

## THE ALLEGORY OF AMERICAN DREAM AS AN ATTACK TO THE VALUES OF 1960'S AMERICAN SOCIETY IN EDWARD ALBEE'S *THE AMERICAN DREAM*

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### ABSTRACT

*This is an analysis of Edward Albee's allegorical absurd play **The American Dream** which is conducted by using sociological approach. The results show that the two characters, Grandma and Young Man, are the representations of American dreams in different periods, the colonial American dream and the 1960's American dream; and that they carry different values. The two American dreams undergo changes, which are reflected in the changes of values held by the two characters. Presenting the different American dreams with different values, Albee intends to criticize the contemporary values of 1960's society as they leave the old traditional ones.*

**Key words:** American dream, allegory, colonial, materialism, values,

### 1. Introduction

*The American Dream* is a twentieth century literary work which was published in 1960. Edward Albee, the author, wrote the work between 1959-1960. The work is a play in one scene with only five characters: Mommy, Daddy, Grandma, Mrs. Barker and Young Man. The place setting of the play is Daddy's and Mommy's apartment. The play talks about a family or home affair with the time background of 1960's. It is about a married couple, Mammy and Daddy, who live with the eighty-six-year-old Grandma. Grandma is Mommy's mother. This couple has no children; thus, they adopt a child whom they fail to raise as the child is dead. In the play, Mommy intends to send Grandma to a nursery home. The plot is colored by the presence of Mrs. Barker, whose intention of coming to the apartment is unknown. Young Man who comes to the apartment looking for a job is

about to be adopted by Mommy and Daddy as their child to replace the deceased child.

The play is, in fact, confusing. It is difficult to understand because it is an absurd play. Nicholas Canaday, Jr. in Ervin Beck's paper 'Allegory in Edward Albee's *The American Dream*' says that the work is the best example of what has come to be known as 'the theater of the absurd' ([http://www.goshen.edu/~lonhs/GC\\_PUBLICATIONS/DREAM.html](http://www.goshen.edu/~lonhs/GC_PUBLICATIONS/DREAM.html)). 'Absurd' as an adjective means unreasonable; foolish; ridiculous (Hornby: 1986:4). An absurd play carries unreasonableness. The play that belongs to 'the theater of the absurd' presents a view of the absurdity of the human condition by the abandoning of usual or rational devices and the use of non-realistic form (Holman, 1980: 4-5). There are some absurdities and unreasonableness in the play, for example; Grandma is able to empty the apartment of all its content such as television, the Pekin-



ese, water and even her own room, Mommy and Daddy gouge the adopted baby's eyes and cut off its hands at the wrists. These absurdities, of course, make the play confusing. They invite many interpretations, as Edward Albee himself says that the play refers to a lot of meaning ([http://www.goshen.edu/~lonhs/GC\\_PUBLICATIONS/DREAM.html](http://www.goshen.edu/~lonhs/GC_PUBLICATIONS/DREAM.html)).

Though *The American Dream* presents a story of home affairs, the ideas it presents are more than just home affairs. It also presents other ideas. One of these is the idea of the allegorical American dream presented by the characters. Ervin Beck says that the play contains allegory ([http://www.goshen.edu/~lonhs/GC\\_PUBLICATIONS/DREAM.html](http://www.goshen.edu/~lonhs/GC_PUBLICATIONS/DREAM.html)). Allegory is a form of extended metaphor in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative, either in prose or verse, are equated with meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. Thus it represents one thing in the guise of another. The characters are usually personifications of abstract qualities, the action and the setting representative of the relationship among the abstractions (Holman, 1980: 10-11).

This paper presents the allegory of American dream used to attack the society's values. There are two different dreams in the play; one is presented by Grandma, the other is presented by Young Man. Grandma allegorically presents the colonial American dream whereas Young Man presents the contemporary American dream. There is a change in the American dreams as it is shown in the play by Grandma's and Young Man's values. The change signifies the change of values in the society. The depiction of American dream in the play and the change of American dream are intended to criticize the contemporary American society in the 1950s-1960s. Thus, the objectives of the discussion are; first, to see the

idea of American dream presented by Grandma and Young Man through the values they hold and to know the society's values attacked by Edward Albee; second, to see the idea of values' change in American dream allegorically presented in the play.

As the ideas of American dream are presented by two characters, Grandma and Young Man, the scope of the study is on the characters of Grandma and Young Man. However, Mommy and Daddy are also discussed to see the values of the contemporary society.

## 2. Research Method

In analyzing the play, sociological approach is used. Concerning the approaches of literary criticism, sociological criticism starts with a conviction that the art's relation to society are vitally important, and that the investigation of these relationships may organize and deepen one's aesthetic response to a work of art. Art is not created in a vacuum; it is the work not simply of a person, but of an author fixed on time and space, answering to a community of which he is an important, because articulate part (Scott, 1962: 123).

As it is said in the quotation, literature is regarded as the writer's response to his world or his society in certain time. *The American Dream* is regarded as Edward Albee's response to what happened in his society. Albee says that the play is an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society.... (Albee, 1960:53-54). Therefore, approaching the play sociologically is assumed as the appropriate way.

The writer utilizes library research as she counts on books found in the library. The main source is Edward Albee's *The American Dream*. Secondary sources, such as Robert H Fossum's and friends' *The American Dream* (1981), Ralph H. Gabriel's



*American Values*. Continuity and Change (1974), and some information found in the websites are also used to give additional understanding in analyzing the play.

### **3. Background and Information**

#### **3.1. Background Information on American Dream**

Everybody will find difficulty in stating when it begins to exist, and what American dream exactly is. These are the meanings of 'dream' and 'American dream' in the dictionaries. According to Neufeldt, one of the meanings of the word 'dream' is 'a fond hope or aspiration (1996: 414). Based on this this meaning, American dream may mean a fond hope or aspiration which is held by Americans or which is found in America. Meanwhile, *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines American dream as an American ideal of a happy and successful life to which all may aspire (1996: 59). So, American dream meant in this paper is the ideal to pursue happiness or the dream of happiness.

In relation to the time when the American dream existed, Spiller and friends (1953: 192) say that as a state of mind and a dream, America had existed long before its discovery. Ever since the early days of Western civilization, peoples had dreamed of a lost Paradise, of a Golden Age characterized by abundance, absence of war, and absence of toil. With the first accounts of the New World; it was felt that these dreams and yearnings had become a fact, a geographical reality fraught with unlimited possibilities. Thus, America as an idea was already at work pointing the way in the never-ending and hitherto chimerical quest of happiness (Spiller and Friends, 1953: 193).

So, the meaning of American dream is started with the idea of America as a dream place to pursue happiness or dream.

After immigrants settle in America, then, American dream becomes an ideal of everybody or groups of people in America to get happiness and success. It means that American dream constitutes the dream of each American or group of Americans to pursue happiness or success.

According to Fossum et al., in the pamphlet *The American Dream*, he asserts that the Dream is and has been comprised of many dreams: no single vision has ever totally dominated the American imagination or dreams (1981: 6). So, American dream does not accommodate an idea only but many ideas as the Dream is woven from many strands of dreams. Basically, the American dream is dream of happiness. And, happiness is identically associated with success.

It is started by the discovery of America itself. In Puritan era, for example, the Puritan's dream was manifested by John Winthrop, to build 'a city upon the hill' or Holy Commonwealth. In the enlightenment era, Benjamin Franklin's thinking of material success had spurred every American to pursue happiness in terms of secular one. In Romantic era, there was dream of equality of man. Thus, there is development of the dream itself in accordance with American history. It can be seen that 'what American dream is' comes along with the history of America. Also, the American dream also develops according to the need of every individual in America. The persecuted individual having a dream of freedom goes to America. The poor American has a dream to be rich. However, the most persistent among those strands of dream is a belief in the new beginning of America. This belief exemplifies better than any other the optimism—some would call it the naivety—of Americans and the fundamental reason why rhetoric about the Dream caught on in the United States (Fossum et.al, 1981:6). The



new motif in the beginning is tied to the image of America as the New World, a potential new Eden in the West, as well as to common attitude toward history, opportunity, success and failure. The concept of frontier must be taken into account in the texture of the Dream (Fossum et.al, 1981: 7)

The basic elements of the Dream persist from colonial times to the present due to historical development, however much the forms of their expression change (Fossum et.al, 1981: 7). So, what American dream is depends on the period, American dream changes along with the time. However, the most important dream is the colonial American dream where people still have the 'innocent' dream due to the values in the period.

### **3.2 A Short Description of 1960's American Society**

In postwar America the shape of political and cultural life was influx. After the depression of the 1930s and the market scarcities of the war years, the majority of Americans had achieved by the early 1960s a level of material comfort unprecedented in the world history (Farrer, 1994:2). After World War II ended, the United States entered a period of unprecedented prosperity built on what the economists called "an economy of abundance." This term described an economic system with the capacity to produce more goods than the people able to them could consume (Todd and Curty, 1972: 814). The 1960s was commonly called the period of affluence. Because of the economic powerful progress, the United States underwent science and technology revolution such as the development of electricity, the development of atomic energy and bomb, invention of electronics such as computers and television, automation in manufacturing process, expansion of aircraft, automobile, railroads

and other transportation industries, development in medical and pharmaceutical industry, household industry etc (Todd and Curty, 1972: 810-817).

These brought effects of growth and change on the quality of American life. The era of 1950s to 1960s or the postwar era saw a mass migration from the large cities to the suburbs. It resulted in rapid development in the suburbs such as demand of schools, law enforcement, roads, sanitation, and welfare services. Automobile enabled someone to do business in the central city. The automobile and paved roads ended isolation. Meanwhile electricity, brought efficiency, and convenience. Thus, the countryside became citified. The old rural patterns, which loomed so large in American economy, politics, and literature, almost disappeared (Morison et al, 1980: 721). Middle class families tended to leave cities into the suburbs. All over the country, people, especially young married couples seeking better living conditions for raising their families migrated out of the cities and built homes in the countryside, leading the movement of the trend toward a more widespread ownership of homes (Todd and Curty, 1972: 819). Consequently, more cities existed. Thus, the United States changed from a rural into an urban nation.

As the suburbs expanded, the metropolitan areas began to grow together to form 'super cities'. New problem existed as prosperity in 'super cities' attracted people from farms. There was an exodus from the farms to the cities. Men and women left the farms to seek better opportunities in the nation's growing urban areas. The middle-class families leaving the original cities were being replaced mainly by men, women, and children, black and white alike, from rural areas of the country. The neglected areas deteriorated into slums when property owners, discouraged by the



flight of the middle class from the 'super cities', refused to spend money for repairs and improvements. This consequently created slum areas (Todd and Curty, 1972: 820).

Meanwhile, as it is mentioned before, the economy was sparked by the emergence of new industries, like plastics and electronics, and by the huge investment of business and of government in research. Not content with the vast home market, American corporations bought control of great automobile, drug, and electrical companies overseas (Morison et al, 1980: 722). In short, American economy rapidly develops because of the fast and vast industrial development. However, America had never known economy of scarcity in the Old World sense of the term, but in the past it had always been able to dispose of its abundance by the steady rise in the standard of living and by exports. Now the capacity of farm and factory to produce far more than could normally be consumed created a new series of problems. One was to build obsolescence into the product itself, thus making reasonably sure that there would be a continuous demand for new models. A second was to create new consumer wants: this task was the special responsibility of the advertisers, ... (Morison et al, 1980: 724). And, advertisements became very important means in this materialistic business. The goal of advertisement was not merely to inform the consumers about products but mainly to create a desire to purchase products or to make consumers want products and injected attitudes favorable to consumption—even for products for which there was no need. Advertising executives recognized that theirs was to break down popular attitudes of self-denial and to foster the instant gratification through consumption (Blackford and Kerr, 1994: 236).

At that time, there had been an in-

formation explosion. People were bombarded with data from a variety of sources; conversations, newspapers, magazines, billboards, placards, brochures, and most significantly electronic media—radio and television (Frazier, 1975: 405). Television viewing habits of Americans had become a cause of concern. Since most people received more information from television than any other medium, it seemed reasonable to assume that it had a strong influence on their perceptions of the world around them (Frazier, 1975: 406).

Television, consequently, became the effective means of advertising products. And it is still up to the present time. The businessmen bombarded television viewers with their products to make them feel the 'up-to-dateness' of their products and the 'outdatedness' of the viewer's goods. This strategy created 'hunger' or demand of the new products. Frazier says that children, mothers of young children, especially cited that television was their prime source of product information (Frazier, 1975: 420).

Watching television is correlated to a certain degree with "general materialism," defined as an attitude emphasizing the importance of material possessions and money as a means to personal satisfactions and social progress (Frazier, 1975: 422). Watching television's commercial spurs the consumptive attitude, an attitude that reflects 'materialism' as people try to get satisfaction through possession and money.

In this case, the industrialists and businessmen materialistically and deliberately created such a consumptive condition and took advantage from the consumptive attitude, disregarding the bad effects of their actions. They just thought of the money and profit they would get. Moral values were not the primary concern any longer in such materialistic view of the society, either the producers or the consumers. Such materi-



alistic view is the one held by Young Man, Mommy and Daddy.

#### 4. The Allegory of American Dream in the American Dream

As it is previously mentioned in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, American dream is an American ideal of a happy and successful life to which all may aspire (1996:59). Grandma and Young Man are the representation of American dreams. They are the representation of the ideal of Americans to have a happy and successful life. Both reflect dreams in different eras. Grandma, who also embodied old America, represents the American dream of colonial period—the time when European immigrants struggled to colonize and settle in America. It can be said also that colonial period refers to the period before American independence. Young Man, who also embodied the sixties' America, represents the twentieth century's American dream. To compare the embedded American dream in the two characters the common ground is Grandma's and Young Man's different attitudes in pursuing happiness or success. Their different attitudes, which lead to different ways of pursuing happiness and success, are due to the different values they hold.

Meanwhile, Mommy and Daddy are the representation of the present society in the present America, which subscribe new values, that in Albee's opinion, are superficial and artificial because they leave the old values. They are described as the victims of materialism in the society which neglects spiritual and traditional values such as love, care, respect, honesty, hard work, etc. They live in a deteriorated apartment in which facilities such as doorbell, icebox, the johny, need fixing and they do not get service needed for the broken facilities.

#### 4.1 Grandma as the Colonial American dream

Grandma is the dream of new beginning of America or the early formation of America nation, which previously mentioned as the most important dream in the history of America. She refers to colonial American dream as she says that she is a 'pioneer stock' (Albee, 1960: 112) and Mommy admits that Grandma is 'rural' (Albee, 1960: 85). The words 'pioneer' and 'rural' indicate the colonial period.

According to Neufelt, 'rural' is a comprehensive nonspecific word referring to life on farm or in the country as distinguished from life in the city; it stresses the contrast between the supposed crudeness and unsophistication of the country and the polish and refinement of the city; it suggests the highly idealized primitive simplicity of rural life, originally among shepherds (1996: 1176). In this sense, the word 'rural' connotes simplicity, crudeness, unpolishedness. It can further be connected to 'innocence'.

Ruralism was, indeed, one of the prominent characteristics of the colonial era. It had something to do with the economic system in the colonial time. Agrarian economic system prevailed within the period. Colonial American economy in the country was still in the stage of self-subsistence. Capitalistic market-orientation and materialistic view hadn't reached the immigrants or Americans yet. They still led simple life. They based their economy in self-subsistent farming, such as raising staple crops, vegetables and raising cattle. Though trade had existed, agrarian activities and home manufacture were the primary ways of living. They produced their own daily needs, from making daily food such as milk, butter, cake to producing furniture and other utensils. Hard industry and endurance became the requirements to survive within the colonial society.



The word 'pioneer' refers to the time when the immigrants pioneered to subdue wilderness to build settlements and farms. In the efforts of subduing the wilderness and in the pioneering American civilization, these pioneers develop many kinds of traditional values, such as the value of freedom as most of European immigrants fled to the New World from the oppression in Europe; the value of individualism as they have to count on themselves or be self-reliant in the hard life in America; the value of opportunity as every one has the same opportunity to clear the land and to get better life; the value of hard working and endurance as they can only get their success only if they work hard and are able to endure the hardships in the wild America.

The value of industry or hard working in the old American dream is explicitly depicted in the play through the description of Grandma as a hard working woman who keeps working and spend her time by working. The fact that she loves to work is admitted by Mommy,

*"Well heaven knows, I would! I can't stand it, watching her do the cooking and the housework, polishing the silver, moving the furniture ..."* (Albee, 1960; 67).

So, industry and love of work had prevailed since colonial era: in the efforts of subduing the wilderness of the New World as it has previously discussed, in Puritan also Enlightenment periods. The Puritan viewed that 'to work' is 'to glorify God'. So, industry was a virtue or value that has to be done because being lazy was a sin. In Puritan society, Puritan religion and work ethics, that were the religious and philosophical foundation of the society, supported the self-subsistent economy to run well.

The value of industry was also strongly emphasized in the Enlightenment era through Benjamin Franklin's concept of thirteen virtues. One of these virtues was the virtue of industry. Franklin considered 'industry' as 'a means of obtaining wealth and distinction' (Skaggs, 1969:36-37). His pamphlet *Poor Richard's Almanack* encouraged people to pursue happiness in terms of material one. Here, people were allowed to pursue material happiness and live happily secularly. Yet, Franklin desired wealth that was not with insatiable lust, but rather regarded it as the best insurance of honesty and independence (Skaggs, 1969:71). Thus, the pursuit of happiness on material things should not be done on the base of lust, but on honesty and independence, also for the sake of honesty and independence themselves.

The pursuit of worldly happiness can be seen in Grandma's desire to have fur business.

*"You should have had Daddy set up in business somewhere. ... I could have gone into fur business"* (Albee, 1960: 70).

Fur business is also an identification of colonial era. This fur business refers to the fur trade done by the white men and the Native Americans. The whites exchanged their goods that were unknown in Native Americans' lives before, such as knives, scissors, needles, woolen cloth, mirrors, etc. for beaver furs. The trading proved to be very profitable to white men. The fur trade was also a form of pursuit of worldly happiness, which at that time had to be done through hard work.

Other value presented by Grandma is sense of dignity. In the play, Grandma is the only one that has sense of dignity ([http://www.goshen.edu/~lonhs/GC\\_PUBLICATION/DREAM.html](http://www.goshen.edu/~lonhs/GC_PUBLICATION/DREAM.html)). As the colonial



American dream, Grandma has all the values previously discussed. The values give her sense of dignity.

*"Well, that's all that counts. People being sorry. Makes you feel better; gives you sense of dignity, and that's all important ... a sense of dignity. And it doesn't matter if you don't care, cause if you don't have that, civilization's doomed"* (Albee, 1960: 64).

Because Grandma has sense of dignity, which constitutes traditional value, she is able to criticize Daddy's attitude for so easily saying sorry after saying something bad without any sincerity. The criticism to Daddy which can be further interpreted as a criticism to the contemporary society that lack of dignity; that perceive they can get dignity by simply doing insincere actions, such as insincere saying sorry for the mistake they do.

To sum up, all the values presented by Grandma are traditional values in America, which by Fossum and Roth are called naivety or innocence (Fossum et.al, 1981:6). These traditional values reflect the innocence of Americans or America at that time. Grandma or the colonial American dream pursues happiness by using her traditional values, which refer to the innocence of America. She reveals that pursue of happiness should be done by using the traditional values. She is willing to start from scratch to pursue happiness because of her pioneer value. She is also willing to work hard for her happiness due to her value of industry. And, she works to achieve success with dignity. In short, Her willingness to start from scratch and work hard with dignity was the reflection of pioneer's dream to get success.

Besides, the name 'Grandma' itself identifies 'oldness', referring to time in the past which in this case colonial period. The

word can be interpreted as the old time of American formation when all values held by Americans were still more innocent than the contemporary values.

#### 4.2 Young Man as the Contemporary American Dream

Young Man is the American dream in a new style. He is explicated as the Hollywood-style American dream of Hollywood success—sexy, materialistic, lacking values, superficially dazzling ([http://www.goshen.edu/~lonhs/GC\\_PUBLICATION/DREAM.html](http://www.goshen.edu/~lonhs/GC_PUBLICATION/DREAM.html)).

The following is the description of Young Man.

Grandma: *"Unh-hunh... will you look at those muscles!"*

Young Man (*flexing his muscles*): *"Yes, they're quite good, aren't they?"* (Albee, 1960:107).

The youngness, somehow, can be interpreted as the present America as compared to Grandma, the old America or colonial America. Young Man appears as a well-build man with muscles. His muscles and well-build figure identify his strength. His strength symbolizes America as a superpower country in the postwar period. *An Outline of American History* describes that in the 1960s 'the continent was peopled, the frontier was gone. A small, struggling republic has become a world power' (p. 117).

Grandma: *"Oh, that's nice. And will you look at that face!"*

Young Man: *"Yes it's quite good, isn't it? Clean-cut, midwest farm boy type, almost insultingly good-looking in a typically American way. Good profile, straight nose, honest eyes, wonderful smile ..."* (Albee, 1960: 108).

The description of Young Man as a midwest farm boy type in certain way might refer to the exodus of farm people to the



city to look for job in the 1960s. Young Man comes to Mommy's and Daddy's apartment to look for a job.

In relation to American dream, Young Man shows the Hollywood-style American dream of Hollywood success—sexy, materialistic, lacking values, superficially dazzling. Hollywood has something to do with movie stars and models. "Physically attractive and good looking are the characteristics of most Hollywood stars and models. Hollywood needs someone with such qualities in movies and modeling. Yet, the qualities are superficial ones. Hollywood does not need inner quality, as it adores superficial beauty. When it needs someone, it needs only his appearance.

Hollywood itself refers to superficial value as it presents its enchantment through glamorous and luxurious things, scenes, clothes, stars, movies, etc, which only look good and beautiful on the surface. Through movies, for example, Hollywood offers superficiality because movies present fake worlds to the society.

Grandma: "I'll bet you have. You ought to be in the movies, boy" (Albee, 1960: 107).

Young Man: "I know" (Albee, 1960: 107).

Young Man: "Well, I've done some modeling" (Albee, 1960: 113).

Besides, the description of Young Man as a well-built and good-looking man was physical appearance. Physical appearance is superficial. In his good appearance, there is a kind of emptiness as the young man says that he is incomplete (Albee, 1960, 113-114). As Hollywood is actually a representation of the society, Albee wants to say that the society appreciates things superficially. Albee satirizes that the values held by the society are superficial ones. They do not care about inner deep values.

It is in accordance with what Albee says that the play is an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society... (Albee, 1960:53-54).

Young Man also reflects the twentieth century American dream of happiness. However, the happiness here is achieved through materialistically. He is depicted as a young man that would do anything for money.

Young Man: "I am looking for work."  
Grandma: "Are you! Well, what kind of work?"

Young Man: "Oh, almost anything ... almost anything that pays. I'll do almost anything for money" (Albee, 1960: 109).

The excerpts above imply that Young Man will take any job—either honestly or dishonestly—for money. He does not care the type and the quality of the job, as long as he gets money.

Besides, he believes that money controls. As one has money he can do a lot of things; money brings power. Money matters in every thing, as he says,

Young Man: "Money talks" (Albee, 1960: 112).

His quality is worse as is not willing to give his favor when it is needed when there is no money in it.

Grandma: "Now, stay there, let me concentrate. What could you do? The folks have been in something of a quandary around here today, sort of a dilemma, and I wonder if you mightn't be some help" (Albee, 1960: 110).

Young Man: I hope so... if there is money in it. Do you have money? (Albee, 1960: 110).

The belief that money is everything;



that money enables ones to do everything; that money influences every side of human life are the new values in the new-styled American dream represented in the Young Man. As money is the ultimate goal or happiness, it should be achieved in whatever ways. Here, Young Man has different way of pursuing material happiness from Grandma because Grandma still holds the traditional values, such as hard work seen in the baking contest and dignity, whereas the young man justifies any way to get money without dignity. His pursuit of happiness has turned into materialism.

Materialism is the tendency to be more concerned with material than with spiritual or intellectual goals or values (Neufeldt: 1996: 834). Materialism is the value that Edward Albee attacks in the society because it has the tendency to subscribe this value in the wrong way. The phrase 'almost anything that pays' said by Young Man reflects the value held by the 1960's society. Albee also attacks materialism of the society through family circle. It is in accordance with what Stugrin says that *The American Dream* is an examination and biting satire on American family unit (1972:19) because Albee sees in American society false values, spiritual shallowness behind an attractive, stereotyped edifice (Stugrin, 1972: 20).

Materialism that neglects traditional values, can be seen through Mommy's and Daddy's attitudes and deeds in the family life.

First, Mommy marries Daddy because of material reason solely. She does not marry him based on love. So feeling does not count in the marriage. Mommy and Grandma are not rich. Since she was a little girl, she wanted to marry a rich man. Marrying an old man is even not a problem to her. This is in fact a criticism to 1960's society that subscribes materialism value; that

marriage is not a matter of love, but instead it is a matter of money. This society's subscription of materialistic value is deeply criticized through the description that the little Mommy even has the dream to marry old rich man, so that she can have his money when he dies.

Mommy: "*We were very poor! But then I married you, Daddy, and now we're very rich*" (Albee: 1960: 65).

Mommy: "*You should. I have a right to live off of you because I married you, and because I used to let you get on top of me and bump your uglies; and I have a right to all your money when you die. And when you do, Grandma and I can live by ourselves ... if she is still here. Unless you have her put in a nursing home*" (Albee, 1960: 67).

Grandma: "*When she was no more than eight years old she used to climb up on my lap and say, in a sickening little voice, 'When I grow up, I'm going to marry a rich old man; I'm going to set my wittle were end right down in a tub o' butter, that's what I'm going to do.'*" And I warned you, Daddy; I told you to stay away from her type. I told you to. I did" (Albee, 1960: 69).

On the other side, the fact that Daddy marries Mommy despite Grandma's warning shows that Daddy cannot differentiate real and fake love. Thinking that Mommy loves him, he marries her.

Second, the materialistic value or false value is further illustrated through the way Mommy and Daddy view and treat their adopted child.

Grandma: "*Well, yes; very much like it. Bundle, bumble; who cares? At any rate, the woman, who was very much like Mommy, said that they wanted a bumble of their own, but that the man, who was very much like Daddy, couldn't have a bumble; and the man, who was very much like Daddy, said*



*that yes, they had wanted a bumble of their own, but that the woman, who was very much like Mommy, couldn't have one, and that now they wanted to buy something very much like a bumble" (Albee, 1960: 98).*

Mommy and Daddy, being unable to have a baby, adopt a baby by buying it. So, even a baby who is a human being is viewed as thing that has commercial and material value.

The baby is not treated as a human being but only as a toy to which they can do whatever they want when it makes them annoyed.

Mrs. Barker: *"For its Daddy! Why, any self-respecting woman would have gouge those eyes right off its head (Albee, 1960: 99).*

Grandma: *Well, she did. That's exactly what she did. But then, it kept its nose up in the air" (Albee, 1960: 100).*

Grandma: *"Well, yes, they did eventually. But first, they cut off its you-know-what" (Albee, 1960: 100).*

Grandma: *"That's what they thought. But after they cut off its you-know-what, it still put its hands under the covers, looking for its-you know-what. So, finally, they had to cut off its hands at the wrists" (Albee, 1960: 100).*

The horrible description of what Mommy and Daddy do to the baby above is an allegorical description of how parents treated their child badly. It reflects that there is lack of love and affection in child-parents relationship that results in child's mistreatment. There is definitely no feeling involved in the family.

The other evidences of the society's subscription of materialistic value are reflected, for example, through Mommy's attitude of consumerism in buying hat (Albee, 1960: 62); Mommy's and Daddy's pursue of satisfaction (Albee, 1960: 62) as they get only unsatisfactory apartment's service and

a failed adopted child (Albee, 1960: 58); and Daddy's dream to be the United States Senator (Albee, 1960: 83) because being a senator means money and power.

The previous discussion reveals the materialistic value of the society. Unfortunately, the materialistic value influences people to have materialistic attitude. People tend to be more interested to the superficial concrete things and ignore other deeper values such as spirituality, feelings and morality which should be the real values in the society. People become more concerned with something superficial or outer rather than something inner. People hold the fake values rather than the real values. Thus, they lack of real values.

This fact is depicted through the description of Young Man that lacks of real values. The condition of lack of values can be seen in Young Man's confession,

*"I've no longer have the capacity to feel anything. I have no emotions. ... I have, now only my person, my body, my face. I use what I have ... I let people love me ... I let people touch me ... I let them draw pleasure from my groin ... from my presence ... from the fact of me..." (Albee, 1960: 115).*

Obviously, he is loose in terms of morality. He has no concept of love. Love for him is superficial love, or love in terms of involvement of physical body. He lets people love him, and take advantage of his body. He might also make use of his body to get what he wants. He, thus, lacks of moral values as the standards of his life.

His willingness to be Mommy and Daddy's adopted son is not based on the fact that he loves them or that he has certain feeling to them, but it is because of money.

Young Man: *"... I'll do almost anything for money" (Albee, 1960: 109).*



Thus, as a child he thinks that he does not need to love his parents and have feeling towards them.

Young Man then represents the twentieth century American dream of happiness. The new dream is allegorically depicted as a well-built and good-looking young man without insights and moral values. It is like a beautiful container without content. It indicates that the dream is superficial, not laden with the old traditional and moral ones reflected in Grandma's. It means also, that the society pursues its happiness superficially as they seek for money without consideration of moral values.

#### 4.3. The Idea of Change in American Dream

American dream is a dream of happiness. What is meant by the idea of change in American dream here is the change of values in the American dream represented through Grandma and Young Man. The American dream itself does not change because the American dream talked in the paper is the same, that is, the dream of happiness.

From the whole discussion above, it can be seen that American dream changes lie in the change of values held by Grandma and Young Man. The old values in the colonial American dream starts disappearing because the new superficial values remove them. These superficial values are artificial because they are not the real values as what Grandma holds. Thus, the new-styled American dream emerges. The idea of value change is seen in Young Man's statement,

Young Man: "*a fall-from grace... a departure of innocence... loss ...*" (Albee, 1960: 114).

The process of change is equated as the departure of innocence. Young Man has no longer had the innocence that Grandma

has. The leaving of the values is also reflected through Grandma's admission,

Grandma: "*.... Letting your true feelings come out. Old people aren't dry enough, I suppose. My sacks are empty, the fluid in my eyeballs is all caked on the inside edges, my spine is made of sugar candy, I breathe ice; but you don't hear me complain. Nobody hears old people complain because people think that's all old people do. And that's because old people are gnarled and sagged and twisted into the shape of a complaint*" (Albee, 1960: 82).

Old people usually undergo physical deterioration that leads to death. This is what Grandma suffers. Her physical strength declines. And, this decline is an allegory of the decline of her old values. So, the old values; industry, sense of dignity, pioneering values, legal way to pursue worldly happiness are in the edge of disappearing, and are replaced by the new artificial and superficial values.

The idea of change is allegorically represented in the play through the idea of carting off Grandma from the house to the nursing home, done by the van man, and the replacement of her position in the house by the Young Man as he is going to be the adopted son in the house. Through the idea of substitution from Grandma to Young Man done by Mommy and Daddy, Albee satirizes the society, as Mommy and Daddy are the representation of society. As Mommy and Daddy intend to take Grandma to the nursing home, and adopt Young Man, Albee criticizes the society that leave the American old values and take the new ones.

However, Albee does not seem to be pessimistic towards this change because he does not make Grandma carted off or taken by the van man. It implies optimism that the old values or dream still persist in the society, as Albee says "Every one of my



plays is an act of optimism "([http://www.gradesaver.com/ Classic Notes/Authors/about-Edward-Albee. html](http://www.gradesaver.com/Classic_Notes/Authors/about-Edward-Albee.html)).

This optimism is further confirmed by Albee in Stugrin (1972: 21) that "Grandma does not really die in the play, except in the eyes of the other characters ... she continues to exist on another plane of being. Thus there seems to a possibility of hope left in the world in that the spirit represented in Grandma has not died, but that it might well appear again in better times (1972: 21). Albee is optimistic that Grandma's values and spirit will appear someday in the better future.

### 5. Conclusion

*The American Dream* presents the idea of American dream and the change in the American dream by using an allegory.

Grandma represents the old colonial dream where people dream and pursue their success and happiness by using and maintaining traditional values. Young Man is the representation of the new contemporary dream where people try to get success but they leave the traditional values. The 1960's society is overcome by money's power. They are trapped in materialism. They dream and pursue money as they think money is the happiness and ultimate goal, forgetting the deep, important traditional values. The American dream in both eras and the changes of the dream are seen through the values held by Grandma and Young Man. Through the idea of change from the old real values to the new, artificial, and superficial ones, Edward Albee wants to criticize the society's values 1960s as reflected through the society's dream in the twentieth century.

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