



South Asians and the American Dream: Identifying Common Perceptions and Redefining the Term

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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies and analyzes perceptions of the American Dream in the South Asian immigrant community of Northern Virginia. The American Dream is a deeply complex ideology with many differing perspectives based on person to person. Ignoring the nuance of the concept, modern day media and current research characterizes the American Dream as acquiring success or simply being successful. Opposingly, it is evident that the idea of the American Dream goes far beyond the constraints of success. Studies indicate that in Hispanic and Latinx communities (which are widely studied), the most common perceptions of the American Dream consisted of Economic and Materialistic fortune, Job Opportunity, Family Wellbeing, and Personal Happiness and/or independence. These categories of perceptions are backed up in validity by various authors such as Perman, Akshar, and Del Sid and their individual studies. This paper aimed to apply these categories to South Asian immigrants - a group that isn't commonly studied in this context - and use the results to broaden the definition of the American Dream adapted by the media. To achieve this, research surveys and interviews were carried out with South Asian immigrant adults in Northern Virginia. Through a quantitative content analysis and qualitative thematic analysis of the results, this study identified that one of the most common perceptions of the American Dream is connected to the desire for more job opportunities.



INTRODUCTION

The American Dream can be referred to as the ideal life one might live in the United States, or America, as the country holds a reputation of “the land of opportunities”. This term was coined back in the 1900’s, shaping the classic American life in literature and media for decades to come. The common misconception that the American Dream is made up solely of success defeats the purpose of the American Dream while also misleading many immigrants during their journey to the United States. Existing research and the current definitions of the term “American Dream” pass it off as success, exemplified in one of the most common definitions from Merriam-Webster dictionary: a happy way of living that is thought of by many Americans as something that can be achieved by anyone in the U.S. especially by working hard and becoming successful (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary). This is evidence of the lack of nuance in the American Dream, the main topic being addressed in this study. The research conducted seeks to answer the developed question, “How do adult South Asian immigrants in Northern Virginia perceive the American Dream, and how can these perceptions help redefine the term ‘American Dream’”? Originally, a target study group of both South and East Asians was chosen. Under further analysis, this gap was changed because of the availability of data for collection: Data on solely South Asians would be much easier to collect given the area of study, Northern Virginia. This research will utilize a mixed method approach with a quantitative survey and a qualitative interview, analyzed with both a content and thematic analysis. The use of this approach allows for a deeper understanding of the reality of the American Dream. The hypothesis of this study is that job opportunity and personal happiness would be among the most common perceptions of the American Dream.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This topic requires an extensive review of nuances within the American Dream. The American Dream consists of many different factors, differing based on personal desires. Its definition from the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is “an American social ideal that stresses egalitarianism and especially material prosperity” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). This focuses more on aspects of equality and success, creating a specific category that may not apply to everyone.

“Success” in the American Dream

Initially, when analyzing what immigrants think of the American Dream, it is easier to label every perception as “finding success”. This has been common in most studies. However, using it is too general to summarize the American Dream. Instead, many sublevels and sub-categories should be created, making the American Dream more complex by definition. Russ Perman, an interviewer from the Seattle Press, conveys this idea in *The ‘American Dream’ from immigrants’ perspectives* by detailing three interviews of immigrants’ differing perceptions of the American Dream. Perman’s interview with an Indian researcher revealed how she wanted success in her work life, admitting that her dream is “working a job she loves”, along with her independence (Perman). Success in work can be considered a sublevel of types of success. Job opportunities are influential in immigration, functioning as push factor.. Researcher Tamara Akshar of The Young Researcher journal creates an argument similar to Perman’s by claiming that core notions of the American Dream include “hard work pays off” and “equal opportunity to success” (Akshar 311). Akshar doesn’t label every idea as success, instead elaborating more on its broader implications & adding new ideas or specifying different notions. The multiple sublevels of the American Dream may all be connected to success, but also have nuances of their own

that cannot be categorized into success. The more common sublevels include safety, job/educational opportunities, freedom of religion, family unification, ect (Akshar 308). Lastly, Jessica Del Sid from Liberty University also contributes to the argument by studying Latino and Hispanic immigrants. Del Sid states that many of the immigrants she studied believed that hard work towards finding a job is enough of an American Dream for them (Del Sid). This makes it evident that success in the context of work is found in Hispanic/Latino immigrant perceptions, while also contributing to the argument that many immigrants desire their American Dream to include job opportunities, which functions as a motivator. It can be said that these motivators are what create the many subcategories. Success in general is a constant theme of perceptions and opinions surrounding the American Dream, however it can't function as a notion on its own.

Desired Values

With the clarifications of success in the American Dream, there are also many varying perceptions that exist. In a general experiment inquiring about personal shortcomings, Samantha Smith (research assistant) of the Pew Research Center provides what immigrants might want in an American Dream: "77% of adults say freedom of choice, 70% say having a good family life, and 60% say retiring comfortably". Are all prevalent desires (Smith). Similarly, Mark Hugo Lopez also of the Pew Research Center highlights that the American Dream according to his data involved hard work, financial security, career success, and life milestones (Lopez). These themes are also reflected in a study by Clara R. Riggio of the Evergreen State College called *Defining the American Dream: A Generational Comparison*. Interviews from numerous participants reveal that "Hard work and material gain were definitely the two most cited themes throughout the research, often remaining linked as a cause and effect" (Riggio 15). Other minor categories created were freedom, social mobility, and family connection. The recurring ideas of hard work and material gain present in both Lopez and Riggio's studies create the base of the American Dream, a commonality for people to start out on while they discover personal desires. These values can act as a motivator. Additionally, it is important to consider the possibility of immigrants who may not believe that the American Dream exists. Christopher Timothy Stout and Davy Le of the Social Science Quarterly journal addresses this in their study of African American immigrants titled, *Living the Dream: Barack Obama and Blacks' Changing Perceptions of the American Dream*. According to the data, black immigrants in general are less likely to believe that they have achieved the American Dream, and are skeptical of the fact that hard work can lead to success - one of the main themes of the American Dream (Stout and Le 1339). This study indicates that blacks are more pessimistic regarding the American Dream. Stout and Le also explain this: African Americans felt the greatest affects of the 2008 Great Recession, which led to their socioeconomic status decline (Stout and Le 1339). Since income and employment opportunities are strong predictors of the American Dream, the lack of success in these fields most likely led to the pessimistic perceptions that African Americans have harbored against the American Dream (Stout and Le). It can be concluded from all three studies that the varying views immigrants have of the American Ideal depends on each person, their life status, external factors, and influence surrounding them.

Influential factors in opinions of the American Dream

The American Dream is not one single thing, rather, a term for many ideas. Most values of the American Dream are created from desires and aspirations, which in turn have to be caused by something. This creates an idea that the perceptions one might have of the American Dream can be influenced by external factors. Riggio states that extraneous factors include family history and skepticism of the US government along with ongoing world issues (Riggio 8).



An example of this comes from Stout and Le's study, where the 2008 Economic Crisis was the ongoing issue. Known as the Great Recession, the 2008 Economic Crisis was a financial and economic collapse that cost many their homes, jobs, and life savings. In the context of the topic, this event had caused Black Americans to decline in socioeconomic status, leading to their increased skepticism of the American Dream. Therefore, this external factor influenced Black Americans' perceptions of the ideal America. While harmful occurrences clearly influence perceptions, the more general influences are ones that surround immigrants, impacting their day to day life. This is what creates the personal success ideal, with the occasional interference of events such as the recession.

Achievability

While everyone has their own definition of the American Dream, its overall achievability has been called into question numerous times. One thing to note is that achievability varies greatly based on personal goals, living situations, and other external factors. That being said, existing research has conflicting views on the achievability of the American Dream. Smith argues that the American Dream is not all that hard to acquire. According to Smith's research 36% of United States adult citizens claim they have acquired their American Dream and 46% state that they are on their way (Smith). This is a major contrast to the mere 17% of people who claim that the American Dream is entirely out of reach (Smith). Smith also highlights another minor trend: White people are more likely to say that they have achieved the American Dream than Black and Hispanic immigrants, who lie in the area of "in the process" (Smith). Different meanings of the American Dream that each race might have created this skepticism within immigrants. The inclusion of this establishes the achievability status of the American Dream among immigrants and separates them from the general trend. Furthermore, researchers Sandra Hanson (of the Department of Sociology of Catholic University) and John Zogby support Smith's argument in their article *Latinos are more likely to believe in the American dream, but most say it is hard to achieve*. They conducted an analysis with the general public, concluding from their poll data that public opinion tends to show a rise in optimism regarding the possibility of achieving the American Dream (581). A crucial trend identified was that most Americans disagreed with the statement that the American Dream has become impossible to achieve (Hanson and Zogby 581). While Hanson and Zogby's data doesn't approach immigrants' American Dreams specifically, it continues to bolster support of the general basis regarding achievability. On the other hand there is counterargument present. Mark Lopez had conducted a study of Latino immigrants specifically, arguing how for them, achieving an American Dream was considered to be difficult. 51% say they have achieved it so far, while 46% claim that they have not at all (Lopez). The presence of this idea creates questions surrounding why this difficulty arose. Olivia A. Murphy of the Inquiries Journal provides a possible answer to this (using Chinese immigrants) in her analysis of the character Leon Leong from Far Myenne Ng's novel *Bone*. Leon intends to find his own American Dream with his family, but faces numerous obstacles. Murphy dissected this as cultural limbo, stating that it would be near impossible to try and maintain a balance between new and old cultures. By doing this, the author implies that immigrants may need to abandon their culture or fully assimilate themselves into the new culture. This idea is bound to be controversial, which is perhaps the reason why many still hold this argument.

Gap

It is evident that there are a vast amount of studies covering the topics of immigrants and their ideal American life. While majority of these studies surround the Latinx/Hispanic community



and multiple others focus on various ethnic groups, there is a lack of examination of Asian immigrant groups, specifically South Asians. This serves as the main gap of this study. With this gap, there is a second, minor gap surrounding location of study. For the convenience of the study, the chosen location was Northern Virginia, as there is an overwhelming presence of South Asians there, leading to abundance of potential data. While this location is convenient for the methodology of this study, it also has not been evaluated in the scholarly conversation in the context of this topic, acting as an unintended gap. The purpose of this study is to expand into the gap of South Asian communities, exploring the commonalities and differences of the perceptions of the American Dream. In doing so, the potential to create new ideas of the American Dream is unlocked, leading to a significant contribution to its overall definition.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

To satisfy the purpose of the study, a mixed method approach was applied, with a quantitative survey and qualitative interview. This combination was the best fit for this particular study, as it allowed for a numerical perspective (from the survey) along with justification of that perspective (from the interview). The research methodology focused on obtaining information from immigrants of South Asian descent over the age of 18. The data was collected by sending out interviews containing general questions along with conducting more detail-oriented interviews. The survey consisted of questions that helped create a basic understanding of the distribution in popularity of set American Ideals. These results helped to determine the participants of the interviews (meaning that the most popular ideals identified would be the main subject of interviews). The outcomes of the survey along with those of the interviews were then combined, compared, and analyzed to uncover the common perceptions of the American Dream and its achievability among South and East Asian immigrant communities in the United States. Questions for the interview and survey were inspired by questions from a data image of a research conducted by Samantha Smith of the Pew Research Center: *Most think the 'American dream' is within reach for them*. The use of Smith's questions as inspiration stemmed from the similarity in the main inquiry: her objective of awareness on factors of the American Dream were modeled in the questions through some of the categories of topic analyzed in this research's literature review. The study was approved by a formal Institutional Review Board and all participants will complete a consent form. All procedures are in accordance with the ethical standards. To ensure this, the survey created was inspired by an article from the American Psychological Association titled *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Behavioral Projects Involving Human Participants by High School Students*. Consent forms were either printed and passed out or emailed to participants. Participants' names were only known to my advisor and I. To ensure this, individual private emails were sent.

Research Survey

The commencing step of this process was the online research surveys, sent out to 70 people. The initial goal for the number of respondents was 80 - 100 due to the abundance of potential South Asian participation, however, this became increasingly harder as willing participants were running out. The goal of the survey was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the general opinions participants held surrounding their American Dream. Conducting research through the use of surveys is a prevailing data collection method that can be utilized in many settings. Before any surveys were sent out, willing participants had

consented to their participation in the study. After ensuring that consent was acquired from all partakers, the link to the Google Forms survey was sent out. The survey was only given out exclusively to participants who met the requirements of being an immigrant and having South and/or East Asian roots. Each participant was messaged the link to the survey, however, confidentiality was kept by omitting all identifying information (including email addresses) from data and overall study records. Participants were free to complete the survey in their own time, given that it was completed with enough time for the conduction of the interviews. The surveys helped jump-start the analysis of potential themes identified in the existing research scope. The questions in the survey remained constant for every participant. The beginning page of the form acted as the introductory page, where participants were once again informed of the implications of their participation and made to assent to their continuation of the survey. The second and final page included a Likert scale style set of questions with choices from one to five (one being strongly disagree, five being strongly agree) about pre-set perceptions of the American Dream (see Appendix B). After the Likert scale, there was one question requiring a true or false answer. The results from the survey were compiled into one sheet (see Appendix C). The survey methodology was used to gain a basic comprehensive understanding of the answer to the research question. Surveying people fits the goal of finding perceptions of the American Dream that are not too in depth. A content analysis was used to analyze the survey data due to the quantifiable nature of the survey. Sorting by common words was the easiest method to code the data.

Interview

The concluding element of this two-step process consisted of conducting interviews. After the data from step one was collected and analyzed, certain participants of the survey were chosen to partake in the interview. This was based on the content of each survey form submitted - which set of answers had potential to be analyzed deeper and could have contained new possible subbranches. No participants outside of those who participated in the survey were chosen for the interview in order to maintain a strong and accurate protection of privacy. Each interview was recorded through the Voice Memos app, and transcripts were typed up as well. No names or identifying information were included in recordings and notes. Interviews ran for a set amount of time consisting of no more than 10 - 15 minutes. The interview was created as a semi-structured interview where participants were able to answer questions in an open-ended manner. Participants and the interviewer conversed normally with structure. The interview questions themselves consisted of four profound and open-answer questions regarding participants' personal perspectives and opinions of the American Dream concept. Each interviewee received the same set of questions (see Appendix A). After all interviews were completed and collected, the data was analyzed in a similar manner to the surveys. A qualitative content analysis was used to find common themes, words, and phrases between the interview and survey. Additionally, the interview was analyzed separately for any possible smaller concepts found in the survey. The goal of the interview was to expand on the answers found in the survey. By conducting open-ended interviews with a chance to answer deeply, a deeper and outsider perspective on the data collected in the survey was obtained. This fit the second half of the research goal, where it was necessary to determine how the perceptions would contribute to the overall definition of the American Dream. The use of a thematic analysis allowed for a deep analysis of the ideas from the interview.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Analysis of Survey

A total of 70 survey responses were collected, thus providing a wide range of data to analyze. Seven out of eight total questions were created as a Likert-scale style question (see Appendix B). Accordingly, graphs were created to present a visual representation of the acquired data. The results from the survey were analyzed quantitatively, with the main objective being to identify the strongest perceptions along with the most and least common ones. This numerical perspective sets the baseline for the qualitative analysis of the interview. One thing to note is that a question from the survey was not included in the data analysis process. This was a result of the question not contributing to the problem statement or being of any use to the intended purpose. The exclusion of this question ensured for a better focus on the more valuable data.

Economic Opportunity & Material Success

Figure 1: Question 1: Economic and Material Success

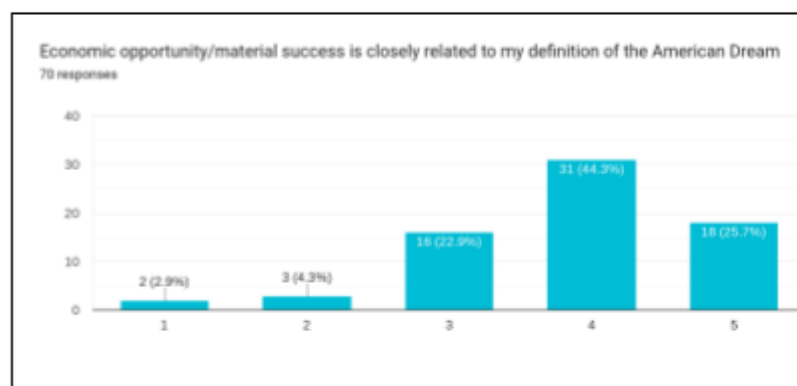


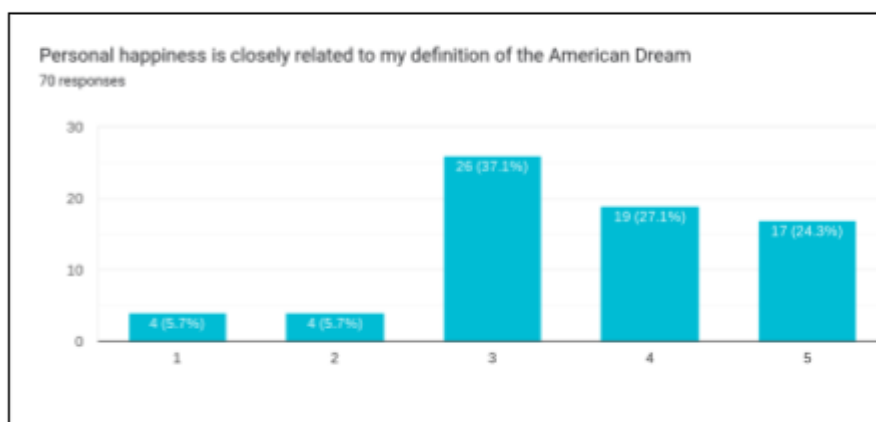
Figure 1 represents the results of Question 1 of the survey. The main perception inquired about was related to economic and material gain. For most of the survey respondents (44.3%), the degree to which they agreed with the statement aligning with their perception of the American Dream fell at a four (agree). 25.7% of respondents selected an accuracy level of five (strongly agree) and 22.9% of respondents selected three (neutral). A total of 70% of

respondents picked a number in the agree to strongly range. With this data, it can be seen that desires of economic and materialistic success had a presence in the majority perceptions of the American Dream of the South Asian community. Because the prevalent answer was four, it can be said that people simply agreed with the statement as opposed to strongly agreeing with it.

Personal Happiness

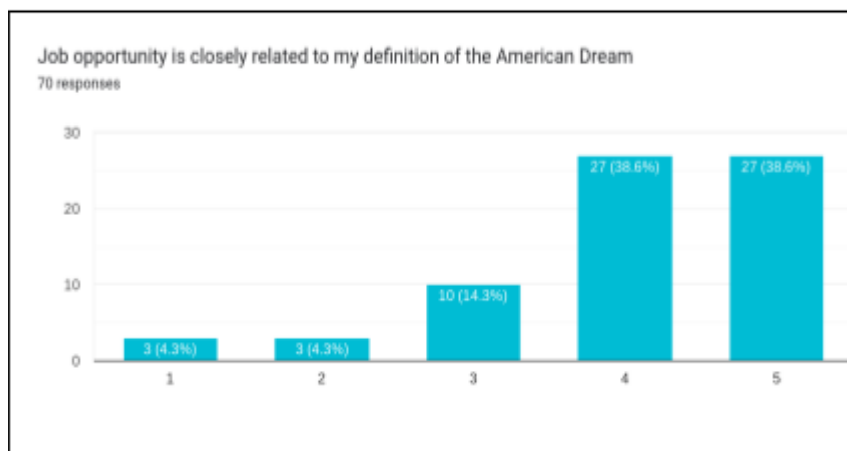
Figure 2 showcases a visual understanding of Question 2 in the validated survey. This question (see Appendix B) acts as a statement relating the American Dream to personal happiness and independence. From the graph, it can be taken that this factor was not important to the majority of the

Figure 2: Question 2 - Personal happiness



respondents (37.1%), with 26 out of 70 answering three. A little over half (51.4%) of the participants answered with fours (27.1%) and fives (24.3%). The least common numbers answered were one and two. The data indicates that personal aspirations and independence are not main desires in an American Ideal. Because of the neutral status, it can be said that it doesn't have an exceptional impact on perceptions of the American Dream for South Asian immigrants like it may have for other immigrant groups.

Figure 3: Question 3 - Job Opportunity

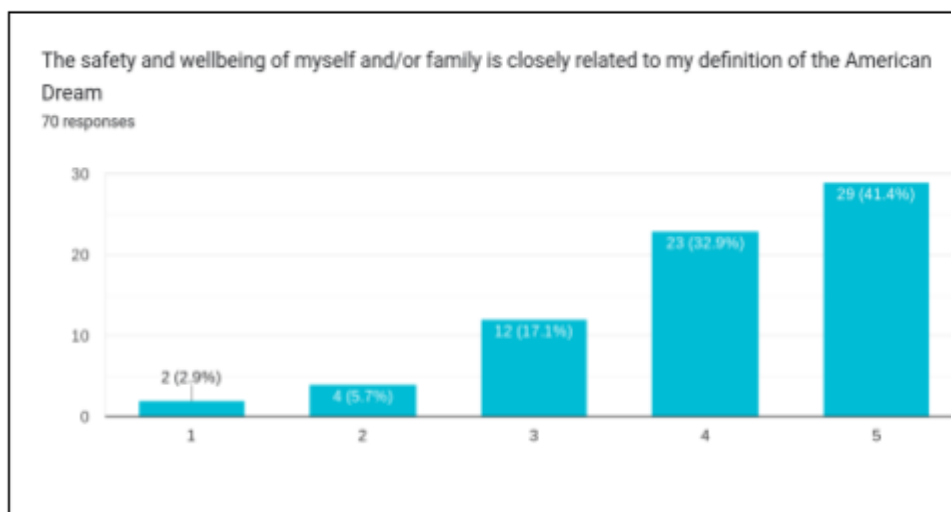


Job Opportunity

The perception of the American Dream related to job opportunity in the survey was analyzed in Figure 3. The graph indicates that this statement regarding job opportunity fell on the higher scale, with answers falling in agree and strongly agree. Out of all survey respondents, 77.2% selected an answer of four or five, indicating a strong alignment between job opportunity and the American Dream. Within this overall

percentage, both answers of four and five had equal an equal percent of respondents picking that number (38.6%). Only 8.6% of respondents disagreed (one & two) and 14.3% of respondents stayed neutral. The findings from this graph suggest that for most respondents, job opportunity was a big desire in their American ideal.

Figure 4: Question 4 - Family/personal safety

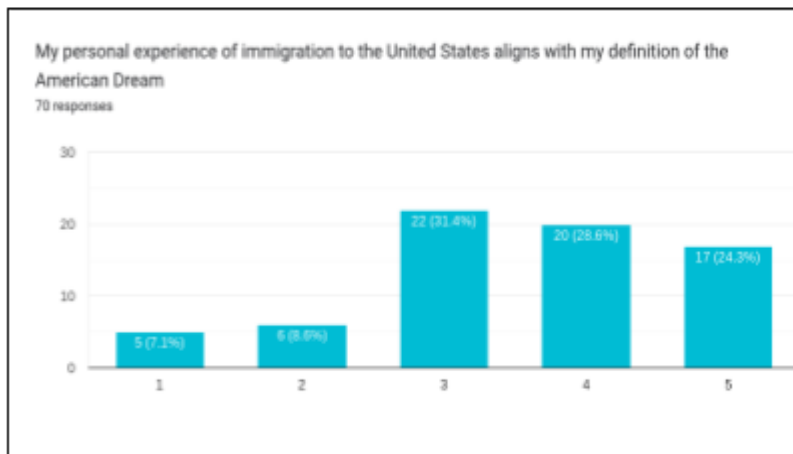


Family & Personal Safety

Figure 4 represents the last of the questions regarding the 4 categories created, with question four inquiring about safety. Most of the answers leaned towards the upper side of the

scale (four and five) with a total of 71.3% answering in these categories. Specifically, 29 respondents answered at level five and 23 respondents answered at level 4. This compares significantly to the mere 17.1% (12 participants) who responded neutrally or 8.6% (6 total between level one and level 2) who disagreed. Since five is the most picked answer, it can be inferred that this aspect is significantly important to South Asian's American Dreams.

Figure 5: Question 5 - Real Experiences



Real Experiences

Question 5 inquired about whether perceptions of the American Dream aligned with the reality of immigration. It can be seen that the most common answer was three (31.4%). Four was a close second (28.6%) and five took third (24.3%). Once again, the common answer being three indicates that most respondents took a neutral stance on this statement. Those who didn't answer neutral leaned more towards agreeing with the statement.

Achievability and Change

Figures six and seven represent the quantitative values of the last two questions of the survey. In figure 6, the majority (61.4%) of respondents answered four or five, indicating that many believe the American Dream is very or somewhat achievable. Only 7.2% believed it wasn't achievable (one & two) and 31.4% stayed neutral. This shows overall optimism to the achievability factor. In figure 7, when asked about any differences in the American Dream, the majority of respondents (65.2%) answered false, indicating that there may be external factors that change the essence of the American Dream. The 34.8% who answered true suggests a divide in this perception.

Figure 7: Question 7 - Change

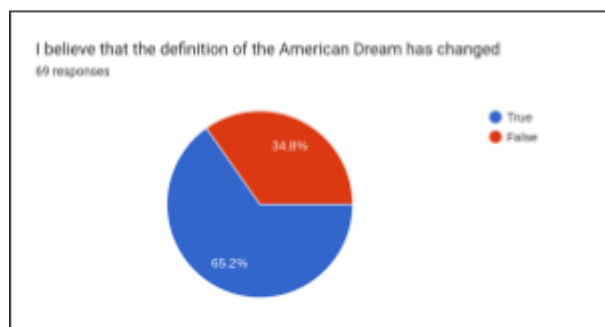


Figure 6: Question 6 - Achievability

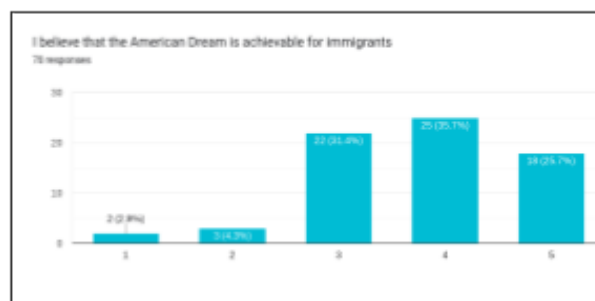


Figure 9: Interview Analysis

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	Career + Materialistic goals (job and educational aspirations)	Acquiring higher education and more job opportunities	More job opportunities, greater standard of living	Economic + Material pursuits and desires	More stable job and higher education opportunities	Opportunity (not further expanded upon)	Stable job, comfortable day-to-day life	Family wellbeing	Equal Opportunity; Able to achieve goals	Working hard, economic + material desires
2	Influence of others who have come here, seeing what they were able to achieve	Not many or good opportunities in home country, witnessing how previous immigrants currently live in US	Friend and family who immigrated before	Influence of friends (pushed to find job in US) and coworkers (witnessing life abroad)	Seeing family immigrate to the US and living their life here, their standard of living was improved	Wanting money and desire to get a job	Hearing about higher education opportunities (possible dream?) Friends + family living in America	Needing better medical and physical care for a special needs child	Cousins that already immigrated here, seeing all the opportunities	Education, Hard work, living in a lower class situation
3	Still centered around education and job opportunity - easier to change both in America	Transitioned into personal fulfillment and creating a good family life	Transitioned to become more family oriented, providing good life for kids	Job security (not opportunity) - more job security in home country	Stayed the same	American Dream is false - there is nothing special here	Stayed the same	No opinion - American Dream has been fulfilled	Changed for the better - changed to developing a family, providing a good life for kids	No change
4	Harder now - greater amount of immigrants → increases competition for Visa, Green Card, Citizenship, ect	Easier now - immigrants are more aware of what life in US is like, people can alter their American Dream to realistic standards	About the it same	Harder now - more rules regarding immigration policies, harder to get a green card	Harder???	Harder now - easier to get Green Card in the past	Harder right now - due to current political scenario	Depends on the person - mostly same???	N/A	Harder → more globalization, competing on global scale

Analysis of Interview

The interview conducted with 10 random survey participants was administered mainly to nuance topics of the survey and obtain a general understanding of the possible reasoning behind some of the survey results. A total of four questions were asked with occasional follow up questions in order to prompt the participants back to the main question (Appendix A). The following concepts about the main survey topics were derived from the interview:

Common American Dream Desire(s): Economic advancement and career and educational opportunities are the most common American Ideals reported, agreeing with the survey data.

Influencers in Perceptions: Family and friends act as a big influence in the creation of a personal American Dream. Seeing others who have immigrated before achieving their American Dream makes it seem more possible for others, and creates that desire. Outliers for this category include desire for a job, medical needs, and living situation.

Change in Perception: Based on the interview, the idea that the American Dream can change is split. Many have stated that their American Dream has either been fulfilled or still the same.

However, changes most commonly include “developing a family” or other family related ideas.

Achievability: The achievability of the American Dream now compared to the past significantly differs, and is more or less harder. This is due to the increase in immigrants over the years,



globalization, and the current political scenario, all making it harder to obtain a Visa, Green Card, or Citizenship. Justification for why it may be easier might be that immigrants are more informed of the reality of life in the United States, allowing them to alter perceptions to realistically achievable standards.

Limitations

While the study revealed valuable insights about varying perceptions of the American dream among South Asians, there are still some limitations present that need to be discussed in order to obtain a full understanding of the main objective. First, a minor limitation in the study would be the data collection span. The time it took to collect all data went over the planned period, making it difficult to pace the rest of the process out. The second limitation has to do with the location gap. Focusing solely on residents of Northern Virginia, an area with an arguably high standard of living whose residents are very wealthy, may have affected the mindsets or opinions and values of the participants. To obtain an understanding of the American Dream for South Asians in the US as a whole, it would have been more accurate to collect data in other major South Asian populations across the country, though this is extremely challenging. The last limitation that affects the main takeaway of this study is any outlier responses from the data. This includes themes from the interview that don't fit in with any of the predesigned categories. Examples of these are this response to question two (see Appendix A): "Needing better medical and physical care for a special needs child" and this answer to question three: "American Dream is false - there is nothing special here". These abnormalities in terms of responses create an awkward category of answers that don't perfectly fit in, and this can make it more difficult to find the most common perceptions or create a definition to fit all perceptions.

CONCLUSION

Fulfilling the Gap

This study addresses one main gap within the existing scholarly conversation. This is the targeted population or group of study: South Asian immigrants were not a vital focus in past studies, as they focused more on the Hispanic and Latino, Black, and even European immigrant communities. This study effectively covers this gap by focusing only on South Asians during data collection. Secondly, there is also a minor gap present: the location. Northern Virginia is an area rich with South Asians and just immigrants in general, creating potential for many different views and mindsets. Because of the specificity of the location, pre-existing research does not cover this area and its data. The gap of South Asians being unfulfilled can be a cause for the fulfillment of the second gap: there is a high population of South Asian immigrants in Northern Virginia, and in order to fill the first gap, a location with many South Asian immigrants is needed, and it being Northern Virginia covers the location gap.

New Understanding & Reflection

The results produced provide a new understanding in response to the hypothesis stating that job opportunity and economic success would be the most common factors of the American Dream. From the results, it can be said that the hypothesis of the study was partially correct. Job Opportunity was one if not the most common opinion about what the American Dream is. However, it is arguable that there are more frequent thought processes of factors of the American Dream than personal happiness, such as economic and materialistic success and family wellbeing. Many decisions were made during this study based on the course it took. The

decision to focus solely on South Asians instead of South and East Asians allotted more time to study South Asians. This ensured an accurate response to the hypothesis and research question, whereas focusing on two different immigrant groups would have been too extensive to produce nuanced concepts. Additionally, question(s) from the research survey were removed. This came due to the realization those specific questions would not add anything to the data, or had nothing to do with the initial inquiry. Doing this made the data analysis easier and more efficient.

Implications

The findings of this study present various implications that new South Asian immigrants should consider in their American Dream. First, South Asian immigrants should keep in mind that their economic and career related pursuits can be achieved easily just by talking to others with the same desires. Because these two factors were found to be among the most common perceptions, there will be many immigrants ready to share their experiences. This can only help new immigrants make informed decisions. Second, those about to emigrate or newly immigrated South Asians should be kept informed about the achievability of the American Dream, in order to help create the best American life for themselves and/or their families. The data indicated that the American Dream would be challenging to achieve in current day, due to multiple factors that cannot be changed. The implication of this updated information being available is that it helps to create a reality of the American Dream, and prepares immigrants for worst case scenarios. Immigrants may go in hearing stories of the past, thinking the American Dream is waiting for them, which may not be true, and given the achievability status of the American Dream now, immigrants would be able to make informed decisions for themselves. One of the purposes of this study was to create a more broader, general term for the American Dream. Thus, from the findings and their implications, this new term should be given for the term “American Dream”: a happy way of living based on individual desires commonly shaped around factors such as economic pursuits, educational and career opportunities, personal happiness, and more.

Areas for Further Research

Looking back on the process of inquiry, many changes would strengthen the findings of the study overall. First, the inclusion of South Asian participants of all socioeconomic backgrounds would provide a more accurate data collection to address all South Asians. Future research should expand upon the population targeted in this study by zooming out of the “wealthy” and “rich” stereotype provided by the choice of location (Northern Virginia). To do this, future studies should pick other locations with a wide range of backgrounds. Second, future research should target the negative aspects of the American Dream. This study mostly focuses on the American Dream in a somewhat positive or even neutral light. To help South Asians fully comprehend what the American Dream might entail, it would be best to add negative factors. So far, many South Asians are told that America is an all great land of opportunity, but as times change, this also changes. Studying more into an American Dream that did not turn out as well as expected will keep new South Asian immigrants aware of all the possibilities. Lastly, the research in this study can be applied to many other major immigrant groups in the United States. By researching more about other immigrants, the data of all groups can be synthesized to create a truly accurate definition of the American Dream in the perspective of immigrants.



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APPENDICES

Appendix A

List of approved interview questions

No.	Question
1	How do you personally define the American Dream?
2	How did you develop this definition, what factors influenced you?
3	Has your definition of the American Dream changed over the course of your life or after you immigrated, and if so, how?
4	How achievable do you think the American Dream was before for you and for other immigrants, and how does it compare to the achievability now?



Appendix B

List of approved Survey questions

Section 2 of 2

Survey Responses

Please respond to the first multiple choice and then the following on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being strongly disagree, 5 being strongly agree) on how well you relate to the statements.

I had a fully developed perception of the American Dream

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Economic opportunity/material success is closely related to my definition of the American Dream

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Personal happiness is closely related to my definition of the American Dream

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Job opportunity is closely related to my definition of the American Dream

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

The safety and wellbeing of myself and/or family is closely related to my definition of the American Dream

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

My personal experience of immigration to the United States aligns with my definition of the American Dream

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I believe that the American Dream is achievable for immigrants

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

I believe that the definition of the American Dream has changed

☐ True

☐ False



Appendix C
Compiled Survey results

Perceptions of the American Dream Survey (Responses)						
File Edit View Insert Format Data Tools Extensions Help						
Q Menu 100% \$ % .00 123 Roboto 10 B I A						
A1 Timestamp						
Form_Responses1						
PARTICIPATION Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. CONTACT This research is being conducted by Kripa Rao. This research has been reviewed according to the IRB protocol. I have read this form, all of the questions I have answered, and I agree to participate in this research.						
1	Timestamp	Select your cultural background	I had a fully developed perception of the American dream before I came to the United States	Economic opportunity/material success is closely related to my definition of the American dream	Personal happiness is closely related to my definition of the American dream	Job opportunity is closely related to my definition of the American dream
2	1/22/2025 11:58:59	Yes		3	4	4
3	1/23/2025 14:48:11	Yes	South Asian	5	4	5
4	1/28/2025 17:30:51	Yes	South Asian	4	4	5
5	1/28/2025 18:06:58	Yes	South Asian	3	5	5
6	1/28/2025 18:24:10	Yes	South Asian	5	4	5
7	1/28/2025 18:28:24	Yes	South Asian	5	5	5
8	1/28/2025 21:38:50	Yes	South Asian	4	4	3
9	1/28/2025 23:09:00	Yes	South Asian	5	4	4
10	1/28/2025 23:19:55	Yes	South Asian	5	5	5
11	1/28/2025 23:21:43	Yes	South Asian	3	3	3
12	1/29/2025 5:25:37	Yes	South Asian	5	5	3
13	1/29/2025 6:06:04	Yes	South Asian	4	5	4
14	1/29/2025 6:15:48	Yes	South Asian	3	4	4
15	1/29/2025 6:43:26	Yes	South Asian	4	4	3
16	1/29/2025 7:51:12	Yes	South Asian	4	5	3
17	1/29/2025 9:26:43	Yes	South Asian	3	4	4
18	1/29/2025 10:34:54	Yes	South Asian	3	3	3
19	1/29/2025 10:39:13	Yes	South Asian	3	3	2
20	1/29/2025 10:50:11	Yes	South Asian	5	5	5
21	1/29/2025 11:15:56	Yes	South Asian	4	4	3