schwartz 1992, 44). The focus is therefore on the impact of one's actions on others.

As regards self-direction, Schwartz (1992, 5) remarks that "[t]he defining goal of this value type is independent thought and action – choosing, creating, exploring". Self-direction represents the higher order dimension "openness to change". It organises values based on how much they drive individuals to pursue their own intellectual and emotional passions exploring unpredictable and uncertain paths. This is in contrast with the inclination to maintain the existing state of affairs, along with the stability it offers in relationships with close individuals, institutions, and customs (Schwartz 1992, 43). Values oriented towards openness to change signify a need for exploration and embracing new experiences and opportunities.

5.2 Metaphorical patterns for the key values in the corpus

The focus of the subsequent part of the study centred on the values of benevolence and self-direction, given their significance in the corpus. The MPA method developed by Stefanowitsch (2004, 2007) was applied to identify and analyse the metaphors associated with them.

As the MPA method prescribes, words that pertained to the target domain were investigated for recurring metaphorical patterns. Based on the criteria of frequency (occurring 100 times or more) and distribution (occurring in 35 films or more) within the corpus, the PVD value-related words that were selected for further investigation are: ‘need’ (frequency 874; range 50), ‘love’ (f 676; r 49), ‘help’ (f 432; r 50), ‘care’ (f 210; r 49), ‘thought’ (f 436; r 50), ‘idea’ (f 253; r 49), ‘mind’ (f 244; r 47), ‘plan’ (f 130; r 36). The words ‘need’, ‘love’, ‘help’ and ‘care’ express the value of benevolence, while the words ‘thought’, ‘idea’, ‘mind’ and ‘plan’ reflect the value of self-direction. Since the aim was to shed light on the conceptualisation of abstract concepts through metaphors, two words referring to human beings (‘mom’ and ‘friend’) were excluded from the analysis, despite their high frequency in the corpus. The patterns formed by the modifiers, verbs, prepositions of the value-related word were extracted with the aid of Sketch Engine.

A total of 172 different potential metaphorical patterns were extracted for the selected value-related words. These patterns were then examined manually through an in-depth exploration of concordance lines and broader sections of text, in order to identify and analyse the metaphorical mappings. The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) was applied (Pragglejaz Group 2007), so as to pinpoint instances where semantic tension emerged, enabling a differentiation between a word’s metaphorical and non-metaphorical meanings.

5.2.1 Metaphorical patterns for the key value of ‘benevolence’

As mentioned above, the analysis concerning the conceptualisation of the key value of benevolence was carried out on the following value-related words: ‘need’, ‘love’, ‘help’ and ‘care’. Table 2 illustrates the conceptual metaphors (CM) which were obtained for the value word *need* based on the metaphorical patterns (MP) that were extracted from the corpus (the number of occurrences of the examples is indicated in square brackets).

Table 2 - *Conceptual metaphors for the value-related word ‘need’*

CM	Examples of MP	Total n. of occurrences of CM
A NEED IS AN ILLNESS (FULFILLING A NEED IS CURING AN ILLNESS)	<i>cure a need</i> [1]; <i>in desperate need</i> [5]	6
A NEED IS AN OBJECT	<i>have no need</i> [1]	3
A NEED IS A CONTAINER / PLACE	<i>in need</i> [3]	3
A NEED IS A HUMAN BEING / A SMALL CHILD	<i>childish need</i> [1]; <i>oppressed need</i> [1]	2

The metaphors conceptualising ‘need’ in the corpus portray it as varying in nature, generally as a negative aspect of human experience. The most frequent metaphor expressing the concept of ‘need’ is the metaphor A NEED IS AN ILLNESS, which conveys the idea that needs require attention and care, similarly to how an illness demands treatment. This con-

cept is also conveyed through the A NEED IS A HUMAN BEING/SMALL CHILD metaphor. A NEED IS AN OBJECT exemplifies an ontological metaphor, which represents a manner of conceiving “events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances” (Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 25) and conveys the idea that a need is something tangible. This idea becomes even more visual through the CONTAINER/PLACE metaphor which suggests that a situation of need is something a person would want to be out of.

Table 3 illustrates the metaphors that conceptualise the idea of ‘love’ in the corpus.

Table 3 - *Conceptual metaphors for the value-related word ‘love’*

<i>CM</i>	<i>Examples of MP</i>	<i>Total n. of occurrences of CM</i>
LOVE IS A CONTAINER / PLACE	<i>in love</i> [70]; <i>love is amazing</i> [1]	71
FALLING IN LOVE IS AN ACCIDENT	<i>fall in love</i> [28]	28
LOVE IS A HUMAN BEING	<i>keep love alive</i> [1]; <i>love is blind</i> ; <i>love [...] can save</i> [1]; <i>fight love</i> [1]	5
LOVE IS A HIDDEN OBJECT	<i>lose love</i> [1]; <i>find love</i> [1]; <i>secret love</i> [1]	3
LOVE IS A NUTRIENT	<i>sweet love</i> [1]; <i>amazing love</i> [1]	3
LOVE IS AN ACTIVITY	<i>love is about + Verb Phrase</i> [2]	2
LOVE IS A JOURNEY	<i>all-time love of your life</i> [1]; <i>first love</i> [1]	2
LOVE IS SOUND	<i>love is [...] a shout</i> [1]; <i>love came to me [...] a voice</i> <i>filled with harmony</i> [1]	2
LOVE IS WAR	<i>fight love</i> [1]	1
LOVE IS THE SKY	<i>star-crossed love</i> [1]	1
LOVE IS A FAITH	<i>believe in love</i> [1]	1

The wide range of ways in which ‘love’ is conceptualised suggests that the corpus includes a diverse array of perspectives on love, possibly reflecting individual viewpoints or varying interpretations of the concept. The metaphor LOVE IS A CONTAINER / PLACE is the most frequent conceptual metaphor with 71 instances. This implies that love is seen as something tangible and a definable space where a person is immersed. The metaphor FALLING IN LOVE IS AN ACCIDENT correlates with this conceptual representation of love. It is the second most frequent metaphor with 28 occurrences, and it implies that the view of love that is conveyed is that of something that happens unexpectedly and a force beyond control. It suggests that the idea of love is perceived as something outside of conscious decision-making, emphasising the element of surprise or chance. The metaphor LOVE IS A HUMAN BEING occurs 5 times, which suggests that some level of agency or personification

is attributed to love. Other metaphors have limited occurrences. A few of these, such as LOVE IS WAR, were also underscored by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 49).

Table 4 reports on the conceptual metaphors that express the concept of ‘help’.

Table 4 - *Conceptual metaphors for the value-related word ‘help’*

<i>CM</i>	<i>Examples of MP</i>	<i>Total n. of occurrences of CM</i>
HELP IS AN OBJECT/A TOOL	<i>X need help</i> [31]; <i>X use help</i> [3]; <i>get help</i> [2]	71
HELP IS A POSSESSION / HELPING SOMEONE IS GIVING AN OBJECT / RECEIVING HELP IS BEING GIVEN AN OBJECT	<i>X’s help</i> [1]; <i>your help</i> [24]; <i>our help</i> [2]; <i>my help</i> [2]	29
HELP IS A CONTAINER; HELPING SOMEONE IS TAKING THAT PERSON OUT OF A CONTAINER	<i>help out</i> [7]	7
HELP IS A HUMAN BEING	<i>X was a huge help</i> [1]; <i>X has been a [...] big help</i> [1]	2

The most frequent metaphorical patterns realise the metaphor HELP IS AN OBJECT/A TOOL, which maps the abstract concept of ‘help’ onto the concrete domain of objects or tools. The prevalence of this metaphor in the corpus suggests that the understanding of ‘help’ is shaped by our experiences with physical objects and tools that assist us in achieving certain goals. This prominence further underscores that the notion of help is often framed as a practical instrument for resolving issues and overcoming obstacles. As the table shows, ‘help’ is also frequently conceptualised as a possession, thus entailing that help is seen as a valuable resource that can be exchanged between individuals. The metaphor conveys, therefore, a transactional understanding of help, which is represented as something that can be owned, shared and transferred.

The conceptualisation of help as a CONTAINER and the act of helping as removing someone from that container suggests that help is understood as a means of rescue from a difficult situation or constraint and as a way of relieving someone from their troubles. The metaphor HELP IS A HUMAN BEING, albeit less frequent, interestingly provides a different conceptualisation of the idea of help. By mapping the concept of help onto the human domain, this metaphor emphasises the interpersonal nature of assistance, suggesting that help is understood as a personal connection, involving direct interaction between individuals.

Table 5 reports on the conceptual metaphors identified for the value-related word ‘care’.

Table 5 - *Conceptual metaphors for the value-related word 'care'*

<i>CM</i>	<i>Examples of MP</i>	<i>Total n. of occurrences of CM</i>
CARE IS AN OBJECT	<i>take care of</i> [61]; <i>have care</i> [1]	68
CARING IS GIVING A PART OF SOMETHING TO SOMEONE ELSE	<i>sharing is caring</i> [3]	3
CARE IS A COMMODITY	<i>afford care</i> [1]; <i>be entitled to care</i> [1]	2
CARE IS A COVER	<i>under [your] care</i> [1]	1

The prevailing metaphor is CARE IS AN OBJECT, implying that care is perceived as tangible, concrete, and potentially something that can be owned. The entailment for this metaphor is that BENEFITING FROM SOMETHING IS RECEIVING AN OBJECT. This conceptualisation is further reinforced through the metaphor CARE IS A COMMODITY metaphor, which also entails that BENEFITING FROM SOMETHING IS BUYING AN OBJECT. In this sense, care is treated as a transactional commodity, where individuals may expect reciprocation or compensation for providing care.

As regards the metaphor CARING IS GIVING A PART OF SOMETHING TO SOMEONE ELSE, this can be seen as deriving from correlation in experience, whereby GIVING AN OBJECT TO SOMEONE ELSE IS CARING FOR THEM. In this sense, care is understood as a process of sharing, implying that care involves selflessness, empathy, and the act of giving oneself or one's resources to meet the needs or well-being of others. The metaphor CARE IS A COVER reveals that care is sometimes perceived, though not as often, as a protective shield or a mode of protection. It implies that care is a means of shielding someone from harm or providing a barrier against negative experiences.

5.2.2 Metaphorical patterns for the key value of 'self-direction'

This section reports on the conceptual metaphors for the key value of 'self-direction' that were identified in the AMC corpus. As previously mentioned, the analysis focused on the following value-related words: 'thought', 'idea', 'mind' and 'plan'. Table 6 outlines the metaphors conceptualising the concept of 'thought'.

Table 6 - *Conceptual metaphors for the value-related word 'thought'*

CM	Examples of MP	Total n. of occurrences of CM
A THOUGHT IS A POSSESSION	<i>your thoughts</i> [3]; <i>my thoughts</i> [2]; <i>X had a thought</i> [3]	8
A THOUGHT IS A MOVEABLE OBJECT	<i>share thoughts</i> [1]; <i>send good thoughts</i> [2]; <i>thought passes through X's brain</i> [1]; <i>thought has crossed X's mind</i> [1]	6
THINKING SOMETHING IS GIVING AN OBJECT TO THAT THING	<i>give thought to something</i> [3]	3
KIND THOUGHTS ARE HIGH QUALITY OBJECTS	<i>good thoughts</i> [2]	2
A THOUGHT IS AN OBJECT MADE UP OF PARTS	<i>a coherent thought</i> [1]	1
A THOUGHT IS A COMMODITY	<i>it's the thought that counts</i> [1]	1
A THOUGHT IS A WRITTEN TEXT	<i>read your thoughts</i> [1]	1
A THOUGHT IS A SOUND	<i>hear your thoughts</i> [1]	1

The most frequent conceptual metaphor is A THOUGHT IS A POSSESSION. This suggests that individuals have ownership and control over their thoughts and are free to shape their own perspectives and decisions. This idea is further strengthened by means of the A THOUGHT IS A COMMODITY metaphor, which indicates that thoughts are viewed as a valuable resource.

The OBJECT ontological metaphor underscores specific facets of the concept of 'thought'. The most frequent, which is brought to the forefront through the metaphor A THOUGHT IS A MOVEABLE OBJECT, conveys the idea that thoughts can be freely manipulated and transported, as individuals have the agency to control and direct their thoughts according to their own will or intentions. Through the metaphor A THOUGHT IS AN OBJECT MADE UP OF PARTS, thoughts are conceptualised as complex entities composed of various elements or components, implying that individuals have the capacity to analyse, dissect, and assemble their thoughts, thus allowing for deeper understanding and independent thought processes.

The WRITTEN TEXT metaphor conceptualises thoughts through written communication. This potentially implies that the ability to think and convey ideas in a coherent and structured manner, similarly to the style of written text is valued. The SOUND metaphor implies that thoughts are also conceptualised as audible sounds, which emphasises the importance of being able to articulate and share one's thoughts verbally.

As regards the value-related word 'idea', Table 7 illustrates the conceptual metaphors that were identified.

Table 7 - Conceptual metaphors for the value-related word 'idea'

CM	Examples of MP	Total n. of occurrences of CM
AN IDEA IS A POSSESSION	<i>Adam's idea</i> [1]; <i>X got an idea</i> [13]; <i>your idea</i> [7]; <i>her idea</i> [1]; <i>our idea</i> [1]; <i>his idea</i> [2]; <i>my idea</i> [5]; <i>have no idea</i> [86]; <i>whose idea</i> [1]; <i>their idea</i> [1]	114
REASONABLE IDEAS ARE HIGH QUALITY OBJECTS	<i>good/better idea</i> [27]	38
AN IDEA IS A LIVING ORGANISM	<i>crazy idea</i> [1]; <i>love the idea</i> [2]; <i>fancy the idea</i> [1]; <i>this whole idea was hatched</i> [1]; <i>like the idea</i> [7]; <i>I'll give that idea a smile</i> [1]	14
REASONABLE IDEAS ARE BIG OBJECTS	<i>great idea</i> [12]	12
AN IDEA IS AN OBJECT	<i>like the idea</i> [7]	7
AN IDEA IS AN OBJECT MADE UP OF PARTS	<i>whole idea</i> [6]; <i>entire idea</i> [1]	7
AN IDEA IS A COMMODITY	<i>dollar idea</i> [2]; <i>billion dollar idea</i> [1]; <i>stole our idea</i> [1]; <i>idea is [...] worth millions</i> [1]	6
UNREASONABLE IDEAS ARE LOW QUALITY OBJECTS	<i>bad idea</i> [3]; <i>horrible idea</i> [1]	5
UNDERSTANDING SOMETHING IS RECEIVING AN OBJECT	<i>get an accurate idea</i> [1]	3
AN IDEA IS A LIGHT SOURCE	<i>bright idea</i> [1]	1
AN IDEA IS A SUBSTANCE	<i>cool idea</i> [1]	1

The metaphors conceptualising ideas as OBJECTS/POSSESSIONS/COMMODITIES/SUBSTANCES suggest that ideas have value and can be owned or traded. Self-direction tends to be represented as a way to assert ownership over one's ideas and to take responsibility for their development and implementation.

As the table reports, reasonable ideas are seen as HIGH-QUALITY/BIG OBJECTS, while unreasonable ideas are conceived as LOW-QUALITY OBJECTS; this implies a recognition of the importance of critical thinking and the ability to discern between good and bad ideas. These metaphors are in line with the UP-DOWN spatialisation metaphors which, as described by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 22), are profoundly ingrained in a certain cultural framework. Here, the idea that "more is better" aligns with the concepts of MORE IS UP and GOOD IS UP.

The metaphor AN IDEA IS A LIVING ORGANISM suggests that ideas are endowed with human-like characteristics, allowing them to be assessed, admired, or even disliked. The

metaphor UNDERSTANDING SOMETHING IS RECEIVING AN OBJECT suggests that knowledge can be acquired and expanded through personal effort. The LIGHT SOURCE metaphor expresses the notion that ideas illuminate and guide individuals' thinking and actions.

Several of the metaphors found in the corpus (AN IDEA IS A LIVING ORGANISM, AN IDEA IS A COMMODITY, AN IDEA IS A LIGHT SOURCE) align with the conceptualisation of 'idea' as delineated also in the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 47-48).

The conceptual metaphors identified in the AMC corpus for 'mind' are reported in Table 8.

Table 8 - *Conceptual metaphors for the value-related word 'mind'*

<i>CM</i>	<i>Examples of MP</i>	<i>Total n. of occurrences of CM</i>
THE MIND IS A CONTAINER	<i>come from minds [1]; out of your minds [10]; crossed your mind [3]; in mind [6]; looked inside my mind [1]; go through your mind [1]</i>	22
NOT BEING REASONABLE IS BEING OUT OF THE CONTAINER	<i>out of your minds [10]</i>	10
THE MIND IS AN OBJECT	<i>little mind [1]; lost their minds [5]; a lot on my mind [3]; messed with my mind [1]; take my mind off X [1]; read your mind [7]; change your mind [6]; blows her mind [2]; put your mind to it [3]</i>	9
THE MIND IS A WRITTEN TEXT	<i>read your mind [7]</i>	7
FORMING A NEW OPINION THAT IS DIFFERENT FROM THE PREVIOUS ONE IS REPLACING AN OBJECT	<i>change your mind [6]</i>	6
THE MIND IS A HIDDEN OBJECT	<i>lose their minds [5]</i>	5
THE MIND IS A MOVEABLE OBJECT	<i>take my mind off her [1]; put your mind to it [3]</i>	4
THE MIND IS A LIGHT OBJECT	<i>blows her mind [1]</i>	2
CONTROL OF THE MIND IS RIGHT (i.e. NOT LEFT)	<i>get your mind right [2]</i>	2
THE MIND IS A SUBSTANCE / LEARNING NEW THINGS IS EXPANDING A SUBSTANCE	<i>expand her mind [2]</i>	2

<i>CM</i>	<i>Examples of MP</i>	<i>Total n. of occurrences of CM</i>
THE MIND IS A LIGHT SOURCE	<i>brightest minds</i> [1]	1
INTELLIGENT MINDS ARE HIGH QUALITY OBJECTS	<i>best minds</i> [1]	1
DECIDING SOMETHING IS UP / DECIDING SOMETHING IS PRODUCING	<i>made her mind up</i> [1]	1

The CONTAINER metaphor is the most frequent; it emphasises that thoughts and ideas are contained in the mind, thus implying that individuals have control over them. This is consistent with the metaphor NOT BEING REASONABLE IS BEING OUT OF THE CONTAINER, which suggests that the ability to direct one's thoughts in a way that is reasonable and coherent is valued in this culture.

The mind is also frequently conceptualised through the ontological metaphor THE MIND IS AN OBJECT, which has various entailments. Firstly, seeing the mind as an object implies that individuals can exercise control over their own thoughts and decisions. As an object, the mind can also be MOVEABLE, LIGHT, and it can be REPLACED. These entailments convey the idea that adaptability, flexibility in thinking and adjusting one's thoughts and perspectives to new information or circumstances are valued. The orientational metaphors CONTROL OF THE MIND IS RIGHT and DECIDING SOMETHING IS UP, as well as the metaphors REASONABLE IDEAS ARE HIGH QUALITY OBJECTS and DECIDING SOMETHING IS PRODUCING reinforce this conceptualisation. Consistently with the above, not being reasonable is seen as BEING OUT OF THE CONTAINER, and not being able to think logically and coherently is represented through the metaphor of the HIDDEN OBJECT.

Table 9 reports on the conceptual metaphors that were identified in the corpus for the value-related word 'plan'.

Table 9 - *Conceptual metaphors for the value-related word 'plan'*

<i>CM</i>	<i>Examples of MP</i>	<i>Total n. of occurrences of CM</i>
A PLAN IS AN OBJECT	<i>all part of the plan</i> [1]; <i>I don't like the plan</i> [2]; <i>create a [...]</i> <i>plan</i> [1]; <i>make plans</i> [1]; <i>great plan</i> [2]; <i>big plan</i> [1]; <i>little plan</i> [1]; <i>my/your/her/their plan</i>	43
A PLAN IS A POSSESSION	<i>my</i> [4]; <i>your plan</i> [12]; <i>her</i> [2]; <i>their plan</i> [1]	19
A PLAN IS A MACHINE	<i>plan has failed</i> [2]; <i>the plan worked</i> [3]; <i>all part of the plan</i> [1]	6

<i>CM</i>	<i>Examples of MP</i>	<i>Total n. of occurrences of CM</i>
A PLAN IS A HUMAN BEING	<i>genius plan</i> [1]; <i>the plan says</i> [1]; <i>the sanity of the plan</i> [1]; <i>I don't like the plan</i> [2]	5
A GOOD PLAN IS BIG	<i>great plan</i> [2]; <i>big plan</i> [1]	3
A PLAN IS A WRITTEN TEXT	<i>misread the plan</i> [2]; <i>an earlier version of the plan</i> [1]	3
A PLAN IS A PATH	<i>go off the plan</i> [1]; <i>get in the way of your plans</i> [1]	2
A GOOD PLAN IS A LIGHT SOURCE	<i>brilliant plan</i> [1]	1

The most frequent metaphor is the ontological metaphor *A PLAN IS AN OBJECT*. This metaphor portrays plans as tangible, manipulable objects. This implies that plans can be possessed (*A PLAN IS A POSSESSION* is the second most frequent metaphor), controlled, and modified and suggests that individuals have the freedom to direct and adjust their plans according to their own preferences (e.g. ‘create a plan’).

The *OBJECT* metaphor is elaborated further in the corpus. A plan is also conceived with greater specificity as a machine, which emphasises the systematic and structured nature of plans. The *HUMAN BEING* metaphor suggests that plans are perceived as having human-like qualities such as agency, autonomy, and rationality. This metaphor conveys the idea that individual decision-making and the ability to shape and direct sound plans is valued in this culture. A less frequent conceptualisation of ‘plan’ is *A PLAN IS A PATH*, whereby a plan is understood as a journey or route to follow. The *WRITTEN TEXT* metaphor consistently suggests that plans have an organised structure that provides guidance and direction. A good plan is conceptualised by means of both size (*A GOOD PLAN IS BIG*), aligning with the “more is better” concept as discussed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 22) and illumination (*A GOOD PLAN IS A LIGHT SOURCE*), drawing on the idea – based on experience – that light offers guidance and clarity.

6. Discussion and concluding remarks

The first aim of the paper was to identify the key values expressed through language in American movies. The analysis found that benevolence and self-direction are the most frequently mentioned values in the corpus. They refer to – respectively – the two higher order dimensions of self-transcendence, i.e. prioritising the welfare of others (Schwartz 1992, 44), and openness to change, i.e. favouring independent thought, action, and emotions (Schwartz 1992, 5).

After identifying the two core values, the analysis sought to shed light on the conceptualisation of these values through metaphors. The focus was placed on metaphorical patterns that incorporated words reflective of benevolence and self-direction.

As regards benevolence, the data show that the American movies place an emphasis on personal connection and empathy between individuals, kindness, nurturing relationships, and support for others. Acts of care and assistance are seen as essential and are represented in the movies as powerful sources of support and nurturance.

This was revealed particularly through the analysis of the metaphorical patterns containing the value-related words 'care' and 'help'; these concepts are prominent in the films and the acts of caring and helping are highly regarded. Care and help are both metaphorically conceptualised most frequently as an OBJECT and a TOOL (e.g. "I will take care"; "I could use some help"). The high occurrence of these ontological metaphors indicates that care and help are seen as something tangible that has value, can be offered to those in need, or exchanged and compensated.

Love is represented in the movies as a force that provides protection, and falling in love is seen as a transformative experience. The metaphor LOVE IS A CONTAINER/A PLACE (e.g. "I was never in love") is the most frequent metaphor for love. This suggests that love is also shown as something that can provide containment and, ultimately, a sense of safety and protection.

The metaphor FALLING IN LOVE IS AN ACCIDENT (e.g. "if you hadn't fallen in love") is moderately frequent. This metaphor suggests that love is seen as an unexpected and uncontrollable event. It implies that love can happen spontaneously, without deliberate intention and lies beyond an individual's control. While this may not directly speak to the value of benevolence, it does indicate that love is represented as an unexpected and transformative experience in the American movies.

With relation to the value of benevolence, the metaphor LOVE IS A HUMAN BEING (e.g. "keep love alive") seems to reflect the belief that love has qualities and characteristics similar to those of a person, such as the ability to care, understand, and support. Through the personification of love, the value of empathy, compassion, and interpersonal connection as essential elements of benevolence is accentuated.

The fact that benevolence is seen as essential for an individual's well-being is reflected in the LOVE IS A NUTRIENT metaphor (e.g. "my sweet love"). Just as nutrients are vital for physical health, benevolence is considered necessary for maintaining emotional health and overall happiness, suggesting that it is a fundamental aspect of individual and communal well-being.

At the same time, the metaphor LOVE IS A HIDDEN OBJECT (e.g. "love is simply lost") also points to another aspect of benevolence that is represented in the movies: the idea that it might not always be obvious or openly shown. Just as finding a hidden object takes effort, recognising benevolence could demand observing and understanding subtle cues.

The data also show that benevolence towards needs is valued in this culture to some extent. The metaphors A NEED IS AN ILLNESS/A HUMAN BEING/A SMALL CHILD (e.g. "born of childish need"; "the hardest part was curing that oppressed need of yours") suggest that needs are perceived as something that requires attention and care, similarly to how an illness demands treatment. These metaphors imply that needs are seen as deserving of assistance, but they also suggest that fulfilling somebody's needs may require effort and resources.

Regarding the other core value that emerged from the study, i.e., self-direction, the analysis revealed that American movies tend to emphasise an individual's ability to control and shape their own thoughts and beliefs. Metaphors like *THE MIND IS A CONTAINER*, *THE MIND IS AN OBJECT* and *THE MIND IS A WRITTEN TEXT* (e.g. "I'll keep that in mind"; "this is blowing my mind"; "I can read your mind") underscore that the mind is conceptualised as a repository for thoughts and ideas, while the metaphor *CONTROL OF THE MIND IS RIGHT* (e.g. "what you need is time to get your mind right") suggests that American films promote a positive perspective on individuals' autonomy and self-control in governing their thoughts and actions. Consistently with this view, the metaphors *REASONABLE IDEAS ARE HIGH-QUALITY/BIG OBJECTS* (e.g. "I've got a better idea"; "it's a great idea") and *DECIDING SOMETHING IS UP/PRODUCING* (e.g. "when she made her mind up about something") also place an emphasis on the importance of critical thinking and sound reasoning. Conversely, through the metaphors *NOT BEING REASONABLE IS BEING OUT OF THE CONTAINER* (e.g. "you're out of your mind how are you gonna get away with this") and *UNREASONABLE IDEAS ARE LOW QUALITY OBJECTS* (e.g. "that's a horrible idea please don't do that") the American movies suggest that deviating from rationality is undesirable.

The data also show an emphasis on understanding (*UNDERSTANDING SOMETHING IS RECEIVING AN OBJECT*) (e.g. "so that you know everyone here could uh get an accurate idea of what we're talking about") and forming new opinions (*FORMING A NEW OPINION THAT IS DIFFERENT FROM THE PREVIOUS ONE IS REPLACING AN OBJECT*) (e.g. "for some reason you change your mind"). This suggests that the movies emphasise the significance of personal drive and self-direction when it comes to acquiring knowledge, growing intellectually, and remaining open to new viewpoints. The metaphors conceptualising a plan as *AN OBJECT*, *A MACHINE*, *A PATH*, *A WRITTEN TEXT*, and *A LIGHT SOURCE* (e.g. "we need a plan"; "my plan is working"; "when you're gonna go off the plan"; "there's no misreading the plan when it comes to you"; "your brilliant plan has failed") consistently convey the idea that individuals are expected to actively shape their own lives, set goals, and proactively work towards achieving them. Overall, the data reveal that the key aspect in the concept of self-direction is a sense of control and independence; this places the responsibility on individuals to proactively guide their decisions and actions.

It is important to acknowledge that the outcomes of the present study have been inherently shaped by the composition of the AMC corpus. This corpus includes the dialogues from movies designed for various target audiences and spanning diverse cinematic genres, historical periods and socio-cultural settings. All these elements can potentially influence the values that are communicated in a movie, as well as their conceptualisation through metaphors. Studies conducted on more narrowly focused corpora, whether in terms of time frame, setting or genre, may, therefore, provide partly diverging results. Moreover, the AMC includes films spanning a fifty-year period that were examined in the present study from a synchronic perspective. Future research adopting a diachronic approach could provide valuable insights into changes over time regarding the prominence of certain values over others.

While recognising these limitations, the present study offers an insight into core cultural aspects of American society as reflected in cinema. The prominence of benevolence underscores the importance of personal bonds, empathy, and the act of providing care and support to others. The fundamental role of love in individual and communal well-being is also emphasised, along with its portrayal as a transformative phenomenon. Additionally, the focus on self-direction, critical thinking, and personal drive sheds light on the ideal of autonomy and control over one's thoughts and actions represented in American movies. These insights can provide a foundation for further exploration of value metaphors in other cultural contexts and languages, which could also reveal whether there is a certain degree of universality across languages concerning the conceptualisation of values. In an audience studies perspective, further research could explore and compare the perceptions of value metaphors among viewers with different cultural backgrounds.

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