



Populace

GALLUP®

Success Index

Executive Summary

Populace, in partnership with Gallup, conducted the first-of-its-kind, nationally representative study to understand what “success” truly means to Americans. The study compares how Americans’ personal definitions of success are different from perceptions of how society defines success — along with the disparities of perceived success across different demographic groups.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE INAUGURAL SUCCESS INDEX INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

There is a stark difference between how Americans define success and how they believe others in society define success.

Most Americans believe others in society define success in **status-oriented** and zero-sum terms, but less than 10% apply this standard to their personal definition of success.

- Americans believe that others in society would say **being famous** is the most important factor for success. Fame, however, is the least important factor in people's personal views of success.
 - Americans also believe others in society have a one-size-fits-all definition of success, concentrated on **status (45.9%)**, followed by **education (19.8%)** and **finances (8.8%)**.
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Americans have very diverse definitions of personal success that cover a wide variety of life domains.

The study found that there is no “average” definition of success. Instead, everyone tends to have a highly unique, personal view of success.

- The most important domains in Americans' personal definitions of success are **education (17.1%)**, **relationships (15.6%)**, and **character (15.4%)**.
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The vast majority of Americans — more than 80% — believe they are achieving success according to their own views of success, rather than what they believe to be society's view of success.

- On a 100-point scale, **Americans, on average, have a “success score” of 68** according to their personal definitions of success. Conversely, respondents average an achieved success score of 31 when it comes to how they think others define success (perceived societal success).
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Americans who have achieved more personal success rate their lives as being better than those who have achieved lower levels of personal success.

- The survey finds that a **20-point increase in achieved personal success** (on a 100-point scale) is associated with a rise in subjective wellbeing — an increase that is roughly equivalent to moving from an **income bracket of \$50,000-\$74,999 to \$75,000-\$99,999**.
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Some demographic differences exist in how Americans think about success.

- Very liberal (63%) and somewhat liberal (66%) respondents report lower levels of personal success than somewhat conservative (72%) and very conservative (71%) Americans.
- Females assign 20% more importance to the attribute of “being famous” and 30% more importance to “has a large social media following” as perceived factors of societal success.

Introduction: Why Study Success?

Our understanding of what constitutes a successful life functions like a personal compass that deeply influences how we perceive, and thus lead, our lives. Our internal, private definitions of success reflect our individual values, aspirations, and life priorities. Our impressions of what society values, on the other hand, present an alternative gauge that reveals our perceived collective values, aspirations, and priorities. These internal and external guides have potentially significant implications on how we organize and prioritize our lives and the foundational pillars of American society.

Populace, a national think tank, is dedicated to studying success and creating a world where all people have the chance to live fulfilling lives in a thriving society.

From youth to adulthood — from our elementary schools to our employers, to our television sets and social media feeds — we are bombarded with a zero-sum definition of success that emphasizes wealth, power, and status over fulfillment and the abilities of every individual.

Understanding what Americans consider a successful life, and whether they consider their lives to be successful, affords the opportunity to deconstruct our values, explore variations in those values, and examine whether our lives are meaningfully affected by these variations. It also allows us to examine whether Americans' needs are being met by the institutions designed to facilitate our success — our workplaces, educational and healthcare systems — in an era of rapid technological and societal change.

The aim of this report is to stimulate conversations about success by investigating the following questions:

- 1** What are the similarities and differences in how people define success and how they believe others define success?
- 2** What facets of life and specific attributes are most important to how people personally gauge success and how they think others gauge success?
- 3** What are the different ways demographic groups define success, and how does that differ from the way they perceive the rest of society defines it?
- 4** To what extent are Americans achieving success according to how they define it?
- 5** What is the relationship between achieved success and life fulfillment?

The Success Gap

Respondents' definitions of success differ from the way they think others in society define it. Most Americans believe other people define success in status-oriented, comparative, and zero-sum terms. However, more than 90% of Americans say that they, personally, do not see success as a finite resource that only some can enjoy.

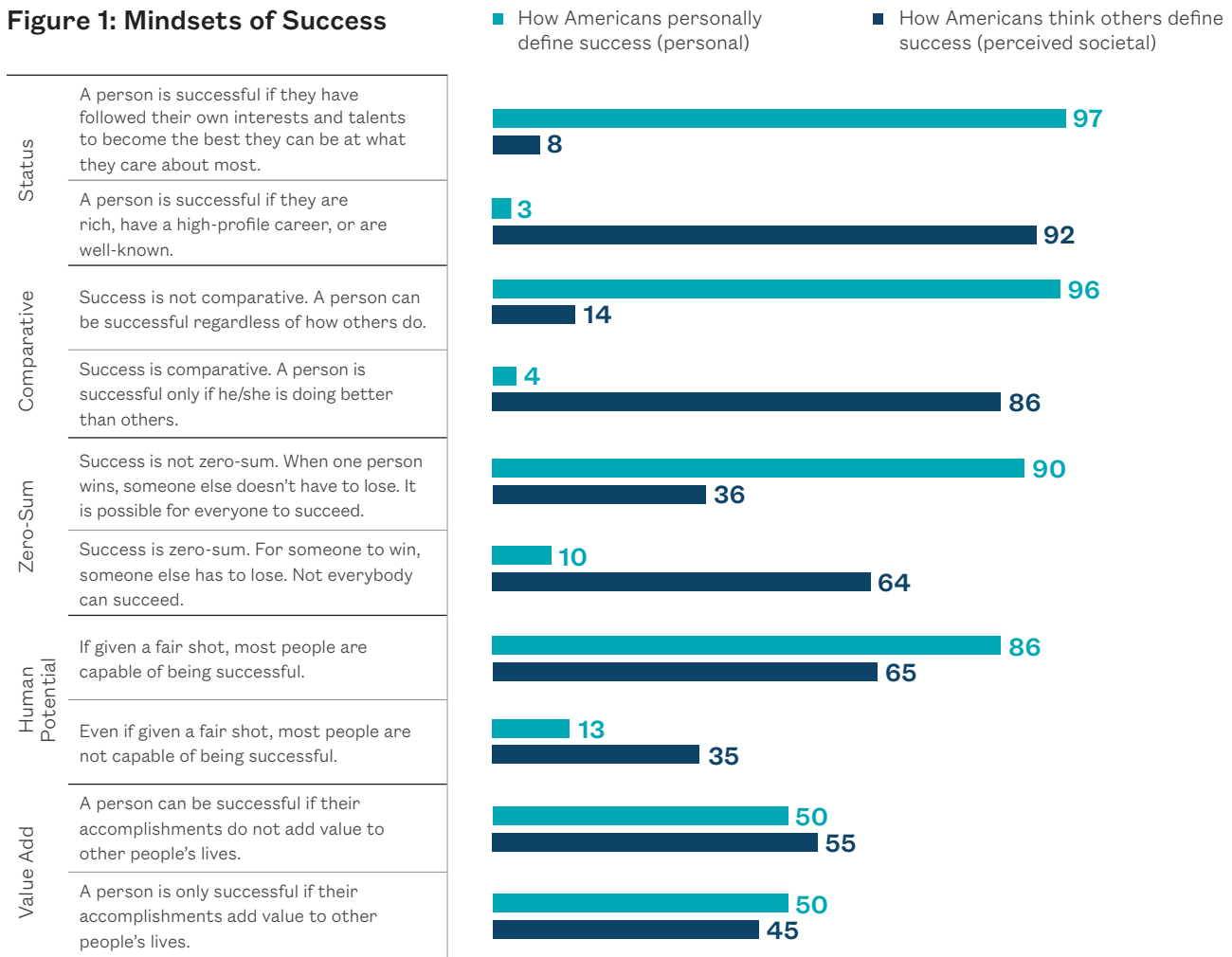
Particularly revealing is Americans' belief that society places significant importance on status symbols.

Almost everyone (97%) said pursuing one's interests and talents comes closer to their personal definition of success, yet nearly everyone (92%) also believes that fame and fortune come closer to society's definition of success.

This variance suggests people hold two distinct definitions of success in their mind: the personal and perceived societal definitions — which are vastly different.

The survey questions regarding people's mindsets of success capture important, general differences in the way Americans understand personal success and how they think others do, but they do not identify what facets of life or specific attributes Americans associate most with success. Through early rounds of investigation into the foundations of a successful life, Populace determined that traditional survey research methods are ill-equipped to provide answers about the specific elements Americans most associate with success.¹

Figure 1: Mindsets of Success



Note: Percentages may sum to 100% +/-1% due to rounding.

¹ Limitations included the possibility of providing socially acceptable answers (e.g., social desirability bias) and the ability to claim every factor as an important part of success (e.g., a ceiling effect).

Understanding Success

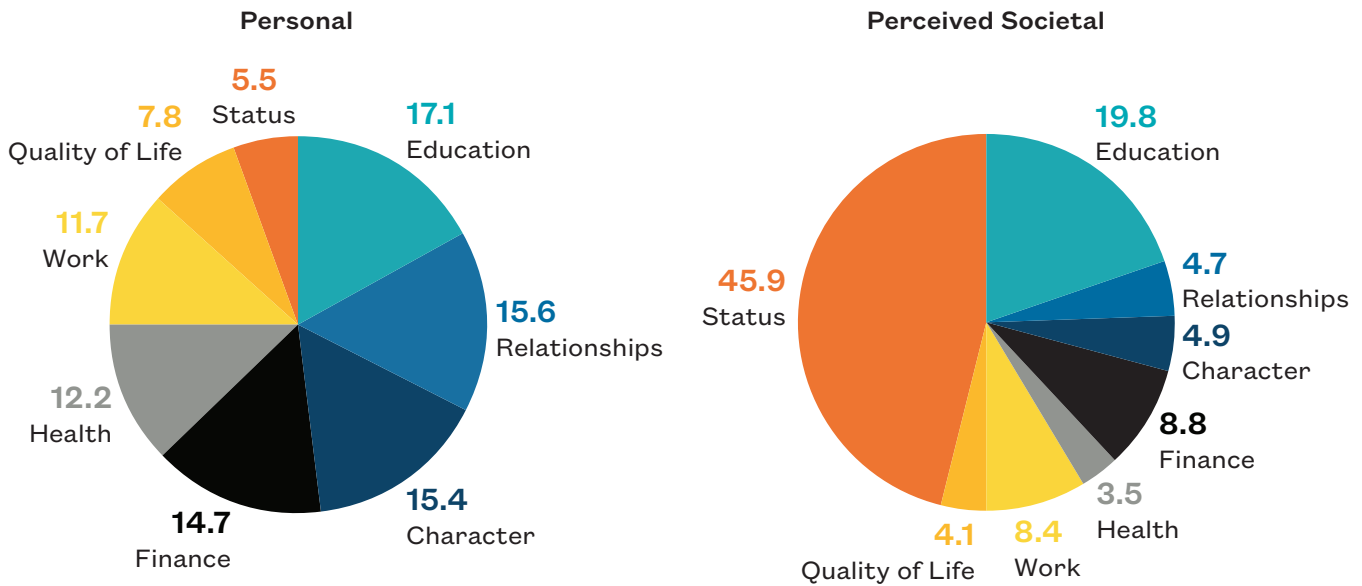
To produce a measure that provided accurate information about the attributes Americans believe contribute most to their personal success and perceived societal success, Populace developed a choice-based conjoint (CBC) survey experiment using a partial profile design.² Based on a nationally representative sample of **5,242 Americans**, Populace calculated the extent to which **76 attributes** contribute to Americans' personal definition of success and their perception of how others define success. These attributes can be categorized into **eight domains**: character, education, finance, health, quality of life, relationships, status, and work.

² For more on the conjoint method and research design, see Appendix B.

This novel methodological approach produced estimates that are best understood in terms of a success pie, where each slice represents how much an attribute contributes to the overall composition of success. Like the results on mindsets of success, the survey found that Americans emphasize different domains of life when considering how they personally define success and how they believe others in society define success.³

Americans’ perceived definition of how others in society define success centers on status, but it is the least important domain when it comes to their personal definitions of success.

Figure 2: Total Composition of Success, By Domain Percentages



Note: Percentages may sum to 100% +/-1% due to rounding.

Americans’ personal views of success are far more balanced than the way Americans think others in society view success.

The status domain is a strong indicator of the disparity between personal and perceived societal definitions of success.

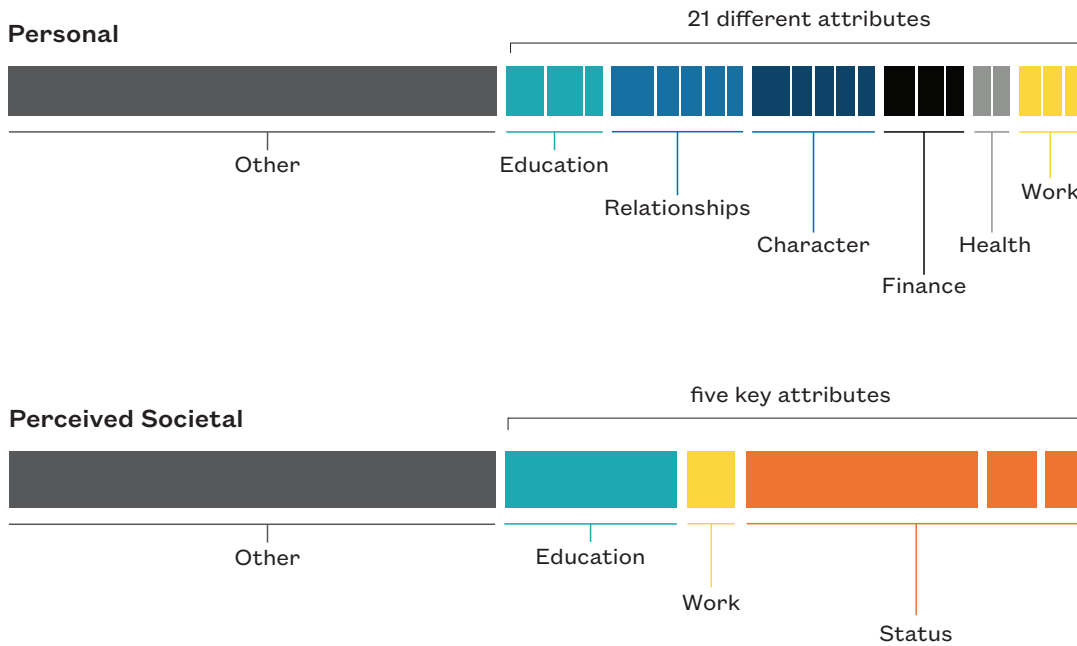
The second largest contributor to how Americans think others in society define success is education — but that is still significantly less important when compared to status, while the key contributors for personal success are more evenly distributed across the education, character, and relationship domains. The survey found that Americans consider the quality of life domain to be relatively unimportant to success in personal and perceived societal perspectives.

³ The relative importance of each domain is found by summing the share of preference for each attribute in a domain. The summed share of preference is then divided by the total number of attributes in that domain. The resulting values for the eight domains are then rescaled to 100.

Americans' personal definitions of success are diverse, while their perceived societal definitions concentrate on a few key attributes.

Of the 76 attributes Populace measured, **five key attributes comprise 50%** of what Americans believe others in society use to define success — when it comes to Americans' personal definitions of success, however, **21 attributes make up 50%**.

Figure 3: Important Attributes of Societal and Personal Success



According to their personal definitions, Americans view being a parent as the top contributor to success — composing 4.32% of Americans' overall definition of personal success (see Page 10).

Another way to interpret the meaning of these values is to compare them to other attributes that make up the pie. Being a parent, an attribute with a value of 4.3%, contributes nearly twice as much to the composition of Americans’ personal definitions of success as an attribute with a value of 2.2% (such as having at least two close friends to depend on — the 7th most important contributor).

The second and third most important contributors to Americans’ personal definitions of success are **having a high school diploma or GED** (3.9%) and **being considered trustworthy by others** (3.8%).

Table 1: Average Share of Preference for Personal Definition of Success

Rank	Attribute	Average Share of Preference ⁴
Most Important Components of Personal Success		
1	Is a parent	4.32
2	Has a high school diploma or GED	3.86
3	Is considered trustworthy by others	3.82
Least Important Components of Personal Success		
74	Determines own work schedule	0.36
75	Has a large social media following	0.17
76	Is famous	0.14

Americans consider fame to be the least important contributor to personal success, but believe it to be the most important contributor to societal success. Fame plays an outsized role in perceptions of societal success, contributing 21.5% to the total definition.

Table 2: Average Share of Preference for Perceived Societal Definition of Success

Rank	Attribute	Average Share of Preference
Most Important Components of Perceived Societal Success		
1	Is famous	21.46
2	Has an advanced degree (e.g. Ph.D., M.D., J.D., MBA)	15.89
3	Is a graduate of an elite college or university	4.62
Least Important Components of Perceived Societal Success		
74	Regularly sees family members	0.24
75	Maintains a healthy diet	0.21
76	Regularly experiences new things	0.20

⁴ The share of preference (SOP) predicts the level of preference a respondent will assign to an attribute given the set of other attributes presented. This term can be thought of as the size of a “slice of the pie.” The sum for the share of preference of all 76 attributes sums to 100, or the entire pie.

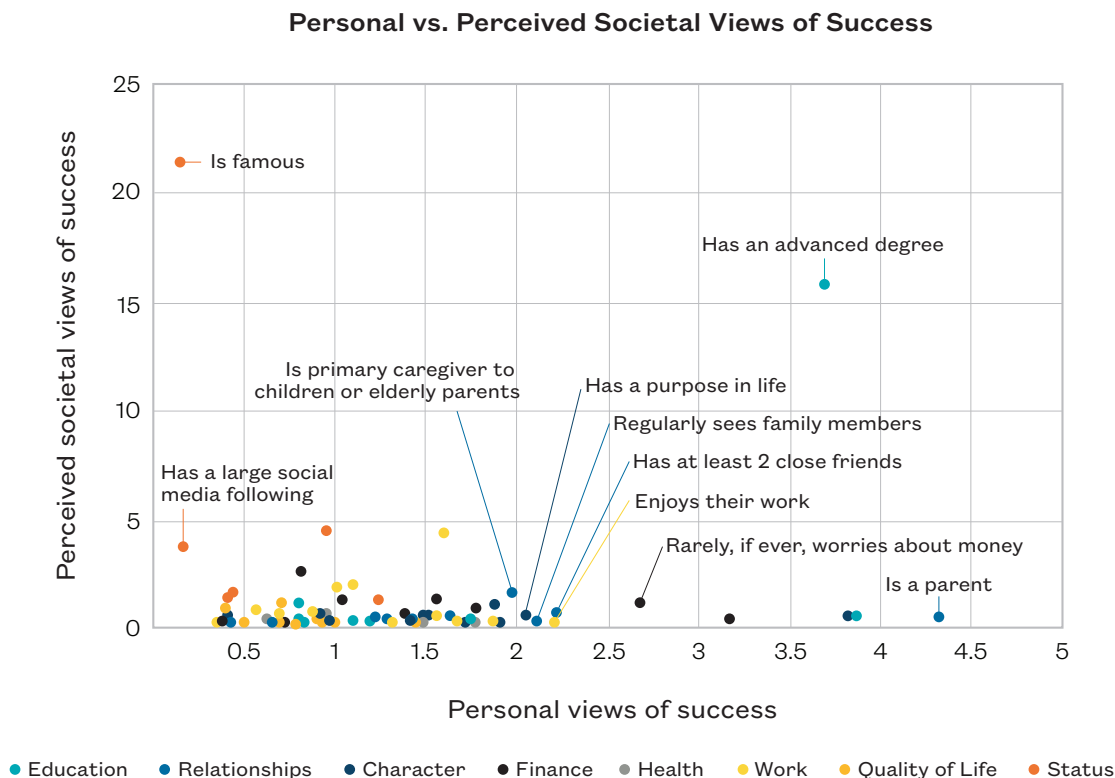
Similar to Americans’ personal definitions of success, educational attainment is an important contributor to their perceived societal definition of success — but the type of education they believe is valued by society is very different from what they personally value. Instead of “having a high school diploma or GED” among the most important attributes (as it is for personal definitions), “being a graduate of an elite college or university” is among the top attributes for perceived societal success. The degree of importance respondents placed on these exclusive attributes of educational achievement reinforces the comparative, status-oriented nature of how Americans think others in society define success.

Figure 4 shows the average, relative importance of each attribute, according to the personal and perceived societal definitions of success. Each of the 76 attributes is categorized into one of eight broad domains of life. Some overlap exists between the attributes Americans consider the most and least important contributors to personal and perceived societal success. For instance, “having an advanced degree (e.g., Ph.D., M.D., J.D., MBA)” is a top five contributor to both definitions, while “having the ability to determine your own work schedule” is in the bottom 10.

The cluster of attributes on the right half of Figure 4, along the x-axis, represent attributes that Americans consider important contributors to their personal definitions of success, but not to perceived societal success. These attributes reveal how vital quality, interpersonal relationships are to Americans’ personal views of success.

In contrast, the attributes high on the y-axis show the importance Americans think others in society place on status-oriented characteristics as markers of success. The relational attributes in this section represent quantity over quality relationships, like “having a large social media following.”

Figure 4: Personal and Perceived Societal Views on the Relative Importance of Success



In most respects, Americans have different views of their personal and perceived societal definitions of success — particularly in the top 10 contributors to personal success, which center on attributes related to financial independence, quality relationships, and the pursuit of meaningful activities. Setting aside having an advanced degree, these key internal success attributes account for 26.4% of the personal success pie, but only 5.5% of the perceived societal success pie.

While Americans tend to link their own definitions of success to attributes that contribute to their personal fulfillment, there is great diversity in the precise way they define personal success. One approach Populace implemented to measure the distinct way Americans define personal success was to determine how many respondents’ top two contributors to personal success are also present in the top contributors for the entire U.S. adult population.⁵ Populace used the same approach to construct a measure for perceived societal success as a benchmark to evaluate the degree to which personal success definitions capture individuality. To demonstrate that the measure is not sensitive to parameter specifications, Populace has presented multiple thresholds in Table 3.

Americans whose top two contributors to personal success are found within the average top five contributors of U.S. adults account for only **8% of the entire population**. In contrast, Americans whose top two contributors to perceived societal success are found within the average top five contributors of U.S. adults account for **46% of the entire population**.

As this finding reinforces, Americans define their own success in a deeply personal and unique way, while they believe others in society adopt a one-size-fits-all definition.

Table 3: Individuality Within Personal and Perceived Societal Definitions of Success

Average Top Contributors for U.S. Adult Population	Personal Definition	Perceived Societal Definition
% of individuals whose top two are found within the average top two attributes of the entire population	3%	27%
% of individuals whose top two are found within the average top five attributes of the entire population	8%	46%
% of individuals whose top two are found within the average top 10 attributes of the entire population	17%	58%
% of individuals whose top two are found within the average top 20 attributes of the entire population	36%	71%

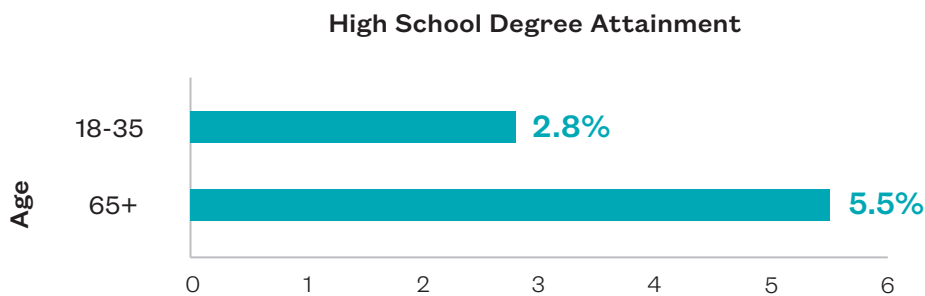
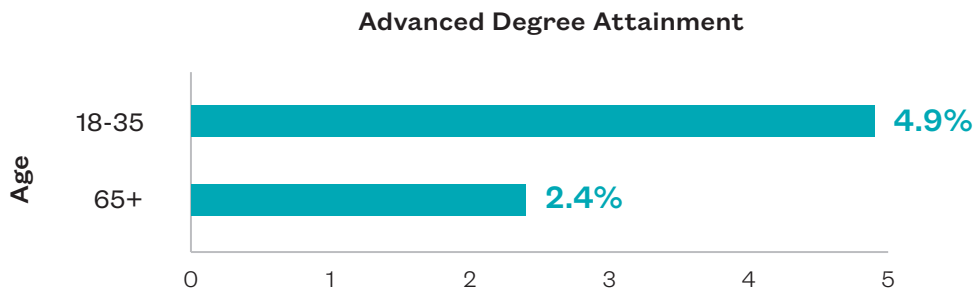
⁵ For example, the top five contributors for personal success across the entire U.S. adult population are the following: 1) is a parent, 2) has a high school diploma or GED, 3) is considered trustworthy by others, 4) has an advanced degree (e.g., Ph.D., M.D., J.D., MBA), 5) does not have credit card debt. If an individual’s top two contributors for personal success are “is considered trustworthy by others” and “does not have credit card debt,” that individual would not be included in the threshold for average top two contributors for the entire U.S. adult population, but would be included in the threshold for average top five contributors.

Demographic Differences

Personal Success

Through examining the way various U.S. demographic groups define success, Populace has developed a more nuanced understanding of the varying views of success in America. In their personal definitions of success, **Americans place relative importance on education and being a parent**, although this varies significantly across demographic groups.

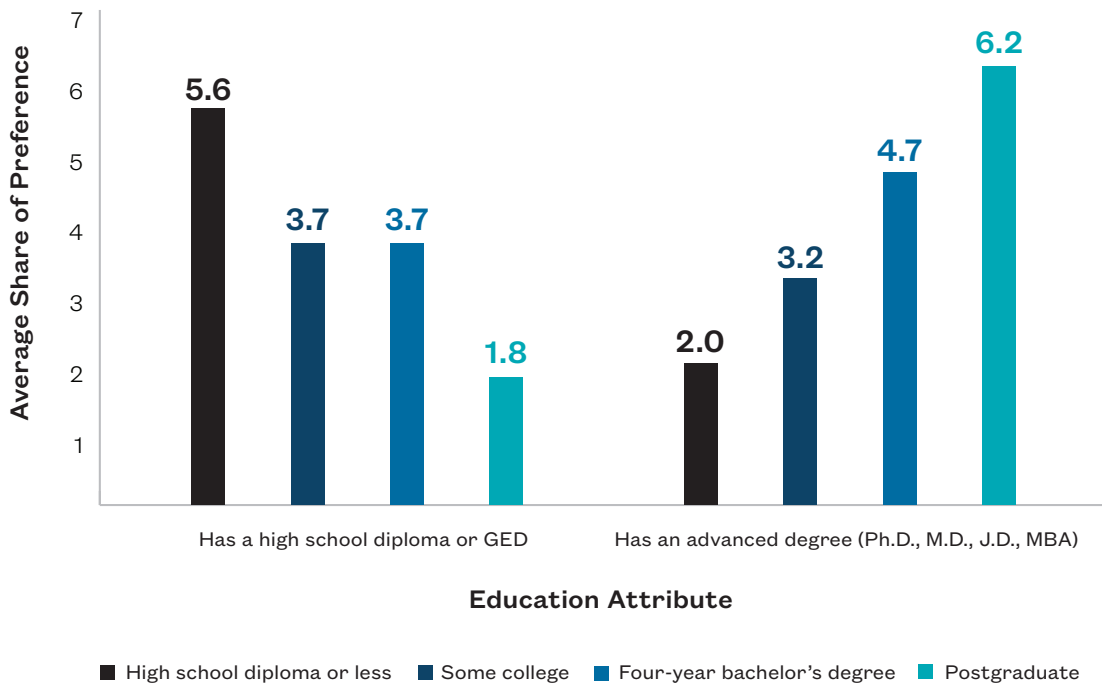
Education is important to Americans of all ages, but younger respondents, ages 18-35, place twice as much importance on advanced degree attainment (4.9%) as older Americans, age 65 and older (2.4%).



Conversely, Americans age 65 and older, place nearly twice as much importance on a high school degree (5.5%) as younger respondents, ages 18-35 (2.8%). The emphases placed on different levels of education suggest that certain levels of educational achievement symbolize a gateway to greater opportunities for each generation — each age group places more importance on the level of education they think will provide financial security.

Similarly, Americans with less formal education place greater emphasis on having a high school diploma or GED, while those with higher levels of formal education emphasize that having an advanced degree is important to their definition of success. **These findings indicate personal definitions of success are partially linked to an individual's own achievements.** Respondents may discount or elevate the importance of attributes based on their own attainment of those milestones.

Figure 5: Contribution of Educational Attainment to Personal Definition of Success



Another attribute that all demographic groups value — but to different degrees — is being a parent. Americans age 65 and older assign 36% more importance to being a parent than Americans age 18-35 (5.1% vs. 3.8% of overall success). Even more striking, very conservative Americans attach more than twice as much importance to being a parent as very liberal ones (6.1% vs. 3.0% of overall success).

Older and more conservative Americans place more importance on **being a parent** as a contributor to their personal success.

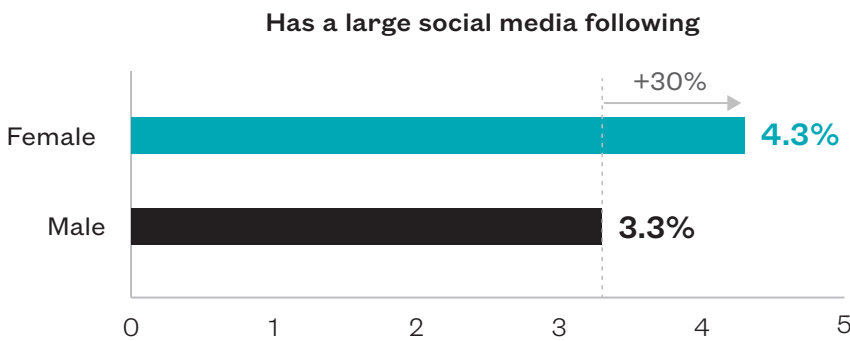
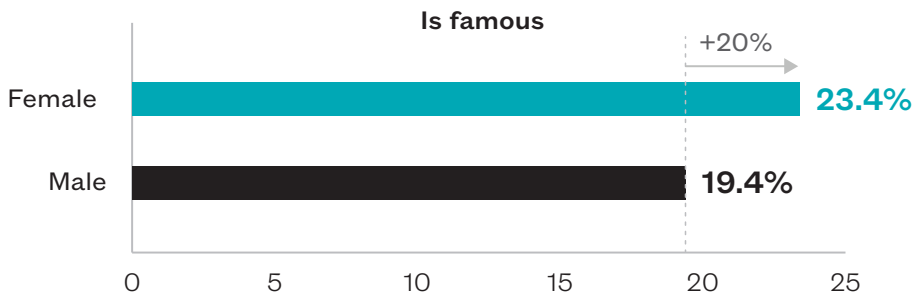
Finally, respondents' income and subjective wellbeing affects the importance they place on some financial and health attributes as contributors to their personal definition of success. For instance, respondents with a household income of \$35,000 or less place 29% more importance on not having credit card debt than respondents with a household income of \$150,000 or more (3.4% vs. 2.7% of overall success). Respondents whose wellbeing falls into the category of "suffering" place over 2.5 times more importance on having excellent health insurance as those categorized as "thriving" (3.7% vs. 1.5% of overall success).⁶

Perceived Societal Success

In terms of how Americans think others in society define success, the study found every demographic group believes fame and having an advanced degree are essential, but to varying degrees.

⁶ Respondents were asked to rate their current life and future life in five years on a 10-point scale, where zero represents the worst possible life for them and 10 the best possible life. Gallup classified the respondents as "thriving" if they rate their current life a seven or higher and their future life an eight or higher. Respondents are classified as "suffering" if they rate their current life with a zero to four and their future life with a zero to four. Those who are neither "thriving" nor "suffering" are considered "struggling."

Compared to males, females believe others in society assign 20% more importance to the attribute “is famous” (23.4% vs. 19.4%) and 30% more to “has a large social media following” (4.3% vs. 3.3%).



This finding indicates that **females believe others in society place even greater importance on status** as a defining characteristic of societal success than men.

When it comes to religious affiliation, agnostics and atheists believe others in society allocate 25% more importance to being famous (25.3% vs. 20.2% of overall success) and 31% more to having an advanced degree (19.6% vs. 15%), compared to Christians.

Another way Populace captures the differences across demographic groups in this study is by looking at the degree of concentration around a few key contributors of success. For instance, younger Americans (18-35) think others in society primarily view success through the lens of the top five attributes: “is famous,” “has an advanced degree,” “is a graduate of an elite college or university,” “owns a business,” “has a large social media following” — more than respondents age 65 and older (54.8% vs. 41.8%). This suggests that older Americans tend to possess a more diverse view of how others in society define success.

Success Indices: Gaps in Achieved Success

After completing the choice-tasks, respondents were asked to self-report whether they had achieved each of the 76 attributes presented in the conjoint experiment. The five attributes people were least likely to have achieved are also the attributes respondents ranked highest for how they think others in society define success (see Table 4).

Table 4: Achieved Rank

	% Achieved	(Average SOP Ranking)	
		Personal Definition	Perceived Societal Definition
Most Commonly Achieved			
Is considered trustworthy by others	97%	3	30
Helps others in times of need	96%	19	73
Is considerate toward others	96%	25	28
Has a high school diploma or GED	95%	2	32
Is interested in learning new things	94%	37	47
Least Commonly Achieved			
Has an advanced degree (e.g., Ph.D., M.D., J.D., MBA)	19%	4	2
Owns a business	16%	22	4
Is a graduate of an elite college or university	13%	44	3
Has a large social media following	13%	75	5
Is famous	2%	76	1

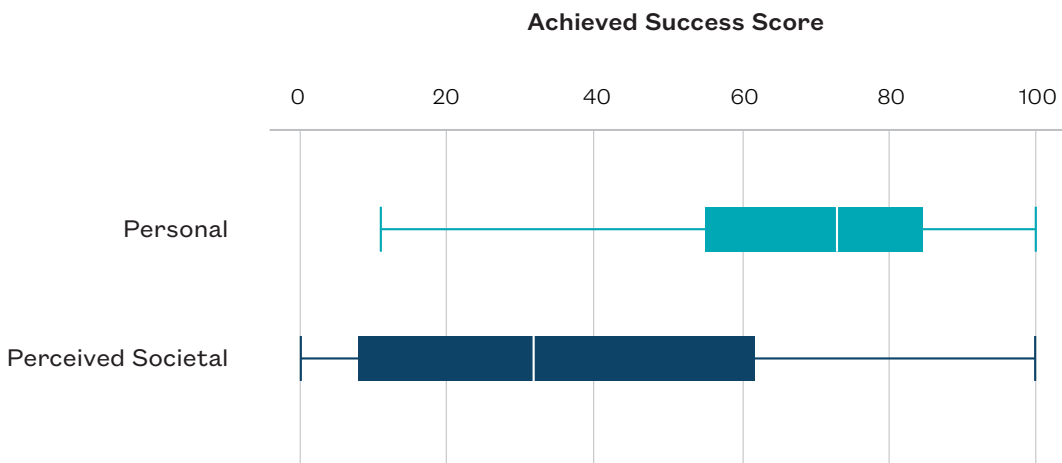
In contrast, respondents ranked two of the top five most achieved attributes (“is considered trustworthy by others” and “has a high school diploma or GED”) among the top five most important contributors to respondents’ personal definitions of success. This finding indicates that people are striving to achieve the things they care about and value as part of their own personal definition of success. It may also indicate that Americans value and strive to attain certain attributes that are personally meaningful — but that they believe are less valued by others in society.

Personal and Perceived Success Scores

Populace calculated personal and perceived societal success scores to capture how much success an individual has achieved according to their own definitions of success. The perceived societal success score measures how much success an individual has achieved according to how they believe others in society define success. For both success scores, the scale ranges from zero (no achieved success) to 100 (perfect achieved success).

As shown in Figure 6, the study found that the average personal success score (mean=68.3; median=72.7) is significantly higher than the average perceived societal success score (mean=36.2; median=31.4).

Figure 6: Personal Success Score and Perceived Societal Success Score



This achievement gap between personal and perceived societal success is expected, given the importance individuals believe others in society place on the attributes few in society have achieved.

Achieved Success Demographic Differences

The degree of average personal success that Americans have achieved varies substantially across demographic groups. Americans with a lower household income tend to achieve less personal success than those with a higher household income (see Figure 7). The largest increase in personal success scores (8 points) occurs between respondents in the income bracket of \$25,000-\$34,999 and those in the bracket of \$35,000-\$49,999.

Respondents' achieved personal success becomes relatively flat once their household income reaches \$75,000 to \$99,999, but the 3-point drop for Americans with a household income over \$200,000 may suggest diminishing returns on personal success once Americans have achieved a certain household income.

Americans' partisanship also correlates with their average achieved personal success (see Figure 7).

Very liberal (63) and somewhat liberal (66) Americans tend to achieve less personal success than somewhat conservative (72) and very conservative (71) Americans.

Ideological moderates have an average personal success score of 70 points, which is only slightly less than respondents who hold conservative views. This finding indicates that liberals place more emphasis on attributes that fewer of them have achieved than moderates or conservatives.

Figure 7: Achieved Personal Success by Household Income and Ideology

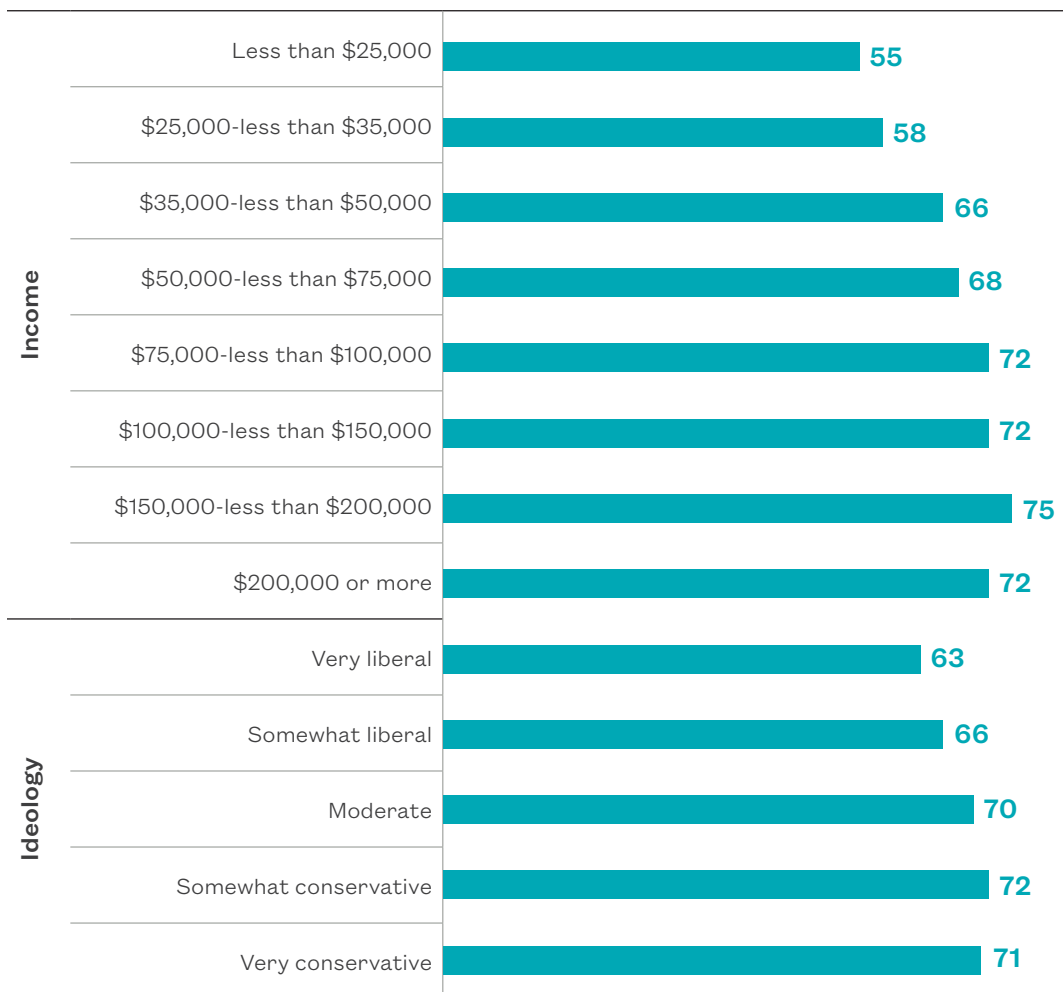
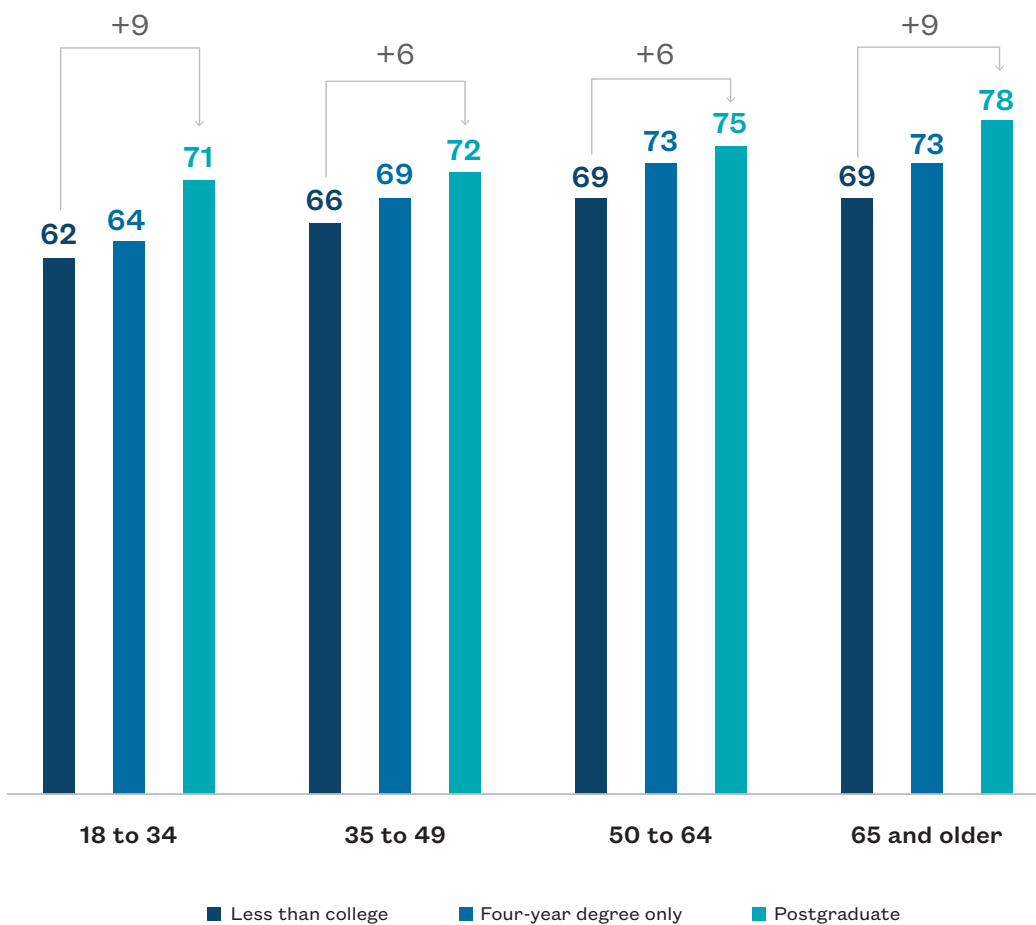


Figure 8 shows the average personal success score of Americans by age and education.

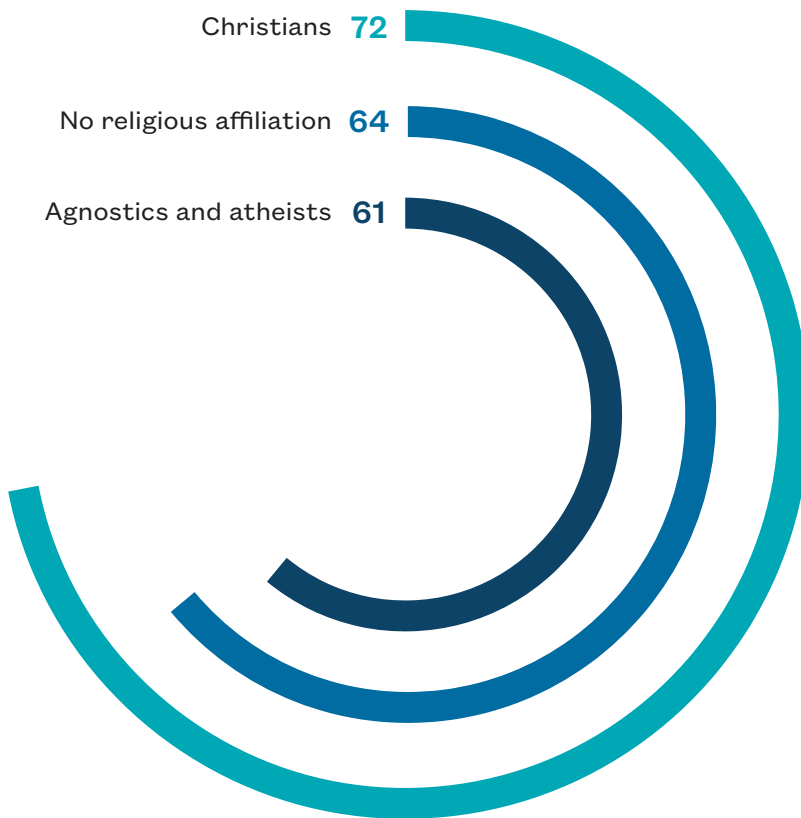
Older Americans with more formal education tend to achieve more personal success.

The **9-point** success gap between Americans with a high school degree or less and those with postgraduate education is slightly larger for 18-35 and 65-and-older age groups, compared to the **6-point gap** for middle-aged Americans, age 35-64. Americans with a postgraduate education comprise the only education group where achieved personal success continues to increase after age 65.

Figure 8: Achieved Personal Success by Age and Educational Attainment



Similarly, the average personal success score for agnostics and atheists (61 points) and respondents who identify as having no religious affiliation (64 points) is lower than that of Christians (72 points).



The Relationship Between Subjective Wellbeing and Success

The practical approach Populace used to validate the utility of these novel measures of achieved success involves demonstrating relationships to other meaningful outcomes of interest, such as wellbeing. **Populace captured the subjective wellbeing of respondents by asking them to think of a zero-to-10 “ladder” scale, where zero represents the worst possible life for them and 10 represents the best possible life.** Respondents were asked to rate their current lives on that scale, and then predict where they think their lives will rank in five years.

Using subjective wellbeing as the dependent variable, Populace leveraged a multivariate regression model to evaluate the hypothesis that a higher personal success score leads to a higher level of life satisfaction.

Holding other factors constant, Populace found a robust positive relationship where achieved personal success was positively associated with a higher wellbeing.⁷

The marginal effect an individual's achieved personal success has on the wellbeing of two people with exactly the same attributes — except for different levels of achieved personal success — is substantial.

An **increase of 20 points** in a personal success score is associated with a **0.33 rise in current life evaluation** (on a 10-point scale), an effect roughly equivalent to moving from an income bracket of **\$50,000-\$74,999** to **\$75,000-\$99,999**. A similar effect arises for predictions of wellbeing five years in the future.

This result suggests a way for Americans to create a happier and more fulfilled society that complements the traditional solutions to increasing everyone's financial security. Recalibrating institutional priorities and developing programs that afford people the opportunities to achieve their own view of personal success is a productive path to boosting the wellbeing of the entire U.S. population.

Another question about the implications of success scores is whether the gap in achieved personal and perceived societal success affects the ways individuals evaluate their lives.⁸ This is a pertinent question since many Americans have a significant achieved-success gap.

⁷ The model includes the societal success score, gender, ideology, race, education, age, age², income and marital status. Personal achieved success is significant at a p<.001 level. The predicted model held all variables constant at their mean values.

⁸ The gap is measured by calculating the difference between the personal success and societal success scores for every individual.

Roughly one in three Americans have a personal success score that is 50 or more points higher than their perceived societal success score (see Table 5).

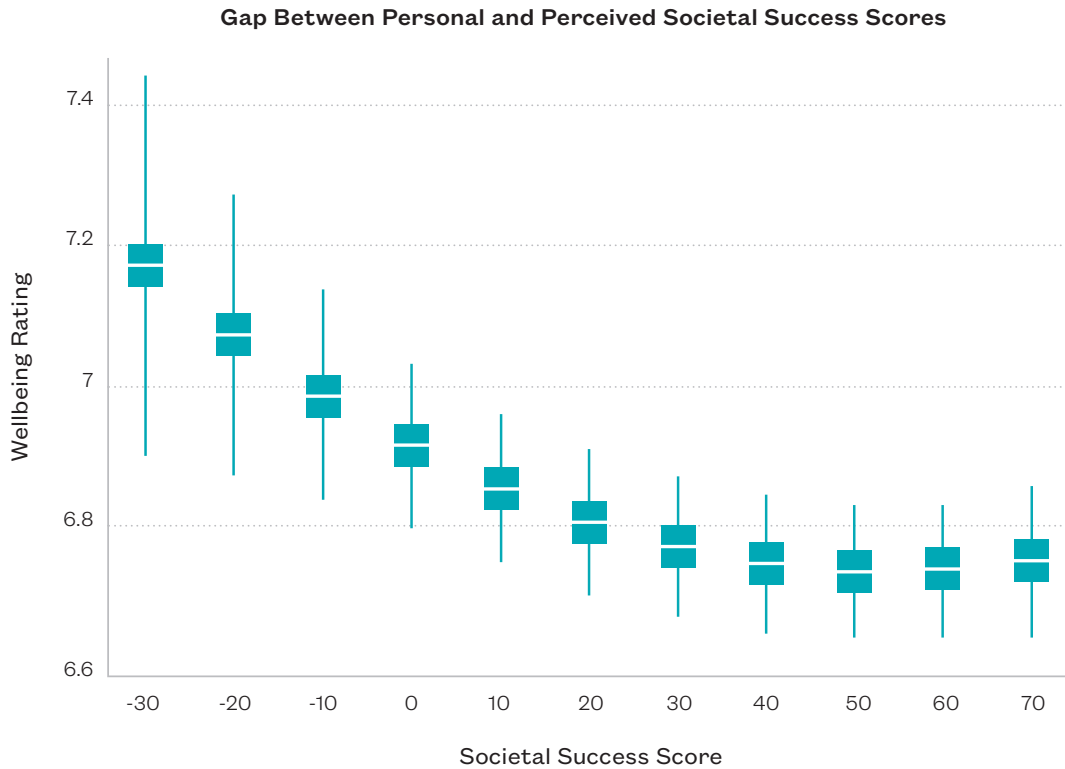
Table 5: Achieved Success Gap

Personal Success Score, Minus Perceived Societal Success Score	% of Americans in Gap Range
More perceived than personal success: -100 to -50.1	1
-50 to -25.1	3
-25 to -0.1	17
0 to 24.99	24
25 to 49.99	26
50 to 74.99	21
More personal than perceived success: 75 to 100	11

One of Populace’s hypotheses is that a large gap between personal and perceived societal success scores could negatively affect wellbeing due to the difference in how people see themselves, compared to how they think society sees them.

Figure 11 shows an individual with a slightly above average personal success score of 70. With a very high perceived societal success score of 70, that person’s estimated wellbeing would be 6.91. If that same individual achieved a perceived societal success score of 100 — a 30-point increase — their wellbeing rating would increase moderately, by .26 points, to 7.17. However, if that individual’s perceived societal success score was zero — a 70-point decrease — wellbeing would only drop .17 points to 6.74. **This finding reaffirms that Americans don’t fully buy in to the perceived societal views of success.**

Figure 11: Success Gap Effect on Life Evaluation



There is a silver lining in this nonlinear relationship between wellbeing and the achieved success gap.

People with a higher perceived societal success score tend to evaluate their lives as more fulfilled, while the negative impact on wellbeing for those with lower societal success scores is less pronounced.

In summary, the study finds that there is a positive and substantially meaningful relationship between achieved personal success and wellbeing.

Higher levels of perceived societal success are also positively correlated with wellbeing, but the substantive effect is only meaningful when achieved personal success is greater than achieved perceived societal success. Fortunately, the potential for cognitive friction caused by a large disparity between personal and perceived societal success does not appear to have a negative impact on the wellbeing of individuals.

Conclusion

As individuals and as members of society, we value various characteristics, achievements, and material possessions as contributors to a successful life. The emphasis we place on these factors gives us an invisible compass that helps guide our choices, social interactions, and institutional operations. With this report, Populace aims to stimulate introspection and spark conversation about these unconscious drivers and examine the impact they have on individual and societal outcomes.

The innovative measures Populace used for this study revealed several insights that open important lines of inquiry, including:

- 1** the different ways Americans define personal success and their perception of how others in society define success
- 2** how much emphasis different demographic groups assign key attributes of success
- 3** the impact of achieved personal and perceived societal success on an individual's wellbeing

The initial results of this study offer insights for how these measures can help researchers gain a deeper understanding of the ways Americans perceive success and whether the prevailing views on success are accurate. This approach offers a fresh look at enduring questions about the attributes we think contribute to a good life — and what attributes we think others in society value.

Specifically, the disconnect between our personal views of success and our perception of how others in society view success suggest that the time and effort Americans invest in certain pursuits may not help them achieve success according to their own definition. The implications — at economic, social, and policy levels — are that we, as Americans, should invest in systems, build institutions, and organize our communities with a greater variety of opportunities for individuals to fulfill of their unique, personal view of success.

Appendix

APPENDIX A:

Methodology

Results for the survey items are based on self-administered web surveys with a random sample of 5,242 U.S. adults age 18 and older, who are members of the Gallup Panel. Gallup uses probability-based, random sampling methods to recruit its panel members.

Gallup conducted interviews for this study July 8-15, 2019. The response rate among panel members sampled for this study was 44.7%. Gallup weighted the obtained samples to correct for nonresponse. Nonresponse adjustments were made by adjusting the sample to match the national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets were based on the 2015 Current Population Survey figures for the 18-and-older U.S. population. For results based on this sample of U.S. adults, the margin of sampling error is ± 1.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher.

All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

The full questionnaire, topline results, detailed cross-tabulations, and raw data may be obtained upon request. For questions about how the survey was conducted, please contact success@populace.org.

APPENDIX B:

Innovative Approach to Measuring Success

A core objective of this research is the identification of the domains and specific attributes most associated with success from a personal and perceived societal perspective. A traditional public opinion approach limited the ability to measure relative importance for this deeply personal, multidimensional construct.

The choice-based conjoint (CBC) approach used in this study was developed for Populace by Gradient Metrics. Unlike common applications of CBC methods in product design and marketing (e.g., preferences in selecting a car), however, the potential quantity of discrete components that constitute success are vast. The outcome of the CBC is the contribution of each level to defining success according to an individual, personal definition and a perceived societal definition.

The CBC approach forces respondents to make trade-offs between different attributes by randomly displaying two profiles of people, each with six attributes (see Table 1). Respondents chose which person is more successful according to their personal definition of success and their perception of how others in society define success. Respondents completed 12 choice-tasks with profiles that drew from the attribute pool.

According to **your own definition of success**, which person do you consider more successful?

Table 1: Choice Task

Person A	Person B
Has a job that involves managing other people	Regularly sees family members
Is personable	Has mastered a difficult skill
Has enough savings to pay for a \$500 unexpected expense	Willing to take risks
Makes time for themselves	Has an advanced degree (e.g., Ph.D., M.D., J.D., MBA)
Participates in a regular recreational activity	Eats out in a restaurant at least once per month
Has a low stress lifestyle	Is in good mental health

According to **society's definition of success**, which person would be considered more successful?

The attributes presented in each profile were randomly drawn from an attribute pool. Based on several focus groups and existing research on success and fulfillment, Populace included 76 attributes in this pool that captured a comprehensive array of factors associated with success.

APPENDIX C:

Calculating a Success Score

After completing the CBC module, respondents are asked to select which of the 76 attributes currently describe their life. This is the variable we use to calculate **achieved success**.

For each respondent, we create an overall **success score** according to the following steps:

- 1 Estimate individual-level utilities for each level.**
 - Drawing upon responses to each choice task, we estimated the “utility” or value that each individual respondent places on each level.
 - We repeated this for the personal and societal definition of success.
- 2 Calculate individual share of preference (SOP).**
 - We scaled the level utilities to a share-of-preference metric that sums to 100.
 - In principle, this conjoint design has one attribute (success) with 76 levels. This allows for direct comparison of the share of preference for each individual level. This would not be possible if levels were grouped into multiple attributes a priori.⁹
- 3 Multiply share of preference by a binary achievement measure.**
 - We multiplied the share of preference by one for each of the 76 levels that a respondent has achieved and by zero for levels that have not been achieved.
- 4 Sum achieved share of preferences.**
 - We summed all achieved share-of-preference scores.
 - A respondent who has achieved nothing will have a success score of zero; someone who has achieved everything will have a score of 100.

With this methodology, each respondent has an achieved success score that is weighted by the importance of each level in his/her own personal definition and according to how others in society define success.

⁹ See <https://www.sawtoothsoftware.com/download/techpap/interpca.pdf>

APPENDIX D

Domain	Attribute Description	Person		Others in Society		% Achieved
		Average SOP	Rank	Average SOP	Rank	
Quality of Life	Always has something important to do	0.39	73	0.99	20	47.00%
Characters	Appears confident to others	0.41	70	0.72	27	87.30%
Work	Determines own work schedule	0.36	74	0.3	67	41.60%
Health	Does not have any serious medical conditions	0.96	43	0.39	57	73.20%
Finance	Does not have credit card debt	3.17	5	0.52	41	53.00%
Finance	Does not have student loan debt	0.71	59	0.29	68	66.30%
Work	Does work that has a positive impact on other people	1.56	23	0.57	36	71.70%
Status	Driven to always be better than others	0.45	68	1.7	9	37.70%
Work	Enjoys their work	2.21	7	0.28	69	75.60%
Health	Exercises regularly	0.95	45	0.83	23	45.30%
Work	Feels that their work is valued	1.88	13	0.39	58	72.10%
Quality of Life	Goes on vacation at least once per year	0.7	60	1.31	15	59.50%
Work	Has a "blue-collar" job	1.31	32	0.41	55	32.00%
Work	Has a "white-collar" job	1.09	38	2.09	7	47.60%
Education	Has a two-year associate degree or vocational certification	0.81	52	0.32	66	33.00%
Education	Has a four-year bachelor's degree	0.8	54	1.26	17	36.80%
Education	Has a high school diploma or GED	3.86	2	0.63	32	94.60%
Status	Has a higher standard of living than peers	0.41	71	1.47	12	36.50%
Work	Has a job that involves managing other people	0.57	66	0.97	21	36.40%
Work	Has a job that is intellectually stimulating	0.75	58	0.39	59	61.60%
Status	Has a large social media following	0.17	75	3.84	5	12.70%
Quality of Life	Has a manageable amount of stress	0.69	61	0.46	46	78.00%
Characters	Has a purpose in life	2.05	10	0.69	29	82.90%
Work	Has a reliable long-term job	0.69	62	0.73	26	68.80%
Education	Has an advanced degree (e.g., Ph.D., M.D., J.D., MBA)	3.69	4	15.89	2	18.70%

Domain	Attribute Description	Person		Others in Society		% Achieved
		Average SOP	Rank	Average SOP	Rank	
Relationships	Has at least two close friends to depend on	2.21	8	0.55	38	77.40%
Health	Has enough energy each day to conduct desired activities	0.63	65	0.44	50	70.00%
Finance	Has enough savings to pay for a \$500 unexpected expense	1.04	39	1.37	14	80.80%
Health	Has excellent health insurance	1.75	16	0.4	56	71.00%
Finance	Has financial investments	0.81	53	2.69	6	60.60%
Education	Has mastered a difficult skill	1.18	36	0.26	72	66.30%
Relationships	Has positive relationships with family members	1.63	21	0.62	34	90.50%
Relationships	Has positive relationships with work colleagues	0.94	46	0.49	42	84.30%
Characters	Has strong moral values	0.92	49	0.77	24	92.70%
Characters	Helps others in times of need	1.72	19	0.25	73	96.40%
Status	Is a graduate of an elite college or university	0.96	44	4.62	3	13.40%
Relationships	Is a parent	4.32	1	0.63	33	65.60%
Relationships	Is actively involved in their community	0.66	64	0.33	65	35.70%
Relationships	Is actively involved in their religious community	1.22	35	0.59	35	28.40%
Characters	Is considerate toward others	1.51	25	0.71	28	95.80%
Characters	Is considered trustworthy by others	3.82	3	0.68	30	96.70%
Work	Is consistently advancing in their career	0.88	51	0.87	22	41.90%
Characters	Is enjoyable to be around	1.48	26	0.65	31	91.70%
Status	Is famous	0.14	76	21.46	1	1.90%
Finance	Is financially independent from others	1.39	31	0.75	25	72.10%
Characters	Is focused on their spiritual wellbeing	1.88	14	1.2	18	52.00%
Relationships	Is in a committed relationship	1.29	33	0.53	40	69.10%
Health	Is in good mental health	1.74	18	0.36	60	84.50%
Education	Is interested in learning new things	1.1	37	0.46	47	93.80%
Relationships	Is married	0.94	47	0.46	48	60.30%
Quality of Life	Is rarely, or never, burdened by work outside of regular working hours	1	41	0.34	62	52.20%

Domain	Attribute Description	Person		Others in Society		% Achieved
		Average SOP	Rank	Average SOP	Rank	
Status	Is recognized as a leader in their profession	1.23	34	1.39	13	36.70%
Work	Is responsible for making important decisions at work	1.01	40	1.88	8	54.80%
Finance	Is saving for a secure retirement	1.78	15	1.02	19	65.80%
Characters	Is sought after for good advice	1.41	30	0.43	51	83.80%
Work	Is the primary caregiver for children and/or elderly parents	1.98	11	1.69	10	36.30%
Education	Is very knowledgeable, regardless of a formal education	1.75	17	0.57	37	85.30%
Relationships	Knows a lot of people	0.42	69	0.43	52	63.60%
Quality of Life	Likes where they live	0.9	50	0.55	39	83.50%
Health	Maintains a healthy diet	1.48	27	0.21	75	60.70%
Quality of Life	Makes time for themselves	0.93	48	0.27	70	77.60%
Work	Owns a business	1.6	22	4.4	4	15.60%
Finance	Owns a home	1.55	24	1.5	11	65.80%
Quality of Life	Participates in a regular artistic and/or creative activity	1.43	28	0.36	61	43.10%
Quality of Life	Participates in a regular recreational activity	0.51	67	0.27	71	55.00%
Characters	Prioritizes needs of others above their own	1.9	12	0.42	54	72.20%
Finance	Rarely, if ever, worries about money	2.67	6	1.27	16	42.00%
Quality of Life	Regularly experiences new things	0.78	57	0.2	76	55.20%
Education	Regularly reads about a variety of interesting topics	0.8	55	0.49	43	80.50%
Relationships	Regularly sees close friends	1.43	29	0.49	44	64.10%
Relationships	Regularly sees family members	2.11	9	0.24	74	71.70%
Characters	Sets and achieves goals	0.97	42	0.45	49	70.70%
Finance	Spends on an occasional splurge expense	0.4	72	0.48	45	82.90%
Quality of Life	Takes time off from work when needed	0.67	63	0.34	63	75.80%
Characters	Willing to take risks	0.8	56	0.34	64	66.20%
Work	Works full-time	1.67	20	0.43	53	61.80%

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