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The American Dream: Empirical Perspectives on Convenient Deviance

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a sample of ten American dreamers who demonstrated convenient deviance. The sample is derived from publicly available sources such as autobiographies by dreamers, media coverage, and investigation reports. The sample consists of four dreamers in the USA, two dreamers in Germany, and one dreamer in each of the countries India, Sweden, Norway, and Greece. While not at all claiming that the sample is representative of dreamers on the convenient deviance path, the individual stories provide insights into motives, opportunities, and willingness for deviance. The empirical sample of ten dreamers is analyzed in this article by application of convenience theory. Convenience theory suggests that convenient deviance can occur when there is a financial motive based on possibilities or threats, there is an organizational opportunity to commit and conceal deviance, and there is an individual willingness for deviant behavior. Specifically, this article addresses the research question: What convenience propositions might explain American dreamers' deviance? Research results indicate the proposition of greed as motive, the proposition of status as opportunity, and the proposition of neutralization as willingness.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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Introduction

The American dream concerned with quality of life refers to opportunities where life is better, richer, fuller, and more satisfying. Opportunities then exist according to ability and achievement (Arend and Patel 2020; Coskuner-Balli et al. 2020). For some, the dream is mainly material prosperity (Mortimer, Mont'Alvao, and Aronson 2020), while the dream for others is "a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position" (Wolak and Peterson 2020a: 969).

Some realize the American dream by convenient deviance. Convenience refers not only to efficiency in effort and time, but also to reduced strain and pain (Mai and Olsen 2016). Convenience is linked to terms such as fast, easy, and comfortable. Convenience says something about attractiveness and accessibility. A convenient individual is not necessarily neither bad nor lacy. On the contrary, the person can be seen as smart and rational (Sundström and Radon 2015). Just like convenience is a driver for consumers when shopping (Berry, Seiders, and Grewal 2002; Collier and Kimes 2012; Farquhar and Rowley 2009; Nido 2021), convenience is a driver for executives and other members in the elite when struggling to reach American dream goals (Braaten and Vaughn 2021; Oka 2021; Qu 2021).

When choosing convenient deviance to realize the American dream, deviance refers to actions and behaviors that challenge or violate norms, regulations, and laws. While deviance mainly has a negative

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connotation, such actions and behaviors can still be classified as understandable, tolerable, and even acceptable. Sometimes, deviance is a term to describe behavior that contravenes accepted norms, values, and ethical standards (Smith and Raymen 2018). Deviance is then “the failure to obey group rules” (Becker 1963: 8), where deviant individuals may be lacking group identity that “occurs when individuals derive a sense of self from being a part of their group” (Shang, Abernethy, and Hung 2020: 375). Deviance in an organizational context is then “a form of behavior that violates organizational norms, and that consequently negatively impacts the well-being of the organization and its members (Michalak and Ashkanasy 2013). Dilchert et al. (2007) argued that deviance is detrimental to organizational performance in several ways, including damaged reputation, exposure to lawsuits, and financial loss. Some scholars have suggested that there might be an opposite phenomenon of positive deviance (e.g., Fox, Wise, and Brehm 2022), but this research agrees with the argument that “positive labeling is not a form of deviance because it does not lead to stigma, social degradation or discretization” (Goode 1991: 306).

This article presents a sample of ten American dreamers who demonstrated convenient deviance. The sample is derived from publicly available sources such as autobiographies by dreamers, media coverage of dreamers, and investigation reports reviewing dreamers. The sample consists of four dreamers in the USA, two dreamers in Germany, and one dreamer in each of the countries India, Sweden, Norway, and Greece. While not at all claiming that the sample is representative of dreamers on the convenient deviance path, the individual stories provide insights into motives, opportunities, and willingness that seem generalizable to some larger population of deviant dreamers. This research is important, as it generates insights into successful individuals who went too far in their pursuit of realizing the American dream.

The empirical sample of ten dreamers is analyzed in this article by application of convenience theory. Convenience theory suggests that convenient deviance can occur when there is a financial motive based on possibilities or threats, there is an organizational opportunity to commit and conceal deviance, and there is an individual willingness for deviant behavior. Specifically, this article addresses the research question: What convenience propositions might explain American dreamers’ deviance? The following literature review concentrates on some perspectives from management, psychology, sociology, and criminology that are covered by and part of the theory of convenience.

Literature review

The financial motive derives from possibilities and threats that exist for the individual and the company (Cullen et al. 2022; Locatelli et al. 2022; Reisig, Holtfreter, and Cullen 2022; Vilalta, López-Ramirez, and Fondevila 2022). Sajko, Boone, and Buyl (2021: 961) studied individual and organizational greed where they defined greed as self-interest by excessive materialistic desire and lack of concern for the well-being of others:

Greed, which is most commonly defined as an excessive materialistic desire to acquire personal wealth, can be seen as the “dark” end of the self-interest continuum – that is, hyper-self-interest (. . .) While self-interest is morally neutral, greed carries a moral charge (. . .) Greed by definition implies a lack of concern for the well-being of others.

The work of Button et al. (2017) on insurance fraudsters illustrated elements of the dream motivation. The offenders were mostly men in their 30s.

The organizational opportunity derives from personal status and access to resources to commit wrongdoing and from lack of control and guardianship to conceal wrongdoing (Chan and Gibbs 2022; Fan and Liu 2022; Scheaf and Wood 2022). Peixoto et al. (2023: 7) focused on entrepreneurial startups as a breeding ground for unethical behavior:

It should be emphasized that accessing external funding is critical for entrepreneurs and their startups’ birth and survival; however, getting it is often challenging. Since the startups’ financial history and the necessary information to establish a reputation is usually nonexistent, investors cannot readily observe venture quality. They may

thus be reluctant to provide funding. Given these struggles, the entrepreneurial ecosystem appears as a propitious breeding ground for unethical behaviors, highlighting the importance of assessing entrepreneurs' ethical standards to, eventually, help predict and prevent these types of behaviors and consequent social and economic damages.

The personal willingness for deviant behavior derives from conscious choice (Hillebrandt et al. 2022; Thomas, Baumer, and Loughran 2022; Troisi, Nauta, and Piciocchi 2022) and perceived innocence. For example, the personality trait of narcissism expects preferential treatment. A pervasive pattern of grandiosity, a need for admiration, and an empathy deficit characterize narcissism, in addition to entitlement, dominance, and superiority (Amos, Longpré, and Roos 2022). Narcissistic identification is a special type of narcissism, where the offender sees little or no difference between self and the corporation. The company money is personal money that can be spent whatever way the narcissist prefers (Galvin, Lange, and Ashforth 2015). Identification with the organization is the process through which an individual's identity becomes entangled with, and imprinted by, the corporation. The person's unique sense of self comes to be understood in reference to that organization, where the organization defines individual self (Toubiana 2020).

Research method

American dreamers demonstrating deviant convenience were identified based on their own self-perceptions as presented in the public domain or on others' characterizations of them in the public domain. Identified autobiographies by individuals, media coverage of individuals, and investigation reports represent secondary material useful in this research. The resulting sample of ten dreamers is listed in Table 1. For example, Bernard Kerik was the New York City police commissioner during the nine-eleven attack in 2001 in the city. He pleaded guilty of tax fraud and false statements, and the court sentenced him to four years in federal prison in 2010. He published his book "From Jailer to Jailed" in 2015. Kerik (2015: 146) seemed to apply a number of neutralization techniques for wrongdoings away from self, while at the same time presenting self as a success:

I had lived a version of the American dream: a high school dropout who with ambition, hard work, and a lot of good luck rose to the cusp of one of the highest positions in the land.

After having served his time in prison, Donald Trump as president of the United States pardoned Bernard Kerik for fraud (Shanahan 2020). Before fraud detection, president George W. Bush nominated Kerik for secretary of Homeland Security in 2004. But Kerik never assumed the position as the New York and national press began investigating his career, accusing him of having connections to organized crime and implying that there was something devious about a stock transaction (Kerik 2015; Shanahan 2020).

Clarke and Clarke (2023) argued that the American dream with Donald Trump is one of the most organizing cultural ideas in the United States. Trump is one of the dreamers in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample of American dreamers on the convenient deviance path.

American Dreamer	Country	American Dream	Outcome
Adani, Gautam	India	Become the richest man in the world with global reach	His empire of companies collapsed
Belfort, Jordan	USA	Enjoy an extremely expensive and adventurous lifestyle	He had to go to prison
Benulic, Boris	Sweden	Expand the business enterprise to places like Las Vegas	He had to go to prison
Besseberg, Anders	Norway	Enjoy bribes and exclusive treatments in return for favors	He was dismissed and investigated
Braun, Markus	Germany	Create the largest digital banking enterprise in the world	He was investigated and prosecuted
Kaili, Eva	Greece	Enjoy jet-set life as a movie star together with celebrities	She was dismissed and investigated
Kerik, Bernhard	USA	Climb to the top in criminal justice and politics	He had to go to prison
Middelhoff, Thomas	Germany	Climb to the top in business with political connections	He had to go to prison
Montella, Erin	USA	Climb to the top on Wall Street by deviant banking	She left and started a family life
Trump, Donald	USA	Become the first businessman to be a successful US president	He was investigated by many agencies

Wolak and Peterson (2020b) characterized Trump as an ambassador for keeping the American dream alive. Netflix (2018) presented the television series entitled “Trump – An American Dream, Starring: Donald Trump.”

A third example of an American dreamer is Eva Kaili. She was a Greek politician who lived the American dream like a movie star (Varvitsioti et al. 2023):

For a member of the European parliament, Eva Kaili lived life more like a movie star. The Greek politician spent her free time on yachts in the Aegean, in glitzy nightclubs in Athens, hanging out at events with supermodels such as Naomi Campbell and on summer vacations at tycoon Sir Richard Branson’s Necker Island Caribbean hide-away. Work involved panel discussions with crypto billionaires and trips abroad including to Qatar ahead of the World Cup, besides the more mundane task of chairing debates in her role as a vice-president of the European parliament.

A movie star is an actor or actress who is famous for playing leading roles in films. The metaphor mentioned in the quote of living a life more like a movie star suggests certain characteristics similar to the American dreamer. Movie stars are wealthy based on “astronomical earnings” (Liu, Liu, and Mazumdar 2014: 386) and typically live in areas such as Hollywood that is associated with glamorous lifestyles. Movie stars are performers who are popular icons beyond the movies (Liu, Mazumdar, and Li 2015). Movie stars are celebrities that refer to fame and broad public recognition given to them by media attention. A celebrity is a unique person known to the public via media coverage. Celebrity implies a favorable public image. As a social democrat, Eva Kaili enjoyed luxury hotels and resorts (Becker et al. 2023).

The presented ten cases are all that could be found with sufficient empirical sources to discuss them. The cases are not selected in any other way than that they simply were detected with sufficient evidence. Since there was no selection, the cases were not selected to support the arguments.

Empirical sources for this research are listed in Table 2 where there are autobiographies, investigation reports, research papers, court documents, research books, news reports, and TV programs. For example, Gautam Adani, an American dreamer in India and a “superstar” (Bartz and Höflinger 2023: 84), attempted to become the richest man in the world with global reach. However, his empire of

Table 2. Sample of American dreamers on the convenient deviance path.

American Dreamer	Country	Research Information Sources
Adani, Gautam	India	Investigation report: Hindenburg (2023). News reports: Erikstad (2023); Iversen (2023b), Iversen (2023a); Lockett, Reed, and Dunkley (2023), Lockett et al. (2023); Mark and Lerman (2023); Parkin and Reed (2023); Patel, Shah, and Kalra (2023); Robertson (2016); Scaggs (2023).
Belfort, Jordan	USA	Autobiography: Belfort (2008); Research paper: Patsiaouras and Fitchett (2011).
Benulic, Boris	Sweden	Autobiography: Benulic (2018). Investigation reports: Deloitte (2013); Ernst and Young (2012); Nergaard (2013b), Nergaard (2013a). Court documents: Svea (2017); Södertörn (2015). News reports: DN (2014); Mo (2018).
Besseberg, Anders	Norway	Investigation report: ERC (2021). News reports: Christiansen (2021); Christiansen, Friberg, and Asbjørnsen (2021); Ellingworth and Dunbar (2018); Panja (2021); Pelley (2018); Ruiz and Schwirtz (2016).
Braun, Markus	Germany	Investigation report: KPMG (2020). News reports: Bartz and Hesse (2022); Chazan and Storbeck (2020a), Chazan and Storbeck (2020b); EQS News (2017); McCrum (2015), McCrum (2019), McCrum (2020), McCrum (2022); McCrum, Palma, and Storbeck (2021); Storbeck (2020b), Storbeck (2020a), Storbeck (2021b), Storbeck (2021a), Storbeck (2022); Storbeck and McCrum (2022); Storbeck and Morris (2021); ZDF (2022).
Kaili, Eva	Greece	News reports: Becker et al. (2023); Bounds (2023); Hancock (2023); Varvitsioti et al. (2023).
Kerik, Bernhard	USA	Autobiography: Kerik (2015). News report: Shanahan (2020).
Middelhoff, Thomas	Germany	Autobiography: Middelhoff (2017). News reports: Storbeck (2018); Weidemann (2017).
Montella, Erin	USA	Autobiography: Montella (2016). Investigation report: Valukas (2010). News reports: Cohan (2016); Corkery (2010); Irwin (2016); Lenzo and Ward (2016).
Trump, Donald	USA	Investigation reports: Eisen et al. (2021); James (2020). Research paper: Reisig, Holtfreter, and Cullen (2022). Research book: Clarke and Clarke (2023). News reports: Sarkis (2020); Smith (2021); Stone (2022); Wolak and Peterson, 2020a, 2020b. TV program: Netflix (2018).

companies collapsed after the Hindenburg (2023) report as reviewed in the Financial Times and other news media.

The methodology applied to the various research information sources listed in Table 2 is content analysis (Bell, Bryman, and Harley 2018; Braaten and Vaughn 2021; Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2007). Content analysis is any methodology or procedure that works to identify characteristics within texts attempting to make valid inferences (Krippendorff 1980; Patrucco, Luzzini, and Ronchi 2017). Content analysis assumes that language reflects both how people understand their surroundings and their cognitive processes. Therefore, content analysis makes it possible to identify and determine relevant text in a context (McClelland, Liang, and Barker 2010).

Hunter (2009) used a similar methodology when studying white-collar offenders after the fall from grace. The focus was on resettlement in the community after a prison sentence that emphasized the importance for ex-prisoners of a change in identity and in the sense of who they are. For resettlement to succeed, such changes had to be supported in the post-release world.

Research results

Gautam Adani's motive was to become one of the world's richest persons by growing his business enterprises into global reach (Bartz and Höflinger 2023). His motive was thus concerned with both greed (Goldstraw-White 2012) and goal (Welsh et al. 2019) as suggested in convenience theory. He had previously stated that he wanted to be number one or the richest person in the world. Adani was very well connected and had important friends in the government. Adani had access to resources including access to the Indian prime minister Modi (Mark and Lerman 2023). He justified his business practices and responded to the allegations by labeling them as a malicious combination of selective misinformation to discredit the business empire. Adani's response was to prepare for lawsuits against Hindenburg (2023) in both India and the United States (Lockett, Reed, and Dunkley 2023).

Jordan Belfort was a big spender on private helicopter transportation home, on top escort girls in brothels, and on a mansion with all kinds of expensive furniture that he described in detail in his book. His American dream is thus tightly linked to the greed perspective. According to the main American dream perspective, the ultimate symbol of success and happiness in life is economic wealth (Schoepfer and Piquero 2006). In the opportunity perspective, Belfort had more than one hundred stockbrokers as a resource who did whatever he told them to do (Belfort 2008). He was a sensation seeker to experience adventure (Craig and Piquero 2017). For him, it was a rational choice to commit crime.

Boris Benulic explored possibilities to satisfy personal greed as well as to achieve extremely ambitious business goals (Locatelli et al. 2022). At the same time, he was afraid of corporate bankruptcy. His opportunity structure consisted of status and access to commit deviant acts, as well as chaos to conceal deviant acts. He had a narcissistic identification with the business (Galvin, Lange, and Ashforth 2015), and he justified his deviant acts. In his autobiography, Benulic (2018) stands completely unaware of the charges against him. He claims that even his lawyers do not understand at all why the prosecutor has indicted him.

Anders Besseberg climbed the hierarchy of needs for status and success (Maslow 1943). He had contributed to the success of biathlon sport and probably wanted to satisfy the need for acclaim as a narcissist (Chatterjee and Pollock 2017). As president of the International Biathlon Union for a long time, and as entrepreneurial creator of modern biathlon events, he enjoyed a very high status. In the opportunity dimension of convenience theory (ERC 2021), argued that Besseberg's corrupt behavior was enabled by a complete lack of basic governance safeguards that left integrity decisions in the sole hands of the president and his allies on the executive board. Besseberg has persistently claimed his innocence, and that he has never done anything wrong, and that he does not understand the accusations against him.

Markus Braun was ambitious, but not necessarily greedy. He had ambitions on behalf of Wirecard to become a leading digital service provider in the financial sector. His motive was thus achievement of goals (Locatelli et al. 2022). At the same time, he was afraid of collapse and bankruptcy (Kang and

Thosuwanhot 2017). He created chaos to conceal deviance that was not detected by KPMG (2020), and rationality in decision-making and neutralization of guilt were caused by personal willingness for deviance.

Eva Kaili lived the American dream like a movie star. According to Varvitsioti et al. (2023), the opportunity structure was a lax parliamentary oversight at the European parliament. The willingness was a feeling of innocence, where Kaili blamed her partner Giorgi. She said in police interrogation that she knew nothing about the corruption, while her partner said that she was not “part of the network,” but “Eva knew of course about the money amounts and their origin, as we are living together” (Becker et al. 2023: 79). Giorgi had always lots of cash. Kaili neutralized her guilt feeling by claiming innocence.

Bernard Kerik had “lived a version of the American dream” (Kerik 2015: 146), not only in terms of top national positions but also in terms of financial prosperity, so greed is the appropriate label for his convenient deviance for which he was convicted. As a police commissioner in New York during the nine-eleven attack, he had a high, almost heroic status (Fox, Wise, and Brehm 2022). Kerik tried to play the blame game, where everyone else but himself were responsible for his fraud (Eberly et al. 2011).

Thomas Middelhoff said in an interview that “I thought certain rules did not apply to me” (Storbeck 2018). A key flaw in his character, Middelhoff said in the interview with Storbeck (2018), reflecting on his convenient motive, was vanity and a constant craving for public attention and affirmation: “That was a mistake.” He had a wish to be in the limelight, and he was well connected. Middelhoff (2017) applied the neutralization technique of condemning those who criticized him (Sykes and Matza 1957).

Erin Montella – as Erin Callan – followed her American dream of putting career success above everything else (Lenzo and Ward 2016):

She was one of the most important people on Wall Street - one of the top women in the entire financial world. But when Lehman fell in 2008, the bank's former chief financial officer, Erin Callan Montella, was dragged down, too. Currently, the ex-Wall Streeter is warning women against the dangers of putting career success above everything else and sharing some of the biggest takeaways from her new memoir “Full Circle: A memoir of leaning in too far and the journey back.” “I think the book is intended to be an introspective reflection on my career, and I had to take responsibility for what I was doing in that position, at that point in time,” Callan Montella told CNBC's Closing Bell on Wednesday. “I wanted to take accountability for my own actions. How did I get there? Why was I in that place? It wasn't random. It wasn't chaos. It was all the things I had done up until then. And be clear with myself and with others about what I thought my role was,” she added.

In her autobiography, Montella (2016) presents herself as a victim rather than an offender in the deviant bank practices that caused the collapse of Lehman Brothers. Claiming to be a victim is a typical neutralization technique (Sykes and Matza 1957).

Donald Trump has been a strong advocate for the American dream of prosperity and consumption that belongs to the greed proposition in the motivational dimension of convenience theory. His opportunity structure is based on the status of being a former president of the United States, where his followers assign him heroic status (Fox, Wise, and Brehm 2022), while government agencies have to consider his background when prosecuting his deviance. His opportunity structure is also based on his ability to conceal potential wrongdoing by various corporate structures and law firm initiatives. His rational choice is based on advantages exceeding disadvantages (Paternoster, Jaynes, and Wilson 2018), and where his actions can be justified (Schoen et al. 2021).

The following convenience themes were identified:

- ADANI: greed, goal, access, justification.
- BELFORT: greed, goal, access, decay, chaos, rationality.
- BENULIC: greed, goal, bankruptcy, status, access, chaos, identity, justification.
- BESSEBERG: greed, status, decay, justification, neutralization.
- BRAUN: goal, bankruptcy, status, chaos, rationality, neutralization.
- KAILI: greed, chaos, neutralization.
- KERIK: greed, status, neutralization.

- MIDDELHOFF greed, status, access, neutralization.
- MONTELLA greed, status, access, neutralization.
- TRUMP greed, status, chaos, rationality, justification.

Figure 1 illustrates the structural model of convenience theory with its fourteen convenience propositions. In our sample of ten American dreamers, the follow ranking of convenience propositions emerges:

- (1) GREED: As personal greed increases, financial misconduct will seem more convenient for an American dreamer in a trusted position.
- (2) STATUS: Higher social status for an American dreamer in a trusted position is associated with greater convenience of committing financial misconduct.
- (3) NEUTRALIZATION: A conveniently oriented American dreamer in a trusted position with a stronger ability to deny guilt has a higher level of willingness to get involved in financial misconduct.
- (4) ACCESS: Increased ease of access to deviance resources for an American dreamer in a trusted position is associated with greater convenience of committing financial misconduct.
- (5) CHAOS: Organizational chaos in the form of lacking overview and guardianship is associated with greater convenience of concealing financial misconduct for an American dreamer in a trusted position.

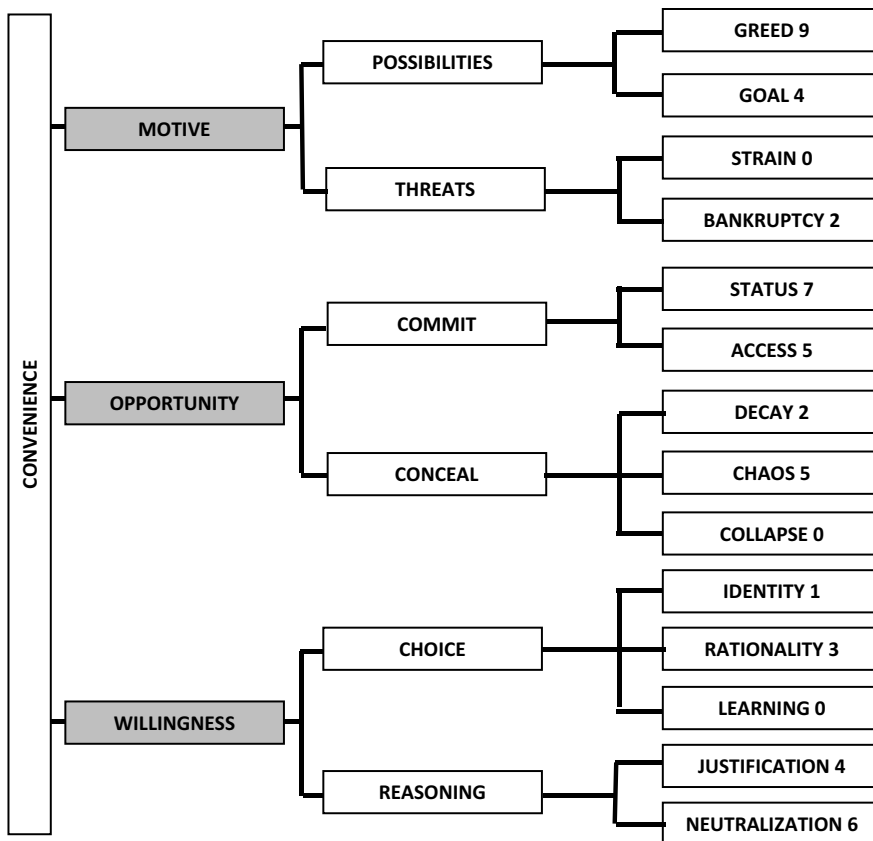


Figure 1. Frequency of convenience propositions in the sample.

- (6) JUSTIFICATION: A conveniently oriented American dreamer in a trusted position with a stronger ability to justify wrongdoing has a higher level of willingness to get involved in financial misconduct.
- (7) GOAL: As commitment to ambitious business goals increases, financial misconduct will seem more convenient for an American dreamer in a trusted position.

The remaining convenience propositions seem less relevant for our sample of American dreamers: rationality, bankruptcy, decay, and identity. The following convenience propositions found no support in our sample: strain, collapse, and learning.

Discussion

This article addresses the following research question: What convenience propositions might explain American dreamers' deviance? It comes as no surprise that greed is the most frequent proposition, as greed is aligned with the idea of the American dream. The possibilities relate in nine out of ten cases to greed of the individual dreamer, while possibilities relate in four out of ten cases to goal of the corporate empire. Three out of four goal cases are combined with greed, that is a combination of corporate expansion and individual wealth. Few deviant actions seem triggered by the fear of corporate collapse and bankruptcy.

High social status is the most frequent proposition for committing deviant actions. High-status individuals enjoy greater respect and deference from, as well as power and influence over, those who are positioned lower in the social hierarchy (Kakkar, Sivanathan, and Global 2020: 532):

Status is a property that rests in the eyes of others and is conferred to individuals who are deemed to have a higher rank or social standing in a pecking order based on a mutually valued set of social attributes. Higher social status or rank grants its holder a host of tangible benefits in both professional and personal domains. For instance, high-status actors are sought by groups for advice, are paid higher, receive unsolicited help, and are credited disproportionately in joint tasks. In innumerable ways, our social ecosystem consistently rewards those with high status.

Especially individuals with high status based on prestige rather than dominance tend to be excused for whatever wrongdoing they commit. Individuals who attain and maintain high rank by behaving in ways that are assertive, controlling, and intimidating are characterized as dominant. Individuals who attain and maintain high rank by their set of skills, knowledge, expertise, and their willingness to share these with others are characterized as prestigious (Kakkar, Sivanathan, and Global 2020).

Chaos is the most frequent proposition for concealing deviant actions. Oversight and guardianship is lacking. Guardianship is supervision that may prevent misconduct by the presence of individuals and systems that are capable and willing to detect and react to wrongdoing. Lacking presence of critical persons, transparent systems, stakeholder watchdogs, capable auditors, and other guardianship instruments make concealment of deviance convenient. As argued by Chan and Gibbs (2022), the presence of guardians does not necessarily equate to capability in crime prevention, especially when studied in a dynamic perspective. For example, potential offenders may over time learn how guardians operate and thus how to avoid the attention of guardianship functions.

Neutralization is the most frequent proposition for deviant behavior willingness. Sykes and Matza (1957) introduced a number of neutralization techniques that have been expanded in recent years. Offenders disclaim responsibility for wrongdoing, refuse damage from wrongdoing, refuse victim from wrongdoing, condemn those who criticize, apologize by higher loyalties, claim blunder quota, claim legal mistake, claim normality of action, claim entitlement to action, claim solution to dilemma, argue necessity of misconduct, claim role in society, perceive being victim of incident, gather support for behavior, and claim rule complexity. Successful application of neutralization techniques enables offenders to experience no guilt or shame for engaging in the act or for being caught doing so. White-collar deviants may also suffer from self-deception, which is the

practice of allowing oneself to believe that a false idea or thought about circumstances is true. Self-deception provides survival and reproductive benefits to those who employ it (Chan and Gibbs 2020).

Convenient deviance by American dreamers as presented in this study of ten cases from various countries is a topic that can be expanded in future research. Some deviants are far from wrongdoing, misconduct, or crime. For example, Norway experienced in 2022 a large number of billionaire refugees as economic emigrants moving to Switzerland to pursue the American dream (Milne 2022). While Switzerland is ranked #5 on the corporate tax haven index, Norway is not on the list at all (European Commission 2020; Tax Justice 2021). Switzerland is ranked #2 on the financial secrecy index, while Norway is ranked #48 (Tax Justice 2022). The tax burden is lower in Switzerland, and rich people have a higher status in that country. In many countries, money can help secure a visible memorial. An example is university buildings that are paid for by wealthy people and thus carry their names. This is not possible in Norway, while it is certainly possible in the United Kingdom (e.g., Saïd Business School after a donation from Wafic Saïd) and in the United States (e.g., Carl H Lindner College of Business after a donation from the family Lindner), and also in Switzerland. An example is the Swiss city of Lugano where several Norwegian billionaire refugees have settled. At the Università della Svizzera Italiana, the rich couple Cele and Aldo Daccò contributed to the construction of the Lugano campus where a major university building is now carrying their names. Names on buildings are symbols by presented artifacts to portrait the persons in positive light by communicating a message for influencing in favor of the persons. When climbing in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, rich people can secure their own legacy by having their names on university buildings.

Conclusion

Greed is the single most significant characteristic of American dreamers in the studied sample. Greed is also the most acknowledged motive for financial crime by white-collar offenders. Goldstraw-White (2012) defined greed as socially constructed needs and desires that can never be completely covered or contended. Greed can be a very strong quest to get more and more of something, and there is a strong preference to maximize wealth. To outsiders it may seem strange that rich people have such a strong desire to become even richer that they are willing to pursue deviant paths. However, as the definition indicates, greedy individuals are never happy with what they have, as they desperately want more all the time. Prosperity is not a means, but a goal for greedy individuals. Greed can grow when the organization does not have an adequate reaction (Haynes, Josefy, and Hitt 2015).

The policy implication of this research addresses prevention of convenient deviance by making propositions less attractive. In particular, heroic status should be avoided, and proper overview and guardianship should be in place.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Petter Gottschalk is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Leadership and Organizational Behavior at BI Norwegian Business School in Oslo, Norway. He has held several chief executive positions in business. Dr. Gottschalk has published extensively on convenience theory, fraud investigation, and knowledge management.

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