



## THE ANXIETY OF AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS IN PLAY SCRIPT *THE HUMANS* (2015) BY STEPHEN KARAM

Novrianti Sri Padilla<sup>1</sup>, Leni Marlina<sup>2</sup>

English Department  
Faculty of Languages and Arts  
Universitas Negeri Padang  
email: [novriantisripadilla@gmail.com](mailto:novriantisripadilla@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This thesis is the analysis of a play script written by Stephen Karam entitled *The Humans* (2015). It explores the issue of the Anxiety of American Middle Class reflected by the protagonist Erick Blake as an representation of American middle class. It is also intended to find out the contribution of fictional devices such as character, stage direction and setting in revealing the issue of the Anxiety of American middle class. This analysis is related to the concept of Anxiety which developed by Sigmund Freud (1949) that is supported by the text –based and context-based interpretation. The result of the analysis from the play script *The Humans* (2015) shows about the anxiety of American middle class that experienced by protagonist can be seen through causes and symptoms of anxiety.

**Key words:** *Anxiety, American Middle Class, Causes and Symptoms.*

### A. INTRODUCTION

*The Humans* (2015) play script written by Stephen Karam, reflects the issue about the anxiety of American Middle Class. The anxiety of American middle class in this analysis refers to the anxiety of character that worries about his status as an American middle class. Erik and his family are the representation of American Middle Class. The protagonist, Erik Blake is a sixty years old man and works as an equipment manager for twenty-eight years in a Catholic high school. His first daughter works as a lawyer and the second daughter work as Bartender. He has to work hard to survive in America to get better life. He and his family have financial problem and it makes him always worry about his future. He cannot sleep well and get bad dreams because of his problem. He never wants to talk about his dream to his wife. Moreover, he lives in Pennsylvania while his daughters live in New York. The distance between him and his daughters makes him feel anxious about his daughters. The anxiety of the protagonist can be seen through causes and symptoms of anxiety.

<sup>1</sup>English ELLSP of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang graduated on December 2019

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang



The anxiety of American middle class that is experienced by protagonist refers to causes of anxiety. In this analysis, the protagonist has three causes of anxiety. The protagonist feels stress about his financial problem. He lost his job. It makes him has trouble payment. The higher cost of living in New York makes him worries about his future. Those problems affect his social status.

The anxiety of American middle class that is experienced by protagonist refers to symptoms of anxiety. The protagonist has three symptoms of anxiety. First, the protagonist has trouble sleeping. Second, he has bad dreams. He represses his entire problem and released it through bad dream. At the end, the protagonist has panic attacks.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

The analysis of the play script *The Humans* (2015) by Stephen Karam is done through text-based interpretation. The play script is analyzed by using fictional devices of drama such as character, stage direction and setting. The fiction of drama is used to reveal the meaning of the play script. Character is used as the representation of American middle class who have the anxiety about financial and family problem. Stage direction is used to show the movement of the character and the situation in the play. Then, setting is used to show the condition that creates the anxiety of American middle class.

In addition, this analysis deals with the psychoanalysis theory anxiety by Sigmund Freud. For Sigmund Freud there are three kinds of anxiety, they are; neurotic anxiety, moral anxiety, and realistic anxiety. In this research, the writer emphasizes realistic anxiety because they relate to the characters that have anxiety. This research also relates to defense mechanisms because it is need to cope with anxiety. Here, two kinds of defense mechanisms that writer emphasizes in this analysis are repression and displacement.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter discusses the issue of anxiety of American middle class in *The Humans* (2015) by Stephan Karam. The anxiety of American middle class in this analysis can be seen through the causes and symptoms of anxiety that experienced by protagonist. In other words, this chapter explores the anxiety of American middle class that worries about his problems that affects his social status. Furthermore, fictional devices such as character, setting and stage direction are applied in revealing this issue.

### **2.1 Causes of Anxiety**

The anxiety of American middle class that is experienced by protagonist refers to causes of anxiety. The protagonist feels stress about his financial problem. He lost his job. It makes him has trouble payment. The higher cost of living in New York makes him worries about his future. Those problems affect his social status.

The protagonist feels anxious because he stress about his financial. He lost his job as an equipment manager in catholic high school. It can be depicted in this following dialogue:

ERIK : that's not ( important)- I am not getting my pension now, they could fire me before it kicked in, all right/ so now-  
AIMEE: they can take away/ your pension?  
Erik: it's (complicated) they're private school so they can do whatever  
Aimee: but why they fire you?  
It's (complicated) they have this morality code,okay?./ St.paul's makes  
Aimee: Okay...  
Erik: you sign it/ and if you  
Brigid: why would a morality code-were you,like selling drugs on the playground?  
Erik: there was an incident and all right, so/ they could  
Brigid : what kind of  
Erik: they could fire me because of this incident, it's-  
Aimee: what are u talking about?  
Erik: cheated on your mom, with, uh a teacher from school and .. we're okay but, I realize this is a lot to just ( unload)..you guys okay?  
Aimee: uh,not really  
Brigid : just..(keep going) (p.85)

The quotation above shows the character as representative of American middle class has financial problem. He works as equipment manager in catholic high school. He works for twenty-eight years. That work helps his financial to fulfil his life. He lost his job before his pension. He lost his job because he cheated with a teacher in that school. Lost his job means his social status as American middle class will falling into lower class. It makes protagonist worries about his future. He thinks that his family are close to poverty. Meanwhile, it is impossible for him to get a new job. He is too old to find a new job. In America, to get a good job they must be fresh graduated, talented and have good education. Moreover, technology and global competition are destroying many middle class careers. Higher skills not only needed to get good job and incomes. For American middle class lost job means that he lost his dream to get a better life in America because he cannot maintain his life to become upper class.

Moreover, the phenomenon above also shows the relation between the concept of anxiety by Sigmund Freud. The protagonist stress about his financial because he lost his job. The word "stress" relate to the key concept of "anxiety" by Sigmund Freud. Based on theory shows, stress is the reason why someone feels anxiety.

The higher cost of living in America makes protagonist worries about his future. He has to pay his mother and daughter medical care cost. The medical care cost in New York is higher than national average. It is rising every year. It makes Erik feels anxious because he stress about his financial. It can be depicted in the following dialogue below:

Erik: the cost of taking momo's been a surprise, you wouldn't even believe how much the (medical stuff costs)  
Brigid : are you guys..  
Aimee: okay So you're behind?  
How much are you behind?

Brigid : Can mom not retired now?  
Erik: I don't want you (worrying about)-  
Aimee: would I able to help you out? Or is it too much for me even-  
Erik: I think-you've lost your job/ and'' I have your own medical stuff to (worry about)  
Aimee: I know but I still want to know how deep a hole you're in. (page 86)

The dialogue above shows the protagonist has trouble pay his mother medical care cost. Through setting, in New York it can show the higher of medical care cost in New York rather than other cities. It makes protagonist stress about that payment. Moreover, he lost job and it makes him did not have money to pay his mother medical care cost. His income is not enough to pay all his debt. Moreover, his daughter (Aimee) also lost his job as lawyer. She lost his job because she has sick. It makes the protagonist has to pay his mother and his daughter medical care cost.

Moreover, the phenomenon above relate to the concept of anxiety by Sigmund Freud. From word “worry” shows the key concept of anxiety. Freud state the anxiety is a feeling of worry and nervous. It means that the protagonist has anxiety because he feels worries about his financial.

Meanwhile, he has trouble paying his mother medical care cost. It can be depicted in quotation below:

Brigid: I'm not trying to judge you I just want can't hire someone to help with?  
Deidre: it'd cost a hundred bucks a night to hire someone to watch her, a hundred bucks to make sure she doesn't fall and get hurt  
Erik: hey okay  
Deirdre: No, she needs to think before she opens her mouth  
Brigid: sorry (page 58)

The quotation above shows the higher cost of medical care cost in New York. Through setting shows the atmosphere is tense. The protagonist As American middle has trouble to pay his mother medical care cost. From utterance “*it'd cost a hundred bucks a night to hire someone to watch her, a hundred bucks to make sure she doesn't fall and get hurt*” shows the higher cost of medical in New York. The protagonist with low income cannot hire someone to take care of Momo because his income is not enough to pay that. It takes a hundred bucks only to hire someone to watch Momo. Moreover, he has to pay for cost of therapy and medicine. It will take much money. He worries he cannot balance between his household expenses with health costs. Therefore, they decided to take care of Momo by themselves.

Moreover, the cost of education is also high in New York. It facts depicted by dialogue below:

Brigid: No, I'm spending most of my nights bartending- you guys don't even know how much student debt I'm stuck with  
Erik: yeah, well I do know who refused to go to a state school  
DEIRDRE: ohhh, score one for Dad

Brigid: I know you were gonna say that (page 17)

The quotation shows the protagonist's daughter chooses to study at private school rather than state school. From utterance "*no, I'm spending most of my nights bartending-you guys don't even know how much student debt I'm stuck with*" shows the Brigid as protagonist's daughter has to work hard to pay his student debt. Moreover, from utterance "*yeah, well I do know who refused to go a state school*" shows the protagonist's daughter choose to study at private school rather than state school. It shows that she wants to show her social status as American middle class can pay school by they own money. It is to keep their prestige from the society. Meanwhile, after graduated they have to pay student debt. They have student debt and difficult to find a good job. In America, government prefer to state student to get better job rather than private school. It makes them shrinking in America.

That payment makes the protagonist feels anxious about his future. He lost his job and did not save money to maintain his life. It can be depicted in following dialogue below:

Erik: I'm working out Aimee  
 Aimee: do you have anything saved? Dad, do you have any saving?  
 Erik: we don't have savings Aimee/ we've been stretched  
 Aimee: okay, okay well you're telling us this when you're drunk/so sorry if I'm getting frustrated  
 Erik: well we haven't had saving for years (page 87)

The dialogue between Erik and his daughter (Aimee) shows that the protagonist did not have any saving. The setting in this play is New York. Through setting it can be portrayed the atmosphere is tense. Aimee wants to make sure about his father financial. In utterance "*do you have anything saved? Dad, do you have any saving?*" Show that Aimee wants to make sure about his father's financial. She afraid his family social status will be shrinking when his father did not have job and save money for future. She lost his job as lawyer make her family more have potential to become lower class. Moreover, from word "frustrated" relates to the key concept of anxiety by Sigmund Freud. Anxiety happens when someone excessive worrying about his problem and it become frustration.

Furthermore, his status as American middle class with low income makes him difficult to save his salary. It shows by quotation below:

Erik: I'll tell you Rich, save your money now. I thought I'd be settled by my age, you know but man it never ends, mortgage, car payments, internet, our dishwasher just gave out.  
 Richard: oh man  
 Erik: yeah,yeah. (small beat) don't you think it should cost less to be alive?  
 Richard: Ha, absolutely

Erik: I even started cutting my own hair to try save a few bucks. Messed it up pretty good. Thank God I'm married..  
(Page 22)

From quotation above shows the protagonist difficult to get a better life in New York. The payment makes him cannot saving money for his future. As American middle class the protagonist has to live pay check for pay check. With low income he cannot manage his financial well. Moreover, lifestyle in America makes them to spend many expenses. Therefore, it makes them to take much debt only to fulfil their lifestyle in American. They have to buy house, car and branded goods only to get the prestige from society. Although, they knows that their income are not enough to cover it all.

Erik cannot save his money for his future because his salary is not enough to fulfill his life in America. The cost of living in America is higher than other countries. As American middle class with low income makes him difficult to get a better life in America. He has to struggle to survive in that country. In order to get prestige, he has to maintain his social status. His financial problem affects his social status. It makes the protagonist worries to lose his status as American middle class. All problems that affects his social status makes him feel anxiety.

## 2.2 Symptoms of Anxiety

The anxiety of American middle class that is experienced by protagonist refers to symptoms of anxiety. The protagonist has three symptoms of anxiety. First, the protagonist has trouble sleeping. Second, he has bad dreams. He represses his entire problem and released it through bad dream. At the end, the protagonist has panic attacks.

First, the symptoms of anxiety that experienced of protagonist is trouble sleeping. The protagonist cannot sleep because he worries about his daughter. It can be depicted in following dialogue below:

Erik: you want to call the super about the noise?

Brigid: No, this is New York, people are loud, why are you so-

Deirdre: hey, he had a rough night, he hasn't sleeping/ he's been- Erik you haven't

Brigid: why haven't you been sleeping? Are you okay?

Erik: Deirdre, c'mon (please don't talk about this) (to Brigid) I'm-yeah, I'm okay.. (page5)

The quotation above about dialogue Erik and his wife shows that Erik has trouble sleeping. It proves that Erik has anxiety because he excessive worrying about his daughter. His problem makes him difficult to sleep. The setting in dialogue above is in New York. Through setting it pictured that protagonist cannot accept the changes that occur in America. He became sensitive about his neighbor. It is the reaction of his trouble sleeping. In utterance "*hey, he had a rough night, he hasn't sleeping/ he's been-Erik you haven't*" shows that the protagonist has nightmare and difficult to sleep. The trouble of sleeping happens

because the protagonist worries about his daughter that lives apart from him. His daughter also has an illness. It makes him feel anxious about his daughter.

Moreover, he represses his entire problem and released it through bad dreams. In utterance "*Deirdre c'mon (please don't talk about this)*" shows that Erik did not want to tell his dream to his daughter. From dialogue above shows the key concept of anxiety which is "*repression*". In this analysis the protagonist used repression as his defense mechanism to release his anxiety. He used bad dreams as an outlet of his repression.

The protagonist has trouble sleeping because he has a tragedy with his daughter. It makes him worry about his daughter's safety. It is supported by dialogue below:

Erik: I've been losing sleep trying to – I was to Father Quinn in how.. / just thinking about losing you guys get me thinking about  
Aimee: what're you saying?  
Erik: when you were gone, when-  
Aimee: what're you saying?  
Erik: the fireman was holding a body with your same suit on?  
Aimee: dad  
Erik: but with a coat of ash melted onto her? Like she got turned into a statue like  
Aimee: dad  
Erik: there was gray in her eyes and mouth even, like she  
Aimee: like she had no face? (page 92)

The quotation above shows the protagonist worries about his daughter. It relates to his trauma. He and his first daughter had a tragedy in New York. He accompanied his daughter to attend job interview in New York Firm. When the tragedy happened, he cannot find his daughter because he had no cell phone. He sees the fireman took a body with same suit with his daughter. He thinks his daughter dead. That tragedy makes him have trouble sleeping. He cannot sleep all night. Moreover, his second daughter chooses to live in place that near with the tragedy. The phenomenon above relates to the key concept of anxiety by Sigmund Freud. From word "losing sleep" it shows the key concept of theory which called "repression". In this analysis the protagonist represses his problem and difficult to sleep.

Second, the protagonist has bad dream. It can be shown in quotation below:

Brigid: tell us come on, Big Guy  
Erik: a coupla nights I've had this (recurring remember)  
there'll be a , a woman  
Brigid: uh huh and?  
Erik: (trying to remember) her back's to me or maybe...Something happens where...Her head turns and...  
I can see that her face is all (messed up)  
Deirdre: what?  
Erik: her skin's stretched over her eyes and her mouth (page 46)

The dialogue above shows that protagonist has bad dream. He dreams about a woman without a face. It relates to his tragedy in New York. When the accident happens, the protagonist sees a woman died. He cannot forget that accident and

become bad dream. In utterance “*her skin’s stretched over her eyes and her mouth*” shows that he has terrible dream. The phenomenon above relate to the key concept to theory of anxiety by Sigmund Freud. From word “dream” relate to defense mechanism concept. According to Freud bad dreams is a repression of a problem. When people repress something, he will get bad dream to release his anxiety.

The quotation below supporting the issue above:

Brigid: how are you doing? Is that why you aren’t sleeping?  
Erik: I’ll sleep tonight  
Richard: oh yeah, sorry Erik, we got sidetracked before- you were talking about your dream?  
Deirdre: oh, so you’ll tell him details about your dream buy you won’t tell me?  
Richard: he didn’t tell me details  
Brigid: well, now I don’t believe you  
Erik: no guys I don’t even remember it, there’s nothing to tell  
Deirdre: I saw the way you woke up, don’t tell me you can’t remember something (page 33)

The quotation above shows the protagonist has bad dreams because of his anxiety through his daughter. The protagonist did not want to talk about his dream to his wife. He represses his entire problem and become bad dream. It relate to theory about defense mechanism. The protagonist used repression as his defense mechanism. When he feels anxious he repress his problem to release his anxiety. It shows by statement “*no guys I don’t even remember it, there’s nothing to tell*” shows that Erik didn’t want to tell about his dream to his wife.

Moreover, he has bad dream as an outlet of his repression. Based on explanation above it shows the key concept theory of anxiety which is “*repression*”. In this analysis, the protagonist used defense mechanism repression to release his anxiety. In additional, the protagonist also used defense mechanism displacement when he feels anxious. It can picture in quotation below:

*Small beat. Erik drinks. Richard and brigid prepare food in the kitchen (page 20)*  
*Richard smiles, Erik drinks. Beat Erik takes a sip of beer.(page 23)*  
*Erik drinks his beer, thinks. (page 34)*  
*Erik is alone for a few beats, lost, drunk. (page 92)*

Through stage direction shows the protagonist always drinks alcohol when he feels anxious. The protagonist drinks alcohol as his displacement. . It helps the protagonist to reduce his anxiety. From word “drinks” relate to the concept of defense mechanism. The protagonist drinks alcohol to reduce his anxiety. It is kind of his defense mechanism to protect his life from anxiety.

At the end the protagonist got panic attacks. It shows by the quotation above:

*Sounds of Erik’s heavy breathing*  
*Erik groping for a chair*  
*Erik dragging it to main downstairs door*  
*Click-clack, click-clack, click-clack*  
*Erik’s breath shortens*  
*Click-clack, click-clack, click-clack*



*Erik's heart pounds, he looks toward the door (page 96)*

Stage direction shows that the protagonist got panic attacks because of his problems. He experienced heavy breathing. From utterance “*Erik's heavy breathing, click-clack, click-clack, click-clack*” shows the protagonist experienced panic attacks. It happens when the character make the confession through his daughter that he cheated with a teacher. It is the reason why he lost his job. In that school, they have morality code. As a teacher, they cannot have special relations with other teacher. He get fired because his mistake. He cheated with a teacher in that school. It makes him gets panic attacks because he worries disappointed his daughter.

Erik: (what happening to me? What's wrong with me? This cannot be happening to me. Oh god, how could I have gotten that worked up?)

*Downstairs: Erik can't quite move yet; he clutches a support beam or sits in a chair, taking steady breath, trying recover.*

*Alone, Erik collects himself still unsure of what just transpired.*

*He goes into the kitchen and splashes some water on his face.*

*He can't quite believe it. He can't quite grasp it.*

*Rattled, the events released something for him- a strange weight's been lifted off his chest.*

*He takes deep breaths, trying to ground himself.*

*This should all last at least fifteen seconds. (page 97)*

Through stage direction shows the Erik has panic attacks. It is referred to his reaction when he feels anxious. It happens when the protagonist has heavy breath and cannot move. He feels chest pain and fear of dying. His panic attack is of his reaction when he feels in danger situation. The phenomenon above relate to the key concept of theory by Sigmund Freud. From word “*released*” related to the concept of “*repression*”. According to Freud, released is a way of people to reduce his anxiety. It is a kind of repression and it will revealed trough bad dream.

In summary the quotation above shows the anxiety of American middle class that experienced by protagonist, Erik Blake. It can be seen through causes and symptoms of anxiety that experienced by character. Through causes of anxiety, the protagonist has anxiety because he has trauma about New York. He worries about his daughters that live in New York. Moreover, he stress about his financial problem. He lost his job. It makes him has trouble payment. Furthermore, the higher cost of living in New York makes him worries about his future. Those problems affect his social status.

Meanwhile, the protagonist experienced the symptoms of anxiety. The protagonist has trouble sleeping. He has bad dreams. He represses his entire problem and released it through bad dream. At the end, the protagonist has panic attacks. Moreover, character, stage direction and setting help to reveal the anxiety that experienced by protagonist as representative of American middle class.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

The issue of American middle class can be revealed in the play script written by Stephen Karam, *The Humans* (2015). Literary devices such as

character, setting and stage direction contribute in uncovering the meaning beyond the play script. Text-based and context-based also plays the anxiety in discovering the issue of anxiety of American middle class. The anxiety of American middle class refers to the causes and symptoms of anxiety that experienced by protagonist Erik Blake as American middle class. Through literary devices, it can be examined that protagonist have anxiety because he had traumatic experiences in New York. Moreover, he worries to lose his status as American middle class.

By using literary devices as strategy to reveal the meaning of the play script, this study finds out how the protagonist has anxiety because of his problem to get a better life. His anxiety can be seen through the causes and symptoms that experienced by protagonist. First, the anxiety of protagonist can be seen through causes of anxiety. The protagonist has anxiety because he has problem about his financial. He lost his job. Moreover, the higher cost of living in New York also the reason why protagonist has anxiety. The problem makes him afraid of falling into lower class. Moreover, he worries about his future that never getting ahead. That problem makes him worries about his social status class. Besides, the second anxiety of protagonist can be seen through symptoms of anxiety. The protagonist has trouble sleeping. He has bad dreams. He represses his entire problem and released it through bad dream. At the end, the protagonist has panic attacks. Moreover, character, stage direction and setting help to reveal the anxiety that experienced by protagonist as representative of American middle class.

Through Sigmund Freud theory about the concept of anxiety its shows the anxiety that experienced by protagonist as American middle class in play script *The Humans* (2015) by Stephan Karam. According to Freud, anxiety is the original reaction in the trauma and it reproduces later in danger situation. Anxiety is a warned of danger. Anxiety creates worries, fear and painful and uncomfortable feelings. In this analysis, the protagonist worries about his financial and family. The anxiety that experienced by protagonist can be seen through causes and symptoms of anxiety. Anxiety also relate to defense mechanism concept. This defense mechanism helps the protagonist release anxiety. One of his key concepts is repression. It can be seen though trouble sleeping and bad dream. Bad dream is an outlet of his repression.

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