

THE AMERICAN DREAM AS A SOURCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONFLICT

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Abstract. *This article examines the American Dream as a source of psychological conflict in American literature. Although the American Dream is traditionally associated with opportunity, success, and self-realization, literary representations often reveal its darker psychological consequences. The study explores how excessive ambition, unrealistic expectations, and social pressure contribute to identity crises, emotional instability, and personal dissatisfaction. Through qualitative literary analysis of selected American literary texts, particularly F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, the research investigates the psychological tensions experienced by individuals pursuing socially constructed ideals of success.*

The findings demonstrate that the American Dream functions not only as a cultural aspiration but also as a psychological burden that shapes human behavior and self-perception.

The study concludes that the pursuit of unattainable ideals frequently generates inner conflict and emotional disillusionment.

Keywords: *American Dream, psychological conflict, identity crisis, self-perception, ambition, success, disillusionment, American literature, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Arthur Miller.*

Introduction. The American Dream has long occupied a central position in American cultural consciousness. Traditionally, it promotes the belief that hard work, determination, and perseverance can lead to prosperity and personal fulfillment regardless of one's social origins. This ideal has inspired generations of individuals seeking economic success and social mobility.

However, literary works frequently challenge this optimistic vision by revealing the psychological pressures associated with the pursuit of success. Twentieth-century American literature often portrays characters whose lives become dominated by unrealistic ambitions and social expectations. These individuals experience internal struggles as they attempt to reconcile personal desires with cultural ideals. In many cases, the pursuit of the American Dream results not in happiness but in frustration, alienation, and psychological distress. This study investigates how the American Dream functions as a source of psychological conflict and examines the emotional consequences of unattainable aspirations in American literary narratives.

Methodology. The research employs qualitative literary analysis and psychological criticism. Close textual reading is used to examine character development, symbolic representations, and thematic structures related to ambition, identity, and emotional conflict. The methodological framework combines literary psychology, cultural criticism, and comparative analysis. Particular attention is given to the psychological experiences of literary characters whose identities are shaped by societal definitions of success. The study analyzes narrative patterns that reveal the tension between aspiration and reality.

Results. The analysis indicates that the American Dream often creates psychological conflict by encouraging individuals to pursue idealized versions of success. Characters frequently measure their self-worth according to social standards of wealth, status, and recognition.

When these expectations remain unfulfilled, feelings of inadequacy and disappointment emerge. In *The Great Gatsby*, Jay Gatsby constructs his entire identity around the dream of achieving wealth and regaining an idealized past. His inability to realize this vision produces emotional isolation and personal tragedy. Similarly, in *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman becomes psychologically trapped by the belief that popularity and material success define personal value. His persistent failure to achieve these goals results in anxiety, frustration, and emotional collapse. The findings reveal that the American Dream can function as a psychological burden when individuals internalize unrealistic cultural expectations.

Discussion. The psychological conflict associated with the American Dream originates from the gap between aspiration and reality. Literary characters often create idealized visions of success that cannot be achieved within existing social conditions. As a result, they experience feelings of failure even when they attain certain forms of achievement. Fitzgerald and Miller demonstrate that external success does not necessarily provide emotional fulfillment. Their protagonists seek validation through wealth, status, and social acceptance, yet remain psychologically dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction reflects broader cultural pressures that encourage individuals to define themselves according to external measures of success. The American Dream also contributes to identity fragmentation. Characters become divided between their authentic selves and the social identities they attempt to construct. Such psychological tension frequently leads to self-deception, alienation, and despair. Through these portrayals, American literature questions the assumption that ambition and achievement inevitably produce happiness.

Conclusion. The study demonstrates that the American Dream functions as a significant source of psychological conflict in American literature. While it offers hope and motivation, it also creates unrealistic expectations that may undermine emotional well-being. Literary representations reveal that the pursuit of socially constructed ideals often results in identity crises, frustration, and personal dissatisfaction. Through their exploration of ambition, self-perception, and emotional struggle, American writers expose the psychological complexities underlying the cultural myth of success. The continued relevance of this theme reflects ongoing concerns about the relationship between personal aspirations and social expectations in modern society.

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