

white collar crime edwin sutherland

white collar crime edwin sutherland is a pivotal concept in criminology, first introduced by the American sociologist Edwin Sutherland in the late 1930s. This term revolutionized the understanding of crime by shifting focus from the traditional view of crime as primarily a lower-class phenomenon to recognizing illegal activities committed by individuals in respectable positions within society. Sutherland's theory highlighted the significance of crimes committed by those in professional, managerial, or business roles, emphasizing that white collar crime is distinct in nature, motivation, and impact. This article explores the origin, definition, types, and implications of white collar crime as conceptualized by Edwin Sutherland, along with its relevance in contemporary society. The discussion includes an examination of Sutherland's influence on legal frameworks and criminological research. The following sections outline the key aspects of white collar crime Edwin Sutherland pioneered, providing a comprehensive understanding for scholars, practitioners, and policy makers alike.

- Origin and Definition of White Collar Crime
- Edwin Sutherland's Contribution to Criminology
- Types of White Collar Crime
- Characteristics and Impact of White Collar Crime
- Legal and Sociological Implications

Origin and Definition of White Collar Crime

The concept of white collar crime was first introduced by Edwin Sutherland in his 1939 presidential address to the American Sociological Society. Sutherland defined white collar crime as "a crime committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of his occupation." This definition challenged the prevailing notion that crime was predominantly committed by the lower socioeconomic classes and underscored the reality that criminal behavior also exists among the affluent and educated. White collar crimes typically involve deceit, concealment, or violation of trust and are motivated by financial gain or business advantage rather than physical violence.

Historical Context

Before Sutherland's work, criminology largely ignored crimes committed by the upper classes, focusing primarily on street crimes and offenses committed by marginalized populations. Sutherland's research was groundbreaking because it brought attention to the illegal acts conducted within corporate offices, government agencies, and professional environments. His work laid the foundation for a broader understanding of crime that

includes economic and corporate offenses.

Key Elements of the Definition

Sutherland's definition emphasizes three main elements:

- **Respectability and High Social Status:** The offender typically holds a position of trust or authority.
- **Occupational Context:** The crime is committed during the course of legitimate business activities.
- **Non-violent Nature:** White collar crimes usually do not involve physical harm but cause financial or reputational damage.

Edwin Sutherland's Contribution to Criminology

Edwin Sutherland's introduction of the term white collar crime marked a paradigm shift in criminological theory. His work expanded the scope of criminal behavior to include offenses committed by the elite, thereby challenging the class bias inherent in previous criminological studies. Sutherland argued that crime is a social phenomenon that transcends class boundaries, which helped pave the way for more inclusive and nuanced research in the field.

Development of Differential Association Theory

Alongside his work on white collar crime, Sutherland developed the Differential Association Theory, which explains how criminal behavior is learned through social interactions. This theory posits that individuals learn values, attitudes, techniques, and motives for criminal behavior from close social groups. It complements the white collar crime concept by illustrating how professionals may adopt criminal behaviors in their occupational environments.

Impact on Criminological Research and Policy

Sutherland's insights have influenced both academic research and public policy. His work encouraged scholars to investigate corporate misconduct, regulatory violations, and financial fraud. Furthermore, it has led to increased regulatory scrutiny and the development of laws targeting white collar offenses, such as securities fraud, insider trading, and embezzlement.

Types of White Collar Crime

White collar crime encompasses a wide array of offenses that occur within professional and business settings. These crimes can be committed by individuals or organizations and often result in significant economic losses and erosion of public trust.

Common Categories of White Collar Crime

- **Fraud:** Deceptive practices intended to secure unfair or unlawful financial gain, including securities fraud, credit card fraud, and insurance fraud.
- **Embezzlement:** Misappropriation of funds or property entrusted to an individual's care, often seen in corporate or governmental contexts.
- **Insider Trading:** Buying or selling stocks based on non-public, material information obtained through a position of trust.
- **Bribery and Corruption:** Offering or accepting something of value to influence the actions of an official or other person in charge of a public or legal duty.
- **Money Laundering:** Concealing the origins of illegally obtained money to make it appear legitimate.
- **Tax Evasion:** Illegal practices to avoid paying taxes owed to the government.

Emerging Forms of White Collar Crime

With advancements in technology, new forms of white collar crime have emerged, including cyber fraud, identity theft, and data breaches. These offenses often exploit digital platforms and electronic systems, complicating detection and prosecution efforts.

Characteristics and Impact of White Collar Crime

White collar crimes possess distinctive characteristics that differentiate them from traditional street crimes. Understanding these features is critical for identifying and addressing such offenses effectively.

Distinctive Features

- **Non-violent but Highly Damaging:** Although physical violence is rare, the financial and social consequences can be extensive.

- **Complex and Concealed:** White collar crimes often involve sophisticated schemes and the manipulation of records to evade detection.
- **Perpetrated by Trusted Individuals:** Offenders typically hold positions of power or authority, which they exploit for personal gain.
- **Institutional Involvement:** Crimes can be committed by individuals acting alone or by organizations as a whole.

Societal and Economic Impact

The consequences of white collar crime extend beyond immediate financial losses. These offenses can undermine public confidence in institutions, distort markets, and exacerbate social inequalities. Victims may include consumers, investors, employees, and governments, making the scope of harm broad and multifaceted. The complexity and subtlety of these crimes often result in underreporting and insufficient legal responses.

Legal and Sociological Implications

The recognition of white collar crime has significant implications for both legal systems and sociological theory. Addressing these crimes requires tailored approaches that reflect their unique nature and challenges.

Legal Frameworks and Enforcement

Following Sutherland's work, legislation specifically targeting white collar offenses has been developed. Regulatory agencies such as the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) play vital roles in enforcement. However, prosecuting white collar crime can be difficult due to the complexity of evidence and the resources available to defendants. Legal reforms continue to evolve to improve detection, investigation, and punishment of these crimes.

Sociological Perspectives

From a sociological standpoint, white collar crime challenges conventional views of criminality and social control. It highlights the role of social structures, power dynamics, and cultural norms in facilitating or deterring criminal behavior among elites. The study of white collar crime also raises ethical questions about corporate responsibility and the influence of economic systems on lawbreaking.

Preventive Measures

- Implementation of stringent compliance and auditing procedures
- Promotion of ethical corporate cultures and accountability
- Enhanced transparency in financial and business operations
- Education and training focused on legal and ethical standards
- Strengthening regulatory oversight and inter-agency cooperation

Frequently Asked Questions

Who was Edwin Sutherland and what is his significance in criminology?

Edwin Sutherland was an American sociologist and criminologist who is best known for defining the concept of white collar crime and significantly contributing to the study of criminology.

What is white collar crime according to Edwin Sutherland?

According to Edwin Sutherland, white collar crime refers to financially motivated, nonviolent crime committed by individuals, typically in professional or business contexts, who occupy positions of trust and authority.

How did Edwin Sutherland's concept of white collar crime change the study of crime?

Edwin Sutherland's concept of white collar crime broadened the scope of criminology by highlighting crimes committed by the affluent and powerful, challenging the traditional focus on street crime and lower-class offenders.

What are some examples of white collar crimes originally identified by Edwin Sutherland?

Examples of white collar crimes identified by Edwin Sutherland include embezzlement, fraud, insider trading, bribery, and other forms of corporate and occupational crime.

Why was Edwin Sutherland's theory of white collar crime controversial?

Sutherland's theory was controversial because it challenged the prevailing belief that crime was mainly a lower-class phenomenon, emphasizing that the wealthy and influential could

also be criminals but were often overlooked by the legal system.

How has Edwin Sutherland's work on white collar crime influenced modern legal and regulatory practices?

Edwin Sutherland's work has influenced the development of laws and regulations targeting corporate misconduct, increased attention to regulatory enforcement, and the establishment of specialized agencies to investigate and prosecute white collar crimes.

What is the difference between white collar crime and blue collar crime as defined by Edwin Sutherland?

White collar crime, as defined by Sutherland, involves crimes committed by individuals in professional positions for financial gain, whereas blue collar crime typically refers to crimes committed by working-class individuals, often involving direct physical harm or property damage.

Additional Resources

1. *White Collar Crime* by Edwin Sutherland

This seminal book by Edwin Sutherland introduced the concept of white collar crime and challenged prevailing notions that crime was primarily a lower-class phenomenon. Sutherland argued that crimes committed by individuals of high social status in the course of their occupation deserved serious attention. The book laid the foundation for the study of corporate crime, fraud, and other non-violent offenses committed in professional settings.

2. *White Collar Crime: An Opportunity Perspective* by Michael L. Benson and Sally S. Simpson

This book explores white collar crime through the lens of opportunity theory, emphasizing how situational factors and access to opportunities shape criminal behavior. Benson and Simpson provide a detailed analysis of various types of white collar offenses, including fraud, embezzlement, and corporate misconduct. The book combines theoretical insights with empirical data to explain why some individuals engage in white collar crime.

3. *Corporate Crime and Punishment: The Crisis of Underenforcement* by Michael L. Davis

Davis tackles the issue of corporate crime enforcement, arguing that many corporations evade adequate punishment for their illegal activities. The book discusses the challenges law enforcement agencies face in prosecuting white collar criminals and the implications of under-enforcement for social justice. It also suggests reforms to strengthen regulatory frameworks and improve accountability.

4. *The Social Reality of White Collar Crime* by David O. Friedrichs

Friedrichs examines white collar crime from a sociological perspective, focusing on how society defines and responds to these offenses. The book discusses the social harm caused by white collar crimes and the reasons these crimes often receive less public condemnation compared to street crimes. It also explores policy responses and prevention strategies.

5. *Understanding White Collar Crime: An Opportunity Perspective* by Michael L. Benson

This text offers a comprehensive overview of white collar crime, focusing on the role of opportunity in facilitating criminal acts. Benson reviews various types of white collar offenses and discusses the social and economic contexts in which they occur. The book emphasizes prevention and detection strategies within organizations.

6. *White Collar Crime: Classic and Contemporary Views* edited by Shanna R. Van Slyke and Michael L. Benson

This edited volume compiles foundational writings by Edwin Sutherland alongside contemporary research on white collar crime. It provides readers with a historical understanding and modern perspectives on the subject. The collection covers diverse topics such as corporate fraud, regulatory enforcement, and the societal impact of white collar offenses.

7. *Enron: The Rise and Fall* by Loren Fox

While focusing on the infamous Enron scandal, this book highlights real-world examples of white collar crime at the corporate level. Fox details the fraudulent accounting practices and corporate corruption that led to Enron's collapse. The narrative illustrates the consequences of white collar crime for employees, investors, and the economy.

8. *White Collar Crime: Law and Practice* by Ronald J. Allen and Josephine Ross

This book provides a legal perspective on white collar crime, discussing statutes, case law, and prosecutorial strategies. It covers a range of offenses such as insider trading, money laundering, and bribery. The authors also analyze challenges in investigating and prosecuting white collar criminals in the modern legal landscape.

9. *The Rise of White Collar Crime in the Global Economy* by Michael Levi

Levi explores how globalization has influenced the nature and scale of white collar crime. The book examines cross-border financial crimes, regulatory gaps, and international cooperation in combating these offenses. It highlights the complexity of addressing white collar crime in an interconnected world economy.

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