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Fyre: The Greatest Party That Never Happened

An excellent example of white-collar crime and how it ties to corporate crime can be seen in the Netflix documentary "*Fyre: The Greatest Party That Never Happened*." This documentary included numerous illustrations of corporate fraud. It also portrayed concepts such as the dark triad of personality, structural and cultural violence, the iceberg metaphor, and the ripple effect. I'll start off by explaining what the Fyre Festival was and how it ended up failing. Following that, I'll discuss how the Fyre Festival ties to white-collar crime in terms of fraud and how it relates to forms of cultural/structural violence. Finally, I'll talk about the dark triad of personality and how the documentary approached these topics by looking at how harm was made to appear admirable.

The documentary *Fyre: The Greatest Party That Never Happened* looks into the infamous Fyre Festival and its co-founders, rappers Ja Rule and Billy McFarland from the 1990s (Jeffery Atkins). McFarland and Ja Rule established this festival in 2016 as a method to advertise their brand-new talent agency, Fyre, which has the same name. McFarland purchased Norman's Cay in the Bahamas and advertised it to customers as Pablo Escobar's former island. Supermodels like Hailey Baldwin, Bella Hadid, and Emily Ratajkowski starred in the marketing film for the Fyre Festival in order to raise awareness of it. To promote the event, more than 300 social media influencers used this to publish a burnt orange tile on their Instagram accounts. 90% of the tickets, which ranged in price from \$450 to \$100,000, were sold in the first 48 hours. People were told that they would fly in on a private plane customized for them from Miami to get the full VIP experience, that it would be the ultimate three-day party and vacation with

luxurious villas and amazing performances, and that it would involve exotic delicacies and exotic foods. Attendees found processed cheese slices on old bread and reused hurricane tents instead of the sight that had been presented to them when they arrived. Fyre Media canceled the event on the first day of the festival, attributing the cancellation to uncontrollable external factors.

McFarland did not have the time or resources to complete the construction of these opulent houses. This film examined the Fyre Festival's worst mishap and how it affected not just the attendees but also the staff members of McFarland and Ja Rule.

This documentary provided numerous illustrations of corporate fraud in action. Billy McFarland, for instance, is well-known for his business endeavors and fraud schemes including Magnises and Fyre Festival, which the prosecution claims scammed over 100 investors of more than \$26 million. According to research, three factors best explain white-collar crime: a supply of motivated offenders, the availability of suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians. (Ramamoorti, 2008). McFarland is a prime example as he repeatedly lied to investors about his company and the amount of funding he had available for the festival, stating that Fyre Media was already putting up at least \$90 million. Criminal opportunities are provided by vulnerable environments and opportunistic scenarios that individuals perceive as offering the potential for criminal reward with little risk of detection (Ramamoorti, 2008). This is demonstrated by McFarland's constant schemes and how he is able to get away with it with minimal consequences. McFarland signed a contract promising not to mention Pablo Escobar's association with the Bahamas island of Norman's Cay in any of the promotional materials for the Fyre Festival. McFarland uses that to his gain and makes a commercial that makes reference to Pablo Escobar, however, McFarland lost the land arrangement. A \$100 million class-action complaint against McFarland was filed on May 1st on behalf of all festival participants, alleging

that the festival's organizers flew visitors to the venue despite being aware of the location's potential problems. Another \$100 million lawsuit was subsequently filed against McFarland and Ja Rule, accusing them of breach of contract and fraud for allegedly scamming people into attending the event by paying social media influencers to post about it covertly. McFarland entered a guilty plea to two wire fraud charges. McFarland's repeated financial crimes indicate deviant behavior and show that white-collar criminals practice deviant behavior to carry out their offenses (Gottschalk, 2017). McFarland portrays this well as he acknowledged fabricating paperwork to lure investors into funding the Fyre Festival due to the power and influence that he has with his business.

This documentary showed forms of cultural and structural violence. Structural violence is an umbrella concept for forms of injustice and exploitation. Research indicates that violence is anything avoidable that impedes personal growth, every inadvertent or indirect restraint on an individual's personal growth is structural violence (Parsons, 2007). This shows how McFarland was able to gaslight his employees into believing that the company, Fyre Media, was a family when in reality it was a mess because of McFarland. McFarland promised many luxury items to the attendees as well such as luxury plane rides, villas, etc. but it turned out to be false as it was not affordable. During the festival, many attendees broke down neighboring tents so they wouldn't have to have people surround their tents. In addition, several attendees were stealing more pillows or beds in order to have a more safe place to sleep after being promised opulent villas. As a result, despite all of the doubts it was displaying, McFarland was still carrying forward the festival. McFarland's behavior in this shows that he is a narcissist and continues to lie without feeling uncomfortable and demonstrates an arrogant indifference to their fate (Alalehto & Azarian, 2018). In this case, McFarland is well aware that this festival cannot happen and is

going to be a disaster due to the fact that narcissistic individuals tend to have an overblown conception of their potential and abilities. Narcissistic individuals usually believe in their superiority and uniqueness and are driven by their need for admiration for their achievement which is exactly what McFarland achieved due to his staff and support (Alalehto & Azarian, 2018).

This documentary illustrated the ripple effect in addition to the iceberg metaphor. Since McFarland is one of the founders of Fyre Media and actively promotes the festival, he serves as the best illustration of the Iceberg metaphor. It is often detected and convicted white-collar criminals only represent the tip of an iceberg in terms of financial crimes committed by privileged people (Gottschalk & Gunnesdal2018). McFarland portrayed various acts of unethical behavior in his Fyre Festival scandal as local workers were guaranteed that they would receive payment. McFarland employees were informed that the festival would continue on and that no matter what happens it will not end. Many of the employees didn't know about McFarland's con games and thought he was brilliant. This had an impact on the staff since Maryann Rolle, owner of the Exuma Point Bar and Grille, worked nonstop to prepare thousands of meals for the Fyre Festival staff and visitors without receiving payment. This was not only for her but also for the local Bahamian laborers who were picking up labor unpaid and without compensation. Rolle spent \$50,000 of her savings to feed individuals who were stuck on the island, damaging her credit in the process. Rolle also provided food for locals and tourists when the festival itself was unable to do so. This demonstrates the ripple effect of models having fun on a beach as exploited workers like Maryann Rolle are being taken advantage of.

McFarland's constant scams, unethical activities, and narcissism are closely tied to The Dark Triad of personality. In relation to White-Collar crime, This concept is composed of three

facets: Machiavellianism, subclinical narcissism, and subclinical psychopathy (Amos et al., 2022). McFarland fulfills all three components as Machiavellianism entails deception to attain one's own purpose which he has done by tricking investors into supporting his ventures. Narcissistic personality traits involve feelings of entitlement, superiority, and dominance which can be seen by McFarland when he rejects other employees' opinions and only shows interest in his own decisions. McFarland also demonstrates psychopathic traits involving a lack of empathy and impulsivity where he shows no care for how this festival would impact others. Research shows that narcissism can motivate an individual to act unethically for their own benefit and can alter perceptions of capability due to beliefs about the ability to successfully commit fraud (Amos et al., 2022).

This documentary framed the festival very well and showed the promotion in harm while continuing to promote the festival while knowing that it will not be successful. With the little room and supplies, McFarland had, the documentary's evidence suggests that the site would be harmful to people. In order to provide attendees with water, McFarland even went so far as to encourage one of his gay employees to blow a Bahamian official's whistle. 40,000 visitors required more residences than there were available, and McFarland was aware of this but still wanted the festival to take place. This demonstrates that McFarland was determined to hold this celebration despite any challenges, whether they were structural or related to weather issues. One of the things I thought was extremely intriguing was that there was a group gathering after the Fyre Festival concluded when they discussed how to bounce back from this. Even though no one perished, one of the team members claimed that they still blatantly lied to the public about what they were giving them, which is a sign of fraud. Ja Rule responds by attempting to persuade his

staff that no fraud was done but rather that there had been "false advertising," which was concerning coming from one of the co-founders of Fyre.

One of the key takeaways from this lesson on White-Collar Crime Awareness is that you should never put your trust in those in positions of authority since they can be con artists. Instead, you should always check out the background of the organizers. Before participating in a disastrous event like the Fyre Festival, people should always conduct adequate research. People should be more conscious of the fact that, more often than not, if influencers post about an event to promote it, they are doing so for pay rather than out of a genuine desire to do so. Since the organizers' surface-level actions merely hint at the significant harm they cause on a deeper level, people should also investigate the underlying implications hidden behind them. This documentary should also leave viewers with the notion that it's crucial to distinguish between those who are exploited and those who profit from events by asking oneself who is harmed and who stands to gain from them.

Overall, I thought this movie was incredibly intriguing to see, and I think it not only reinforced what I had studied in my class on white-collar crime but also made me more aware of how corrupt the world actually is. I think I would not have learned about the harm and brutality depicted in the documentary if I hadn't taken this class. I also think that I wouldn't be able to understand the extent of Billy McFarland's fraud and the con games he played with his other businesses. Looking at many perspectives on how people commit these crimes has, in my opinion, helped me better understand the crimes of the powerful. Additionally, it increased my understanding of how crucial it is to investigate these crimes because they are rarely brought up or investigated.

All things considered, *"Fyre: The Greatest Party That Never Happened"* ended up being the largest Fyre Fraud ever. Billy McFarland is currently serving a six-year sentence in federal jail, but he also owes \$26,191,306.28 in restitution, which is just absurd to consider. Learning more about frauds like these events and the fact that what is marketed isn't necessarily what it seems to be is crucial. The Fyre Festival displayed several instances of injury, violence, and effects on people, and the event's organizers have shown little regret for what happened. Fyre is a story about superficial excess—how we live in a time when appearances are more important than substance—but it's also a reminder that everything still has a price.

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