

November 2021

Defining the American Dream: A Generational Comparison

Clara R. Riggio

The Evergreen State College, rigcla17@evergreen.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.utc.edu/mps>

Recommended Citation

Riggio, Clara R. (2021) "Defining the American Dream: A Generational Comparison," *Modern Psychological Studies*: Vol. 27 : No. 1 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://scholar.utc.edu/mps/vol27/iss1/1>

This articles is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals, Magazines, and Newsletters at UTC Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Modern Psychological Studies by an authorized editor of UTC Scholar. For more information, please contact scholar@utc.edu.

Abstract

The American Dream has functioned as an idealized view of success in the United States since its conception in the 1930s. As generations pass, questions of plausibility and definition surround the American Dream. Over the course of 20 semi-structured interviews composed of open-ended questions, participants were asked how they defined the American Dream and how plausible they felt achieving the American Dream was for them. The participants were then compared across age differences. Across participants, six clear themes were most often associated with the American Dream: hard work, freedom, social mobility, material gain, family connection, and individuality. Older participants had a richer and more clear definition of the American Dream while younger generations expressed more skepticism toward the concept.

Defining the American Dream: A Generational Comparison

The American Dream has been the objective for many since its first appearance in James Truslow Adams' 1931 book, *The Epic of America*. Written in the midst of the Great Depression, Adams sought to motivate the working class by coining the phrase that would inspire a nation, but how strongly do we hold these beliefs now? The American Dream is defined in this work as, "a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position" (p.375). The definition invokes thoughts of social mobility and achievement, but who does the dream speak to? Have we, as a nation, moved away from this ideal or is the American Dream still alive and well?

Many have asked these same questions about the applicability (and achievability) of the American Dream in the 21st century. A recent National Public Radio (NPR) survey, shows that 40% of lower-income adults responded that the American Dream was "out of reach" compared to 5% and 3% of higher-income adults and individuals in the top 1%, respectively (Neel, 2020). A Pew Research study conducted in 2017 found that 17% of people across demographic groups found the American Dream to be "out of reach," showing a recent decrease in the belief that the concept is attainable for everyone (Smith, 2017). However, neither of these studies provided a definition for their participants. Neel (2020) stated, "the responses reflect whatever people think it is" (para. 7), while participants in Smith (2017) varied in what they deemed essential to the concept, a majority citing freedom and family over financial gain.

Certain aspects of the American Dream seem to be more important to some definitions than others. One core theme that many focus on is the concept of social mobility and the idea that anyone is capable of moving up the social ladder. While it is known from previous research

that one's social class at birth is greatly correlated with their social class later in life, America's social mobility rates in the early 21st century have primarily remained stable (Haskin et al., 2008). The participants in the two studies conducted by Chambers et al. (2015) showed great pessimism in regard to social mobility and often underestimated the amount of movement between social classes. The researchers theorize that this negative view of our nation's current social mobility is greatly impacted by the media's coverage and commentary on unemployment rates, wealth inequality, and other pressing economic issues in the United States. Viewing social mobility as unattainable in today's society may cause it to be less of a defining theme within the American Dream for younger individuals.

Political and economic changes in recent years seem to have a wide effect on our society's beliefs about success. Schoon & Mortimer (2017) conducted research on young people's subscription to the idea of the American Dream after the 2008 recession. While the research indicates young people's distrust in institutions, it also proves that the American Dream remains a salient concept that continues to guide individual behavior. One difference from previous generations, however, is the idea of a "collective agency" or "cooperative individualism" (Schoon & Mortimer, 2017). These concepts are much more socially, rather than individually, focused which shows a prioritization of social relationships among younger generations. Understanding this shift from individual to collective may also help us understand individual's definitions of success and whether or not their goals are primarily self-focused. The American Dream is inherently self-focused in its ideas. This may mean that younger people are less likely to identify with the American Dream as a goal.

Aronson et al. (2014) collected qualitative data from interviews with young adults seeking higher education after the Great Recession. Based on these interviews it is apparent that

while the Great Recession yielded a lot of fear from young generations, it also emphasized the importance of higher education and motivated many young people to pursue college degrees. This shifting of the job market and an approximated 102% increase in the United States student loan debt over the past decade (Hess, 2020) has created a new motive for financial success and higher-income jobs for many young people. Some scholars, however, have posited whether or not money can buy happiness. Nickersen et al. (2003) hypothesized that “aspiring to and achieving financial success may have negative psychological consequences, such as depression, anxiety, lessened self-esteem, and dissatisfaction with life”(p.531). To investigate this, the researchers used longitudinal data in which participants self-reported the importance of personal financial success and their overall satisfaction with life, both when they were college students and approximately 20 years later. This research suggested that while there did appear to be “negative consequences of the goal for financial success, these consequences are neither as deleterious nor as pervasive as previous studies have suggested” (Nickersen et al., 2003 p.535). Despite the inverse relationship between financial goals and satisfaction with life, researchers determined that “the positive effect of household income on overall life satisfaction was stronger than the negative effect of the goal for financial success” (Nickersen et al., 2003, p. 535). This research shows a strong linkage between financial prosperity and happiness. This could imply a larger attribution of material and financial gain to the idea of the American Dream.

Upon uncovering some of the themes that are most frequently associated with the American Dream, I began to wonder if the differences across definitions could be compared across demographics. Race has been the most frequently studied demographic and shows some interesting comparisons. Cohen-Marks and Stout (2011) used data from a Los Angeles study to look at various racial and ethnic groups’ perceptions of the American Dream. Their findings

indicate that many minority groups do not feel that they have achieved or will achieve the ideal of the American Dream, the exception being Latinx individuals who generally have a more optimistic approach to the idea. Cohen-Marks and Stout did, however, find that despite some pessimistic views of the American Dream, there was no evidence of diluted faith in the concept. In Devos et al. (2010), the researchers argue that a national identity is not equally accessible to all Americans. This is shown in the implicit and explicit perceptions of Americans and what groups of people are more often associated with the nationality. It is apparent from the research that members of the Latinx community are less likely to be viewed as American by both white and Latinx individuals. This lack of identification with Americanism could be the driving force behind achieving the American Dream. This idea could encourage further research around working toward the American Dream as a means of assimilation to dominant culture.

In Cernkovich et al. (2000), researchers explored the ways that strain and social control theory's effects on criminology also had an effect on African Americans' perceptions of economic success and achieving the American Dream. The researchers supported the argument that social class differences affect one's aspirations and expectations in regard to economic achievement. The Life Role Salience scale, which asks individuals to determine how important certain work, familial, and societal roles are to them, was used in the study to measure participants' commitment to certain roles that were heavily associated with the material and career aspects of the American Dream. The findings of this study indicate that low-income Black Americans maintain a stronger commitment to the career and material goals of the American Dream than their white counterparts. In 2012, Stout & Le published their findings on changed perceptions of the American Dream among Black Americans due to the increase in positive symbols for the Black community, specifically the election of President Barack Obama. Surveys

conducted between 1987 and 2010 suggest that despite worsening economic statuses among Black Americans, positive perspectives toward the American Dream increased after Obama's election. The research also suggests that Black Americans are more likely to associate hard work with success than their White counterparts. Stout & Le (2012) argue that positive symbols have a greater effect on Black perceptions of the American Dream than economic and career success. Race as a mechanism for measuring identification with the American Dream is a fruitful area of research. There is a lack, however, in qualitative methodology and deeper discussion around the meanings of the American Dream to marginalized peoples.

Generational differences are another area that has been understudied. While we have seen a recent decline in belief in the American Dream, it is unclear whether or not younger people value it as closely as their older counterparts. Though some studies such as Dries et al. (2008) have looked into the ways different generations define success, there has been relatively little overall difference. In that particular study, the primary category through which success was measured was life satisfaction, which appeared as the priority across age groups. There is also a lack of qualitative research in this area and the concept of the American Dream in general. In reviewing the literature and coming up with my own definition of the American Dream, I decided to conduct this research.

My main goal is to determine what themes people associate with the American Dream and whether these themes differ across generations. This research will compare Baby Boomers and Generation X with participants who are Millennials and Generation Z. I theorized that older individuals would identify more strongly with the concept of the American Dream and that younger individuals would express more skepticism. All research within this study was conducted by me, the author. I identify as a white woman and am a member of Generation Z. I

was born into an upper-middle-class family and raised in the suburbs of Los Angeles, California. I would also consider myself liberal and am a registered Democrat. My ancestry is broadly European and my mother and father are, respectively, first and second generation Americans. These factors could have a hand in the collection of my data and could influence the ways I view the phenomenon of the American Dream. Though I maintained a stance of impartiality, asking the same questions to each participant, my demographics, heritage, and beliefs could have an influence on my participants, analysis, and the study as a whole.

Method

Participants

I interviewed 20 individuals (students and staff) that were recruited at The Evergreen State College, a small liberal arts college in Olympia, Washington. To create a generational comparison, eight of my participants were born before 1981 (which includes Generation X and Baby Boomers) and the other twelve were born in 1981 or after (which includes Millennials and Generation Z). Out of these participants, ten identified as men, nine identified as women, and one identified as non-binary.

Materials

The schedule for the interviews was semi-structured and open-ended. In these interviews, I asked open-ended questions about each participant's perceptions of, and identification with, the American Dream (Appendix). I also included questions about the participant's familial history and whether or not they feel components like immigrant status, age, or race affect their definition of the American Dream. The questions I chose were meant to delve deeper into the individual's personal life and determine if their definition was unique to their experiences. I employed family history questions to ask about their parents and grandparents to determine how previous

generations have instilled or rejected the concept in their lives. I also enjoyed hearing about participants' paths to achieving the American Dream and whether or not they felt it to be an important goal in their lives.

Procedure

In order to gather information on participants' individual definitions of the "American Dream", I conducted semi-structured, qualitative interviews. First, I approached students and staff members on The Evergreen State College campus and explained the interview process. The interviews were conducted in private study rooms in the library building and took approximately 15 to 30 minutes per participant. During the interview, I audio recorded participants' answers. After these interviews were conducted, I transcribed the audio recordings and was able to code for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In doing this, I looked for major trends in vocabulary that were used when defining the "American Dream" as well as the imagery, characters, and qualities that participants associated with the concept. Lastly, I looked for trends in each generation and was able to compare and contrast participants across generations.

Results

Over the course of these 20 interviews, multiple recurring topics of conversation stood out, playing significant roles in the way these participants defined the American Dream. Definitions were influenced by extraneous factors such as family history, skepticism toward the United States government, and generational differences. The most common themes that occurred across these differences included hard work, freedom, social mobility, material gain, family connection, and individuality.

Hard Work

Hard work was one of the most cited qualities associated with the American Dream. Because of its importance in relation to work, especially among those in the working class, the American Dream is invariably linked to an individual's ability to work hard to reach their goals. One older participant stated that the entire basis of the American Dream was, "the idea that you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps. That you can be a self-made man or a self-made woman." This is often the precursor to achieving the American Dream and is one of the most recognized aspects in literature and other narratives.

Seeking higher education was especially important to a lot of participants and showed that hard work extended in other ways beyond manual labor. A Millennial cited all of the work that would allow her to achieve the American Dream stating, "My plans are to finish college, go to grad school, get a white-collar job, buy some land and a house, that's still the American Dream." This seems to be a typical life path for many Americans in the 21st century and much of the late 20th century. Even within the last decade, we have seen a vast increase in Americans who hold college degrees. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, "From 2010 to 2019, the percentage of people age 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher jumped from 29.9% to 36.0%"(Alonzo, 2019). Many people have also avoided the traditional college route and returned to school later in life. This increase has greatly changed the demographics of our workforce in terms of level of education.

Freedom

As the United States is considered "the land of the free," it's no surprise that freedom is also linked to the American Dream. Many participants spoke about the freedom to do as they please, whether that be from a place of success or simply one of our inalienable Constitutional

rights. An older participant, an immigrant from Germany, began her interview by defining the American Dream.

The American Dream is, first of all, freedom. Freedom from restrictions from the government. Freedom from entanglement in things that you don't want to be entangled in. American freedom is the best thing. That's why we all came here.

This particular participant emphasized that even the simplest of freedoms, such as freedom of expression or protest, ensure that our lives in America, although they can be hard, are much more privileged than other places in the world.

Another older participant, a man in Generation X, emphasized the way that choice and the American Dream are vital to our society. He states that individuals in the United States do not need to conform to the ways of society if they do not want to. When asked about the importance of the American Dream in his life, he responded, "I find it more as a right than a dream. Like we have this privileged right to have what we want to have...". This quote displays a sense of rightful ownership in the promise of the American Dream. This has been a promise of many politicians throughout the years. Trump even stated that in the case of a Biden presidency, "You could say goodbye to your American Dream" (Wolak & Peterson, 2020). Our right to the American Dream has been promised time and time again, but few have been able to deliver in a way that truly satiates the American people.

Social Mobility

Social mobility is another key component of the American Dream that involves ending in a better social or economic position than where you began. This notion was expressed in many interviews, especially when discussing familial history. The idea of doing "better" than the generations before you and hoping future generations share the same improvement. One older

participant touched on the idea of social mobility through sharing experiences from his childhood.

I was raised in a public housing project in Tacoma [Washington]. My mother was a single mother. We didn't have much. And I think that idea helped me to get out of the projects, do well in school, and get a college education... it was quite clear if I worked hard... I could do something. I could at least get out of the project, have a decent job.

These improvements were often seen in older generations, such as grandparents or great-grandparents. The notion was also heavily linked to individual's definitions of the American Dream, with one participant stating that the most basic point of the American Dream is that, "anyone can grow up to be president. That there's this way that no matter where you start, you can end up in a different place and that opportunities are open to all people."

Material Gain

When asked what they envisioned when hearing the term "American Dream" many participants painted a picture of the nuclear family living in suburbia. These ideal lifestyles have included material items such as, "a white picket fence, golden retriever, and two-car garage" or can be as simple as owning your own home. While some examples of material gain could be extravagant, one younger participant explained that the American Dream is truly about, "having the feeling... you're at home and... have all the resources to be okay." Many participants also mentioned being "comfortable" which was read as having enough resources and not having to worry about scarcity.

A Baby Boomer man cited his grandmother, an interior designer, as one of his role models in achieving the American Dream. "She got to travel the world and interact a lot with

famous designers... in San Francisco and L.A.”. High-profile jobs and examples of luxury (traveling to expensive cities, rubbing elbows with celebrities, etc.) have become crucial to some people’s idea of success. These examples all revolve around money, affluence, and material items. Another Boomer man brings up the example of author Horatio Alger. Alger wrote stories for young adults in the late 19th century. His stories often consisted of a “rags-to-riches” narrative where a young man (who embodies positive qualities like honesty and integrity) rises into the middle class and achieves financial success. These stories inspired young people and encouraged them to make their own way.

Family Connection

Many interviews touched on wanting to be able to provide for a future family. Marriage was not discussed often, but children were. Some participants brought up how important familial bonds were to the previous generations in their families. One participant, whose great-grandparents immigrated from Norway, included family in her definition of the American Dream

They were able to establish a life here ... they were able to start a family, a farm, they were able to just do things and I think for my great-grandma and grandpa that was just their dream: to raise their children and have generations after generations in America, where everything was evolving. I feel like that’s the true definition of the American Dream...

Other participants vaguely mentioned familial happiness in their idea of success and achieving the American Dream, while others questioned if children were going to be a part of the equation for them. One older participant stressed that her emphasis on family was not about offspring but for the family that was already around her. She stated, “I know that for my family, it’s about family. Having that home, and the kids, and the grandkids and all that. But for me it’s about

being around my family,” citing her nieces, nephews, and siblings as the most important people in that example.

Individuality

In a lot of ways, this theme of individuality is opposite of wanting a familial connection, but is also about achievement on one’s own, without financial support from another party. In a quote from an older participant, it is evident that media, such as movies and books, play a large role in the way we define the American Dream.

I think of all these movies... of like the cowboy, out there, on their own, making things happen. And this doesn’t have to be an actual cowboy or cowboy on a horse, but it could be a cowboy in the city. That archetype. And so I’m sure that feeds into my idea of myself, at least in different points in my life. “I’m gonna go and do this on my own. I’m gonna make this thing happen by myself”.

A younger participant claimed that creativity and ingenuity were both important qualities for a person achieving the American Dream to have, showing the importance of individual expression.

We see the need for individuality in so many facets of our society. Creativity, innovation, and uniqueness are all heavily valued. One Generation Z participant cited Kylie Jenner as a model of the American Dream, due to her owning her own business, making a name for herself, and becoming a unique name in the world of pop culture. The same participant spoke to a similar sentiment that is held by many in the younger generations. The growing idea that we do not need to fit into the American Dream’s mold is becoming more popular. The participant finished their interview by stating, “My age group is more able to expand on ideas and know not everything is set in stone and the American Dream changes...” showing that the path to fulfilling the Dream is ever-changing and distinctive to each individual.

Generational Comparison

While these interviews were primarily focused on the recurring themes that play into individuals' definitions of the American Dream, other important aspects of the interviews were assessed in order to better understand the divide between the generations. When asked if they embraced or rejected the American Dream, a majority of participants in the study stated that they were more ambivalent about the concept and the way it is practiced in the United States. One participant, a member of Generation Z, stated that he “[likes] what it stands for... I embrace the ideals that it provides though I do reject some of the... historical things that are tied to it”. Younger participants were very diverse in the way they felt about the American Dream, equally embracing, rejecting, and feeling ambivalent toward the concept. A majority of older participants felt ambivalent to the idea or embraced it while only one blatantly rejected the American Dream.

Younger participants expressed doubt and openly scrutinized the idea of the American Dream and their perceived failings of the current U.S. government 2.4 times more often than those in older generations. Some cited this as cynicism while others simply doubted whether or not the American Dream was an accurate, achievable goal. One millennial participant described the underlying issues that she believes are used to perpetuate the goal of the American Dream. She states, “It’s kind of a myth that’s been used to justify certain behaviors... the ‘pull yourself up by your bootstraps’ ... to turn away from looking at social inequality and issues of systemic oppression.” This suspicion toward the American Dream was also expressed heavily when participants were asked whether or not they felt their race affected their definition or perception of the idea. A majority of the participants were white and expressed some amount of guilt or recognized their privilege within United States society. Many participants felt that because they

were given certain opportunities in life because of their race, they were not identifiable as achievers of the American Dream.

Discussion

Within the current study, it was made clear that no two people have the same definition of the American Dream. Although similar themes were expressed throughout, particular themes were of more importance to different participants. Hard work and material gain were definitely the two most cited themes throughout the research, often remaining linked as a cause and effect. Older participants showed more variation in the themes they mentioned, painting a descriptive image of the American Dream in all of its forms. Younger participants cited material gain most often while older participants focused heavily on hard work, with familial connections and individuality following closely. The frequency that these themes were mentioned by older participants could signify a more multifaceted definition than those of their younger counterparts.

Possible limitations to the study were most likely surrounding the number of participants and their backgrounds. This sample was by no means representative of the demographic makeup of the American people. A majority of my participants identified themselves as white and were primarily students and staff on The Evergreen State College campus. The lack of representation from people of color and individuals from varying socioeconomic classes may not create a holistic definition of the American Dream that can be applied to everyone living in the United States. Political ideologies may also play a role in the participants' responses, as The Evergreen State College seems to have a primarily liberal student body. Conducting further research with Black, Indigenous, and other Americans of color, as well as immigrants would be much more indicative of the ways the American Dream is perceived. Another limitation is the possibility of

my own demographics and biases affecting the research, the participants that I interviewed, and the way they responded to my questions.

Although this population is not completely representative of the United States populations, it still does create a basis, off which further research can be based. One area of interest throughout these interviews was the responses from the four immigrants I interviewed. Each of these participants came from very different parts of the world and it was fascinating to see where the similarities and differences lied. Many cited hard work, repeatedly, while others discussed the expansive freedom that the United States of America allows. Future studies can proceed in a number of different directions as the American Dream is truly a multi-faceted concept. The Life Role Salience scale that was used to determine Black Americans' identification with the American Dream and its components in Cernkovich et al. (2000) could potentially be useful in understanding whether other groups identify with these roles across ideologies, ages, race, and gender. One future direction for this research would be interviewing students who are members of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DACA "Dreamers" make up a large population of college students in the United States. I hope to conduct this research with Dreamers in the future in order to understand their view of America and what opportunities they have here. Another useful direction this research could extend in is the ways that the American Dream is taught to children of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. It was very interesting to hear about people's experiences with their parents and previous generations, but it also may be useful to investigate the language surrounding the American Dream that is taught to us in schools as children.

The American Dream is a grossly under-researched topic, especially in today's political climate. Politicians push the idea that anyone can become rich and successful if they work hard

and make good choices, but many find the American Dream to be less plausible in today's economy and society. The American Dream encourages the working class to continue working until they have surpassed their superiors. The use of this concept to maintain subservience and reinforce the idea that hard work pays off is questionable, especially in today's political climate. The overall concept of the American Dream is viewed as a positive, motivating force in our society, but its underlying motivation could prove that its implementation is dangerous and inequitable to the working class.

References

- Adams, J.T. (1931). *The epic of America*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Alger, H. Jr. (1868). *Ragged Dick; or, street life in New York with the boot blacks*. A.K. Loring.
- Alonzo, F. (2020, March). U.S. census bureau releases new educational attainment data. *United States Census Bureau*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov>
- Aronson, P., Callahan, T., & Davis, T. (2015). The transition from college to work during the Great Recession: Employment, financial, and identity challenges. *Journal of Youth Studies, 18*(9). 1097-1118. doi:10.1080/13676261.2015.1020931.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2). 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
- Cernkovich, S.A., Giordano, P.C., & Rudolph, J.L. (2000). Race, crime and the American dream. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 37*(2). 131-170. doi: 10.1177/0022427800037002001.
- Chambers, J.R., Swan, L.K., & Heesacker, M. (2015). Perceptions of U.S. social mobility are divided (and distorted) along ideological lines. *Psychological Science, 26*(4). 413-423. doi:10.1177/0956797614566657.
- Cohen-Marks, M.A. & Stout, C. (2011). Can the American dream survive the new multiethnic America? Evidence from Los Angeles. *Sociological Forum, 26*(4). 824-845. doi: 10.1111/j.1573-7861.2011.01286.x
- Devos, T., Gavin, K., Quintana, F. J. (2010). Say “adios” to the American dream? The interplay between ethnic and national identity among Latino and Caucasian Americans. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 16*(1). 37-49. doi: 10.1037/a0015868

- Dries, N., Pepermans, R., De Kerpel, E. (2008). Exploring four generations' beliefs about career: Is 'satisfied' the new 'successful'?. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23 (8), 907-928.
- Neel, J. (2020, January). Is there hope for the American dream? What Americans think about income inequality. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org>
- Nickerson, C., Schwarz, N., Diener, E., & Kahneman, D. (2003). Zeroing in on the dark side of the American dream: A closer look at the negative consequences of the goal for financial success. *Psychological Science*, 14(6). 531-6. doi: 10.1046/j.0956-7976.2003.psci_1461.x
- Haskin, R., Isaacs, J., & Sawhill, I. (2008). *Getting ahead or losing ground: Economic mobility in America*. Pew Charitable Trusts.
- Hess, A.J. (2020). U.S. student debt has increased by more than 100% over the past 10 years. *Consumer News and Business Channel*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com>
- Schoon, I. & Mortimer, J. (2017). Youth and the Great Recession: Are values, achievement orientation and outlook to the future affected? *International Journal of Psychology*, 52(1). 1-8. doi:10.1002/ijop.12400
- Stout, C.T. & Le, D. (2012). Living the dream: Barack Obama and Blacks' changing perceptions of the American dream. *Social Science Quarterly*, 93(5). 1338-1359. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-6237.2012.00915.x
- Smith, S. (2017, October). Most think the "American dream" is within reach for them. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank>

Wolak, J. & Peterson, D. A. M. (2020, September). Trump keeps invoking the 'American dream.' Americans are pessimistic that they can achieve it. *The Washington Post*.

Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com>

Appendix*American Dream Interview Questions*

- 1) How do you define “The American Dream”? What does “The American Dream” represent to you?
- 2) What symbolism, images, characters, groups, or qualities do you associate with the American Dream?
- 3) How important is the idea of the American Dream to you? Why?
- 4) In what ways do you identify with the idea of the American Dream?
- 5) In what ways do you embrace or reject the idea of the American Dream?
- 6) Have you/Will you achieve the American Dream? Why/How?
- 7) How long ago did your family immigrate to America? Where from?
- 8) From your perspective, did your parents/guardians achieve the American Dream? How?
- 9) Would your parents/guardians say they achieved the American Dream? Why?
- 10) In what ways was the American Dream important to your parents/guardians?
- 11) How important was the American Dream to previous generations in your family, such as grandparents?
- 12) What ethnicity are you?
- 13) Would you say your ethnicity affects your definition? Why/Why not?
- 14) What year were you born?
- 15) Would you say your age affects your definition? Why/Why not?