

American Dream as Revealed Through the Character of Matthew in the Movie of *Fatherhood* (2021)

Rita Setiani

(setianirita345@gmail.com)

Universitas Sains Al-Qur'an, Wonosobo, Indonesia

Atinia Hidayah

(atinia Hidayah @gmail.com)

Universitas Sains Al-Qur'an, Wonosobo, Indonesia

Abstract

This study is aimed to analyze : (1) The concept of the American Dream reflected in the character Matthew in the Fatherhood (2021) , (2) The social and economi factors influence the journey of Matthew character in achieving the vision of the American Dream in the Fatherhood (2021) film. The study uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the film entitled Fatherhood (2021) directed by Paul Weitz as the objective research. The collecting data of the research method includes watching and reading, identifying, classifying, and selecting. The analyzing data of the research method by using displaying, explaining, selecting, and interpreting. The researcher analyzes the data by using theory of popular culture of American Dream. The result of the study : (1) The concept of the American Dream reflected in the character Matthew in the Fatherhood film such as hard work and resilience, family and community support, providing the best education for the childern, happiness and family unity, and courage in facing challenges; (2) The social and economi factors influence the journey of Matthew character in achieving the vision of the American Dream in the Fatherhood film include family and friends support, social stigma, community role, employment status and income, access to education and training.

Keywords: *American Dream, Fatherhood, Family*

Introduction

The American Dream can generally be interpreted as the national ethos of the United States. This is the ideal form of democracy, human rights, freedom, opportunity and equality to obtain freedom to achieve success and prosperity. This understanding envisions how all the obstacles that must be faced by all groups to achieve social mobility are the same.

James Truslow Adam, author of the book *Epic of America*, in 1931 wrote in his book that the American Dream hopes for a better, richer, and fuller life for all people and that they get opportunities based on their abilities or achievements in life without regard to social class or in what environment he was born. The American Dream is not about having luxury goods or high salaries, but rather

about social order where every man and woman in society has equal opportunities, is judged by their abilities, and their achievements are recognized by others. American Dream can be found in literature. Literature itself has meaning as painting or opus. Literature means opus or good and beautiful painting. So, literature is all writing or opus which have good value written within beautiful language.

The film *Fatherhood* (2021) tells the story of Matthew, a young widower who must become a father and mother to his young daughter, Maddy, after the death of his beloved wife. This film presents the loving father-daughter relationship between Matt and Maddy and conveys an important message about parental support in children's search for identity, especially from an early age. This film also normalizes the role of fathers who also bear babies even though they work and presents the story of a single father who cares for and raises his child with a parenting style that is applied until his child grows up.

Literary Review

American Dream

The American Dream is an ideal concept maintained by American society since the eighteenth century. The concept initiated by the Declaration of Independence is that every human being is created equal and has rights from God which have been inherent to him since birth, namely the right to life, the right to freedom, and the right to happiness.

Firstly, as mentioned by Cullen in *The America Dream : A Short History of An Idea that Shaped the Nation*, the term of American dream was popularized by John Trustow Adams in 1931 on his book entitled *The Epic of America*. The American Dream is the belief that anyone, regardless of where they are born or what class they are born into, can achieve their own version of success in a society that allows upward mobility for everyone. Although the idea of the American Dream may have existed long before 1776, the phrase itself was coined by American businessman and historian James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book *The Epic of America*.

The American Dream is about aspiring to be one's best self and transcending the position one was born into. This is not just about obtaining wealth and possessions, to achieve this dream there are many ways to make it happen. It is believed that people are realizing their own version of the American Dream, where they have to work hard to achieve equality and upward mobility, then have a good family life.

The American Dream remains a concept that motivates many individuals to seek opportunity and success in the United States. Although it has experienced changes and challenges over time, with different adaptations and interpretations by different generations, the American Dream continues to be a symbol of hope and aspiration, inspiring people to work hard and pursue a better life.

Concept of Fatherhood as an American Dream

The concept of family in early American history has undergone significant changes over time, influencing changes in family values and social norms related to family structure, gender, and personal relationships. The purpose of this literary study is to investigate a complex body of knowledge by examining how the subject is understood, experienced, and defined in various contexts.

In a lot of literature, a fathers are frequently portrayed as the cornerstones of the family economy. He works tirelessly to provide family members with the necessities, which is part of realizing the American Dream. Books such as Heather Beth Johnson's *The American Dream and the Power of Wealth* explores the ways in which economic stability and growth are often linked to the achievement of the cited citations.

In the American Dream, a father is usually portrayed as the strong, independent head of the household. He is fully committed to empowering and upholding his family, ensuring that values such as hard work, integrity, and respect are instilled in his children. In this context, the fathers always feels obligated to provide the best education and opportunities for his children, which his sees as a means of achieving social mobility and success. As a key component of the American Dream, a father works tirelessly to ensure that the children in his care have access to high-quality education.

Fathers in the context of the American Dream are often depicted as figures who are resistant and persistent. They show resilience in facing various life challenges, from the economic crisis to personal problems, and still try to provide the best for their family. Fathers work not only for material success but also to achieve happiness and emotional satisfaction in family life. In his articles Robert L. Griswold (1993) explored how the role of the father has evolved and remains an important symbol of family happiness and achievement in the context of the American Dream.

Research Methodology

The research method which is used in this research is qualitative research. Based on Creswell in his books *Research Design* (1994), qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.

The object in this research is film under title *Fatherhood* (2021) directed by Paul Weitz that published in 2021. The film published sentences of subtitle, also focus on dialoug in the film. The types of data that is used are main data which is collected from the dialogue's film, and supporting data which is collected from some sources, like books, article, and journal that can support the research.

The method of collecting data in this research is by doing observation. The procedures are watching the movie and reading the scripts, identifying the data from the scripts and subtitle, classifying data and selecting the data.

After the data are collected, the next step is analyzing data by following: Displaying the data, explaining data, selecting data and interpreting data.

Finding and Discussion

The research analyzes the issue in this chapter. The issue is about the types of concept American dream and the social and economi factory influence the journey of Matthew character in achieving the vision of the American dream in the *Fatherhood* (2020) film.

1. The concept of the American Dream reflected in the character Matthew in the *Fatherhood* (2021) Film.

a. Hard Work and Resilience

Matthew's journey begins with a tragic event the sudden death of his wife shortly after childbirth. This catastrophe forces him into the unexpected and challenging role of a single father. Despite his grief and lack of preparation, Matthew decides to take on the responsibility of raising his daughter, Maddy.

Matthew : *"I got it. I'm going to do this. I'm going to raise her on my own."*

Jordan : *"Are you sure, Matt? This is going to be really hard."*

Matthew : *"I know. But I have to. She's my daughter. I have to be there for her."*

(*Fatherhood*, 2021, 00:23:45)

On a bright morning, Matthew and Jordan were in a park. Around them, there were several parents and children who were also playing, which showed that the park was quite busy. Matthew tries to show his affection and tries to face the challenges he faces. This conversation contains moments of honesty and confession from Matthew about his feelings and struggles.

In this dialogue, Matthew's character is depicted as someone who is responsible and a hard worker, while Jordan is shown as a wise and supportive friend. Matthew shows his determination to take care of his daughter. Therefore, he said, *"I got it. I'm going to do this. I'm going to raise her on my own."*, even though many people doubt his abilities and realize that the task is very difficult, as Jordan said *"This is going to be really hard."* This dialogue is an important moment in the film that depicts Matthew's character as a tough and dedicated father.

b. Family and Community Support

The American Dream also involves building a supportive community and family environment. Matthew journey is not alone, he receives support from family, friends, and even strangers who provide guidance and assistance.

Matthew: *"Mom, I don't know if I can do this. Raising Maddy on my own... it's overwhelming."*

Anna : *"Matthew, listen to me. You are not alone in this. We are all here for you. Your father and I, we will help you with whatever you need."*

Matthew: *"But what if I mess up? What if I can't give her the life she deserves?"*

Anna : *"Every parent makes mistakes. The important thing is that you're trying your best and that you love her. That's what"*

matters most. And remember, you have a whole family ready to support you."
(*Fatherhood*, 2021, 01:05:00)

This conversation take place in the Matthew family's house, more precisely in the living room or kitchen, a place where the family usually gathers and talks comfortably. The time of this conversation occur in the afternoon, when daily activities had end and the family has time to sit together and speak.

In this dialogue, Anna provides advice and emotional support to Matt when he feels overwhelmed by the responsibilities of single parenthood. His mother reminded Matt that he was not alone and that his family would always be there to help him through difficult times. As she said *"You are not alone in this. We are all here for you. Your father and I, we will help you with whatever you need."* Anna provides moral encouragement to Matt, assuring him that he is capable of handling the role of a single father despite the enormous challenges. As she said *"And remember, you have a whole family ready to support you."* This dialogue shows how important family support is in difficult situations and how the family can provide strength and security when facing big challenges, by providing the moral strength and enthusiasm needed.

c. Providing the best education for the children

The concept of the American dream in this context highlights the belief that education is the key to achieving success and prosperity in the United States. Matthew fights to give Maddy access to a quality education, even though he faces various obstacles and challenges as a single father.

Matthew : *"I want Maddy to have the best education possible. It's important to me that she has every opportunity to succeed."*

Swan : *"I understand, but it's not just about the school. It's about the support system too. She needs to feel secure and loved."*

Matthew : *"I know, and I'm doing my best. I just want to make sure she has every chance to thrive."*

Swan : *"You're doing a great job, Matthew. Just remember, it's not just about the academics. It's about the whole environment."*

(*Fatherhood*, 2021, 01:05:36)

This dialogue take place in the school environment or the child's place of education. This scene takes place after Maddy starts to grow up and starts school.

The atmosphere in the neighborhood shows Matthew's deep concern about his daughter's educational future.

This dialogue is important in showing Matthew's character as a dedicated father and how much he values education as an important part of Maddy's future. As Matthew said to Swan *"I want Maddy to have the best education possible"*. Matthew shows a strong determination to be a good father and ensures that Maddy has everything she needs to succeed, even though he faces challenges as a single father but Matthew is determined to provide the best education for Maddy.

d. Happiness and Family Unity

The American Dream concept of happiness and family unity includes the belief that every individual has the opportunity to achieve a prosperous life and build strong family relationships. It goes beyond material achievements and includes aspects such as love, happiness and togetherness in a family.

Matthew : *"We're going to build our own house, one day. It's going to be a great place, with a big playground out back."*

Maddy : *"Really? What kind of house?"*

Matthew : *"You can choose your own color. We can paint it whatever you want. And in the back garden, we'll plant our own family tree. Every year, we'll add another branch for each important moment in our lives."*

(*Fatherhood*, 2021, 1:09:20)

This dialogue takes place in the house or a place that is comfortable for Matthew and Maddy, specifically in Maddy's room. The atmosphere of the room may feel intimate and loving. This scene occurs at night after their daily activities. This can be a relaxing moment where they have a chance to talk to each other without distractions.

This dialogue explains about family happiness and integrity, where Matthew and Maddy can share their thoughts and feelings about family happiness and integrity. As Matthew explains in this dialogue, *"We're going to build our own house, one day."* the meaning of this dialogue is Matthew's desire to build his own happy family by choosing according to the happiness he wants. This dialogue creates a warm and loving atmosphere in which Matthew and Maddy can share their thoughts and feelings about family happiness and unity. In another scene,

Matthew also explains the importance of being together and supporting each other in the family to achieve happiness.

e. Courage in facing challenges

In the context of the American dream, courage is one of the keys to achieving bigger dreams and life goals. People who adopt this concept believe that by having the courage to face challenges, they can overcome limitations and achieve the desired success.

Matthew : *"Maddy, do you know that courage doesn't mean we don't feel afraid. Even the bravest people have felt afraid. But what makes them brave is when they keep going forward even though they are afraid."*

Maddy : *"So, does that mean I have to continue to be brave, Dad?"*

Matthew : *"Yes, Maddy. Continue to be brave. Every step we take, even small, is a step towards courage. And together, we can face any challenges that lie ahead of us."*

(*Fatherhood*, 2021, 1:27:20)

This dialogue occurs in an intimate, quiet place, such as a living room or bedroom, which gives them the opportunity to share their thoughts more openly. The atmosphere was warm and emotional, because the topic they discussed, courage, can be deep and personal. This dialogue occurs at night in their house.

The dialogue reflects a conversation between Matthew and Maddy about courage. Matthew teaches Maddy that courage doesn't mean not being afraid. Even the bravest people can feel afraid. What makes them brave is the ability to keep going even though they are afraid. Matthew emphasizes the importance of moving forward even in times of fear. This shows that courage is not about eliminating fear completely, but about overcoming it and moving forward anyway. Matthew teaches Maddy that every step taken, no matter how small, is a step towards courage.

2. The social and economic factors influence the journey of Matthew character in achieving the vision of the American Dream in the *Fatherhood* (2021) film

a. Social Factor

Family and Friends Support

Matthew receives significant support from his family and friends, which help ease the emotional and practical burden of being a single father. This support provides a sense of security and helps in making difficult decisions.

Matthew : *"I'm doing my best here, but it's hard. People don't expect a dad to do all of this alone. They look at me like I'm a failure just because I'm a man."*

Marian : *"I know it's tough, Matthew. But you're not alone. You have friends and family who are here to help. Society might have its expectations, but you're proving them wrong every day."*

(*Fatherhood*, 2021, 00:56:30)

This scene took place at Matthew's house. The room feels warm and full of family memories. The atmosphere in this scene is quite emotional and intimate. Matthew sat on the sofa with a tired and slightly discouraged expression on his face. He felt the burden of great responsibility as a single father. Marian, who was sitting beside him, showed an attitude full of understanding and compassion.

In this dialogue, Matthew expresses his feelings about the negative perception he receives as a single father, *"They look at me like I'm a failure just because I'm a man."* This reflects social pressures and gender stereotypes that often assume that the primary role in childcare is the mother's responsibility. Marian, as his mother-in-law, tries to provide emotional support and reassure Matthew that although the challenges are tough, he is not alone. *"But you're not alone. You have friends and family who are here to help,"* he reminded Matthew about the importance of a social support network consisting of family and friends who are ready to help.

Social Stigma

Society often views childcare as a woman's primary responsibility, so single fathers like Matthew face social stigma and doubts about their abilities as primary caregivers.

Matthew : *"I'm doing my best here, but it's hard. People don't expect a dad to do all of this alone. They look at me like I'm a failure just because I'm a man."*

Marian : *"I know it's tough, Matthew. But you're not alone. You have friends and family who are here to help. Society might have its expectations, but you're proving them wrong every day."*

(*Fatherhood*, 2021, 00:56:30)

This scene took place in the living room of Matthew's house, which is warm and full of family memories. The house decoration is simple but reflects the warmth of the family, with family photos and children's toys scattered here and there. Matthew sat on the sofa with a tired and slightly discouraged expression on his face. Marian sat beside him, showing an understanding and affectionate attitude.

In this dialogue, Matthew expresses his feelings about the social stigma he faces as a single father. He feels judged and considered a failure by society just because he is a man trying to do tasks usually associated with women. *"They look at me like I'm a failure just because I'm a man."* This reflects social pressures and gender stereotypes that often assume that the primary role in childcare is the mother's responsibility. Marian emphasizes that Matthew has proven society's expectations wrong by carrying out the role of a single father well. *"Society might have its expectations, but you're proving them wrong every day."* This support gives Matthew the strength to continue fighting and proves that he is capable of being a good father, despite the stigma.

Community Role

Getting involve in the community can provide a wide support network and the opportunity to get practical as well as emotion help.

Matthew : *" Sometimes, I feel like I'm doing everything wrong. I don't know if I'm being too strict or too lenient. I just want to be a good dad for Maddy."*

Community members : *"You're not alone, Matthew. We all have those doubts. It's normal to feel that way. The fact that you're here and talking about it means you're already a great dad."*

Community members : *"Yeah, and remember, it's okay to ask for help. We're all here for each other. Parenting is tough, but you don't have to do it alone."*

Matthew : *"Thanks, guys. I really needed to hear that. It's been overwhelming, but knowing I have this support makes a huge difference."*

(*Fatherhood*, 2021, 00:39:50)

This scene happen in the afternoon, according to the general schedule of support group meetings. This scene took place in a comfortable and simple meeting room, usually use for support groups. The room was equippe with chairs arrange in a circle, allowing all participants to see and talk to each other easily.

This scene reflects the importance of social support in facing life's challenges. Matthew, initially felt like a failure and overwhelmed, he said *"Sometimes, I feel like I'm doing everything wrong. I don't know if I'm being too strict or too lenient"*. He expressed his frustration with the situation he faced. He

feels unable to provide the best for his daughter, Maddy, and often feels trapped under the pressure of enormous responsibility.

2. Factor Economic

Employment Status and Income

Job stability and income are crucial factors for Matthew to provide a decent life for his daughter. Adequate income allows him to meet basic needs and plan for a better future.

Matthew : *"I need this job. It's not just about the money, it's about providing stability for Maddy and me."*

Boss Matthew : *"I understand, but balancing work and being a single parent is tough. We need to find a way that works for both of us."*

(*Fatherhood*, 2021, 00:20:00)

This scene took place during the day, at the beginning of Matthew's return to the office after taking leave. This scene took place in a modern and neat office room. The atmosphere in this scene was quite calm and serious.

This dialogue explains Matthew who is facing financial pressure because he has to take care of his child alone with only one source of income. *"I need this job. It's not just about the money, it's about providing stability for Maddy and me."* This illustrates one of the major economic challenges faced by many single parents, where childcare costs, household needs, and daily expenses must be managed on one income. Matthew is also facing the same problem so that he expresses his through to his boss. His boss is offering more flexible working arrangements, which is a reflection of the modern trend in workplaces to support employees with family responsibilities.

Access to Education and Training

Good education and training can open up better career opportunities, which in turn can increase income and economic stability.

Matthew : *"I need to find a way to better myself, for Maddy's sake. Maybe going back to school or taking some courses will help us in the long run."*

Matthew's friend : *"That's a great idea. Investing in yourself can open up new opportunities. It's tough now, but it'll pay off."*

(*Fatherhood*, 2021, 00:50:30)

This scene takes place in a cafe or restaurant, a comfortable and casual place to chat. The environment around them was full of daily activity, with several people sitting at other tables, enjoying their food and drinks. This place provided a quite relaxed atmosphere and allowed for private conversations between friends.

In the dialogue, Matthew and his friend talk about the high cost of education and how it is a big challenge for many families. Matthew understands that his daughter's education is a long-term investment that will pay off in the future. "Maybe going back to school or taking some courses will help us in the long run." Matthew has hopes and dreams for a better future for his daughter.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis in the chapter IV, the researcher concludes that John Trustow Adams in 1931 on his book entitled *The Epic of America* contains the issue stated in the problem statements. The first issue is about the concept of the American Dream reflected in the character Matthew in the *Fatherhood* (2021) film and the social and economic factors influence the journey of Matthew character in achieving the vision of the American Dream. In the movie *Fatherhood* (2021), the character Matthew embodies the essence of the American Dream through his relentless determination to overcome personal tragedy and provide a better future for his daughter. Despite the overwhelming grief following his wife's unexpected death, Matthew refuses to succumb to despair. Instead, he channels his energy into being a loving and dedicated single father. In the movie *Fatherhood* 2021, Matthew's character shows several important elements of the American Dream concept. This concept includes the idea that anyone, regardless of background, can achieve success through hard work and resilience, family and community support, providing the best education for the children, happiness and family unity, and courage in facing challenges. It is possible to overcome significant obstacles and create a better life for oneself and one's family. This detailed portrayal aligns with a more comprehensive understanding of the American Dream, emphasizing emotional and familial fulfillment alongside traditional notions of success.

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