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## Analysis Of The Male Characters In All My Sons And Death Of A Salesman

The American Dream: the belief that, despite surrounding circumstances, and no matter where they were born or what social class they are in, anyone can achieve their very own version of success within society. However Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" shows Willy Loman's determination to put his children's success before his own and his beliefs that the American Dream should be to have a simplistic lifestyle that has less of a focus on materialistic items yet still fulfills their desires. The events that occur throughout the play show Willy that these things don't always turn out the way they have been planned and that often people lose sight of the things they should hold most dear to them. 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.' This extract from the Declaration of Independence sums up what Willy Loman believes the American Dream is. However, in Arthur Miller's play 'All My Sons' the lead protagonist has a different view of what the American Dream is and what it means to him. Joe Keller highlights the darker sides of the American Dream and goes against his better morals to achieve his version of the American Dream. We see him lie to cover his own back and blame his business partner Steve Deever for selling faulty plane parts that caused several planes crashes killing 21 pilots.

Joe Keller in "All my Sons" is at the head of the Keller family. He owns a successful business that supplies the military with parts for World War Two planes. He values his family greatly and is relatively hard working. He carries this image proudly. However, he soon makes a tragic mistake and blames it on someone else, and begins to spiral out of control. The audience gets to see two sides of Joe's personality. We see him as an honest, family man yet in contrast to this we also see a dishonest, selfish, and manipulative man who isn't willing to risk losing his respectable reputation and puts his business on the line when he loses his morals in order to succeed. Keller is described in the play as: "A heavy man of stolid mind and build, a businessman these many years, but with the imprint of the machine-shop worker and Boss still upon him....A man among men."

His "stolid mind" emphasizes how strong-minded he is, suggesting he lacks emotion and is very calm, highlighting he is a good family man and his family is able to depend on him to be the lead man in the family. It is stressed here that he is a respectable and 'normal' man and his only goal is to give his family the best future possible. Always having a concern with money, his main ambition has always been to be successful both in his business and financially. His business and financial ambitions haven't only been for him but also for his family but have a poor perception of what he needs to do to succeed and we see this when he sends a shipment of faulty plane parts to the US military. "A man among men" suggests that he would do the same as anyone else would do to succeed, highlighting he is no different from anyone else.

Willy Loman, in "Death of a Salesman," is similar to Joe Keller in "All My Sons." He in some ways values his business and stays loyal to his beliefs surrounding the American Dream. He also fails to see his mental health as a priority when it comes to making a decision between his business and his well-being. In his own "perfect" world, he is a very successful salesman. He uses his work to hide from his mental health struggles and cannot come to terms with the

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anxiety and self-doubt he experiences. He hides this well with his extremely arrogant personality, however struggles to keep this perfect picture of strength from shattering. He clings to the idea of the American Dream that anyone can make it if they are viewed as attractive and popular, but even this, in the end, does not prove to be enough for him when it becomes clear that he isn't actually popular, well-liked or good at his job.

This level of arrogance comes from Willy's career, He believes that he is vital to the company and it would crumble to the ground without him. But realistically it's the company that's vital to him. When he discovers he's not really needed anywhere, his self-worth is no longer. He finds himself facing a sharp downwards spiral and making poor life choices after he loses grip of all reality and time. This attitude is almost the same as Joe Keller's approach to his mental health as just like Joe, he notices his problems yet still fails to make a change in his life to improve his well-being.

Another thing both Joe Keller and Willy Loman have in common is their regrets throughout the play, which inevitably lead them to the same dreadful fate. In *All My Sons*, Joe Keller finds himself regretting the fact that he knowingly sold faulty plane parts to the military leading to the untimely death of his son Larry and another twenty pilots who were flying the faulty World War Two planes. This led to him being seen as a let-down by both his friends and family due to his lack of commitment as a parent as well as his lack of empathy. This, in turn, destroyed his life and his reputation, as well as that of his family and friends. Despite his wealth and success as a businessman, he is still viewed as a failure by many. Despite Joe being at the forefront of the decision to sell faulty plane parts to the military that resulted in the deaths of 21 airmen, Joe blamed this decision on Steve Deever, his business partner: "So he takes out his tools and he... covers over the cracks. All right... that's bad, it's wrong, but that's what a little man does. If I could have gone in that day and told him - junk 'em, Steve, we can afford it."

Despite this being the opposite of what actually happened, to hide his guilt and regret Joe recruited Steve to help cover his tracks, perhaps highlighting that he is even beginning to believe his own story, He lies to both his son Chris and Ann, Larry's fiancée easily now that he has had to cover the truth with this story for so long. He then feels guilt and regret that comes from knowingly selling faulty plane parts which end up killing not only his own son but 21 other American Pilots. The lies and deceit he tells his business partner to fill him with regret in the end when he finds that there is no other way out from his guilt than to commit suicide when he finds he has to chose between going to jail and committing suicide, highlighting the true extent of his guilt and regret, although he refuses to fully admit it.

Death of a Salesman's Willy Loman also finds himself with regrets, which leads him to a world of delusion and depression. Willy finds his life is further complicated by his life choices. A moment he particularly regrets is when Biff discovered him with another woman, who he was having an affair in a hotel room. He finds that this incident has an undeniable effect on him. He realizes here that he cannot be honest and face up to what he has done, nor can he forgive himself and break from the torture and restraints of the regrets he is wrapped up in. This regret, like Joe, leads him to the dreadful decision where he chooses to kill himself for what he believed to be the greater good as this action is taken to hopefully redirect his son Biff onto a path where he can finally find greatness "Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world, a young man with such - personal attractiveness, gets lost. And such a hard worker. There's one thing about Biff - he's not lazy."

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Both Willy and his wife Linda describe their son as having a distinct inability to “find himself”. Willy reveals his true interpretation of the American Dream within these lines. He shows here that he believes that the American Dream rewards those who have a certain personal attractiveness, as well as the success that comes with hard work. Entirely dependant on his business and salesmanship, Willy relies on his personal attractiveness and believes that being “well-liked” throughout society is important in finding the key to success. We see Willy deny reality in order to achieve his own version of the American Dream. Willy decides to relive the past, revisiting his memories and events in a series of flashbacks which he is seen to be the successful businessman he desperately wants to be.

Despite his family is desperate to create a life for their children built around the American dream, Chris, in *All My Sons*, is desperate to break free from the life his parents created for him, based on good intentions and what they think he would've wanted. However, he finds that he wants to discover his own path in life. He wants his own life and not just the one that his parents want for him. This is to his father's disappointment as everything he has worked for has been for Chris “I want a family, I want some kids, I want to build something I can give myself to.”

Americans value their right to freedom, a right that many other countries are not fortunate enough to have. However, even this right to freedom has its restrictions. Chris believes that his family is holding him back from his own desires as they are so focused on the ‘perfect life’ the American Dream offers. His own dream is being able to support himself and his own family with the skills and qualities he has developed throughout his life on his own. He longs for the day he can follow his own American Dream and marry Ann and have children with her. Chris finds that he is very passionate about doing things himself and in his own way without interference from his family. This highlights here the desperation of Joe to succeed as he even tries to succeed through his son and finds himself trying to live his own version of the American Dream through his family.

Biff, in *Death of a Salesman*, highlights his desperate desire to impress and prove himself to his dad. Despite his best efforts to make Willy proud he only finds that Willy himself is flawed and is so caught up in his materialistic dreams that Willy fails to realize that they are too far from Biff’s grasp, proving that Willy is not able to cope with the truth. Biff finds that he is no longer able to have an open conversation with his father as he can no longer accept the harsh reality of life “Sure, maybe we could buy a ranch. Raise cattle, use or muscles. Men built like we are should be working out in the open.”

This scene shows that Biff and Happy, the two grown sons of Willy and Linda. Biff is sharing his version of the American Dream. Happy replies to Biff’s comment, saying; “The Loman Brothers, eh?” This suggests that Biff’s version of the American Dream is owning a home in Western America, Happy’s comment referring to “The Loman Brothers” shows that his dream of owning a ranch is far from realistic and is perhaps a reference to older Western movies. It is highlighted here that Willy has passed his optimism surrounding the American Dream onto his sons. This hinders their future as they focus their sights upon unrealistic dreams and expectations. Biff symbolizes throughout the play that the American Dream is not the same for everyone and it is not what every man wants for himself and his family. Biff wants his dad to stop focussing on such unrealistic dreams. Willy dreams of money and success, but Biff’s dreams are far more simplistic, and he dreams of being loved for who he is.

Both Joe and Willy are led to the same dreadful fate. Larry and Chris abandoned Joe. Chris was

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loyal to Joe before his lies were revealed and his mishandling of business was also uncovered. Chris was then more than willing to leave Joe in prison for the rest of his life. Larry also abandoned Joe. After Larry finds out that his father's business was responsible for the deaths of his friends in the military, Larry saw no other way out than to kill himself as he couldn't deal with the news of the involvement of his father's business in the crashes "Yesterday they flew in a load of papers from the States and I read about Dad and your father being convicted. I can't express myself. I can't tell you how I feel... I can't bear to live anymore. Last night I circled the base for twenty minutes before I could bring myself in. How could he have done that? Every day three or four men never come back and he sits back there doing 'business'... I don't know how to tell you what I feel... I can't face anybody... I'm going out on a mission in a few minutes. They'll probably report me as missing. If they do, I want you to know that you mustn't wait for me" Chris reading Harry's suicide letter to Joe is ultimately seen as Joe's breaking point where he finally crumbles under the pressure and sees there is no way out, and this event forced him to end his life. Joe's trail of mistakes was what inevitably led his family to abandon him in his time of need, even though he did everything he could, in the end, to try and keep his loved ones surrounding him. This links both 'All My Sons' and 'Death of a Salesman' together as Willy has also struggled with abandonment his whole life.

Most difficult of all to deal with, his sons refuse to take any part in his life troubles and worries and seem to be almost embarrassed by him. Willy's son Happy goes on to openly state that Willy Loman is "not his father" when trying to find and impress a woman to go on a date with. Willy is trying to live in a world of fantasy where he is trying his best to escape his own reality. He wants to be in a world where he is viewed as extraordinary when in fact this is far from reality. Willy is no longer surrounded by his loved ones. This leads him to the dreadful decision he takes to end his life. His boss, Howard, also in a way abandons Willy as he fires him because he is no longer contributing to the business and he can no longer use him to his advantage. In true Willy Loman fashion, even this is his final attempt at achieving the American Dream he has longed after for so long. The life insurance that could be collected from his death should be more than enough to support Biff in opening the doors to a business yet Biff is not willing to take this on.

Both Joe Keller and Willy Loman can be perceived as normal, hard-working American men. However, they both developed flaws, cracking their perfect American Dream. They could no longer distinguish the difference between reality and fantasy as we see that Willy Loman was even almost living in a dream-like state. Their tragic misunderstanding of the American Dream led them to the same tragic fate as well as both protagonists having abandonment issues which also became detrimental to their well-being. Death of a Salesman highlights true issues in today's society keeping it as relevant as ever, Willy's self-delusion, and his sense of failure and regret make the play so relatable to the audience as these are feelings many have experienced at one point in their life. It is unfortunate that the mistakes that Willy made were so detrimental to his reputation and relationships yet the situation he found himself in is not uncommon. Willy cannot accept that he is just as ordinary as everyone else. The play's ability to be relatable to everyone even now, years after it was written, makes so many people admire it so much. We find that Biff's words "I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you" are true despite Willy's desperate pleas to change everyone's mind. All My Sons also highlights flaws throughout our society as Joe Keller's final statement that the pilots were "All My Sons" shows his sudden realization that he may as well have killed his own son, highlighting that society should have a responsibility to look after everyone equally just as though they were their own.