

Extract of an article “‘The Sopranos’, dissatisfaction and the American Dream” by David Charpentier (2011)

For the seven years it graced television screens, David Chase’s *The Sopranos* was a lightning rod for critical and intellectual debate. Issues of ethnicity, violence, guilt, family, addiction, history and identity traversed the show’s plotlines and audience. As one of the shows that helped redefine the American art form of episodic television, the pursuit and redefinition of the American Dream was a constant point of discussion and denigration. For many, success is signaled by a large house in the suburbs, nice cars, the ability to allow your children to grow up to achieve what they want; obtaining these goals, for the children and grandchildren of hardworking immigrants, will lead to a satisfying, happy life.

Of course this concept is incredibly flawed and at the end of the series, Tony and Carmella Soprano may have well-educated children, successful businesses and ostentatious shows of wealth, but they are no better for it and significantly less happy than when the series began. Disappointment is contiguous with unobtainable utopian ideals. It may be because the characters primarily seek fulfillment through material and sensual pleasures—itsself shaped by the media, notably movies and other television shows—that they are rendered to disappointment. Characters such as Tony and Junior want control of their people and interests, to reap the benefits of being boss. They want to be like *The Godfather*, like Don Corleone, but seem to ignore the fact that Vito watched his son die and Michael lost his family and murdered his brother.

Power was all they had; despite all their material wealth they were never truly happy. Though their inability to obtain the perfect life is directly correlated to their Mafioso lifestyle, the larger metaphor regarding American unfulfillment and questions of identity transcend stories of mob life.