

# white collar crime edwin sutherland

**white collar crime edwin sutherland** is a foundational concept in criminology that revolutionized the understanding of crime beyond traditional street-level offenses. Edwin Sutherland, a prominent sociologist and criminologist, introduced the term “white collar crime” in the late 1930s to describe crimes committed by individuals of high social status in the course of their occupations. This groundbreaking theory challenged the prevailing notion that crime was predominantly a lower-class phenomenon. The concept of white collar crime encompasses a wide range of non-violent offenses such as fraud, embezzlement, insider trading, and corporate misconduct. This article explores the origins, definitions, implications, and lasting impact of white collar crime as conceptualized by Edwin Sutherland. It also examines the evolution of the term and its significance in contemporary criminal justice and regulatory frameworks.

- Origin and Definition of White Collar Crime
- Edwin Sutherland’s Contribution to Criminology
- Types of White Collar Crime
- Impact and Consequences of White Collar Crime
- Challenges in Prosecuting White Collar Crime
- Legacy and Influence of Edwin Sutherland’s Theory

## Origin and Definition of White Collar Crime

The term white collar crime was first coined by Edwin Sutherland in 1939 during his presidential address to the American Sociological Society. He 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 marked a significant departure from traditional criminological theories that primarily focused on crimes committed by lower socioeconomic classes. Sutherland’s insight highlighted that criminal behavior is not confined to poverty or desperation but can also be present among the affluent and powerful.

White collar crime includes a variety of illegal acts characterized by deceit, concealment, or violation of trust, and these acts are not dependent on the application or threat of physical force or violence. The definition has since been expanded and refined by scholars and legal authorities, but the core concept remains rooted in Sutherland’s original framework. His work paved the way for a broader understanding of crime that incorporates economic

and corporate misconduct.

## Edwin Sutherland's Contribution to Criminology

Edwin Sutherland's contribution to criminology is monumental in shifting the focus of crime research to include the social context and status of offenders. Prior to his work, criminology largely ignored crimes committed by the upper class, assuming criminality was a lower-class issue. Sutherland challenged this bias by documenting extensive examples of criminal acts committed by business executives, professionals, and government officials.

## The Theory of Differential Association

Sutherland is also renowned for developing the theory of differential association, which explains how criminal behavior is learned through interactions with others. This theory supports the concept of white collar crime by suggesting that individuals in certain social environments, including corporate settings, can learn and adopt criminal behaviors.

## Research and Publications

In his seminal book, *White Collar Crime* (1949), Sutherland systematically analyzed cases of economic crime, providing empirical evidence that white collar criminals often evade punishment and that their crimes have significant social costs. His research emphasized the need for legal reforms and greater attention to nonviolent crimes committed by the economically privileged.

## Types of White Collar Crime

White collar crime comprises a diverse range of offenses typically committed by individuals in professional or business roles. These crimes often involve financial deception or breach of trust and can have wide-ranging effects on victims and society. Some common types include:

- **Fraud:** Deceptive practices such as securities fraud, credit card fraud, insurance fraud, and mortgage fraud.
- **Embezzlement:** The misappropriation or theft of funds placed in one's trust or belonging to an employer.
- **Insider Trading:** Trading stocks or other securities based on non-public, material information.
- **Bribery and Corruption:** Offering or accepting something of value to influence official actions or decisions.

- **Money Laundering:** Concealing the origins of illegally obtained money to make it appear legitimate.
- **Tax Evasion:** Illegally avoiding paying taxes owed to the government.

Each of these offenses typically involves sophisticated methods and often requires specialized knowledge or access to privileged information, distinguishing them from conventional street crimes.

## **Impact and Consequences of White Collar Crime**

White collar crime has far-reaching consequences that impact individuals, corporations, governments, and society at large. Unlike many traditional crimes, white collar offenses can result in significant financial losses, undermining public trust in institutions and markets.

### **Economic and Social Costs**

Financially, white collar crimes cause billions of dollars in losses annually worldwide. Victims may include consumers, investors, employees, and taxpayers. Beyond monetary damage, these crimes can erode confidence in economic systems, leading to destabilization and reduced investment.

### **Psychological and Reputational Damage**

Victims of white collar crime often suffer psychological distress and a loss of faith in institutions. Businesses implicated in such crimes may experience severe reputational harm, regulatory scrutiny, and loss of competitive advantage.

## **Challenges in Prosecuting White Collar Crime**

Prosecuting white collar crime presents unique difficulties compared to conventional criminal cases. The complexity and technical nature of these offenses often require specialized knowledge and resources.

### **Complexity and Evidence Gathering**

White collar crimes frequently involve intricate financial transactions, cross-border activities, and sophisticated concealment techniques. Gathering sufficient evidence to prove intent and wrongdoing can be time-consuming and resource-intensive.

### **Legal and Regulatory Obstacles**

Laws governing white collar crime vary widely, and regulatory agencies may

face limitations in jurisdiction and authority. Additionally, perpetrators often have access to high-quality legal defense teams, further complicating prosecution efforts.

## **Underreporting and Detection Issues**

Many white collar crimes go undetected or unreported due to victim reluctance, corporate cover-ups, or the subtle nature of the offenses. This underreporting hampers law enforcement's ability to address the full scope of the problem.

## **Legacy and Influence of Edwin Sutherland's Theory**

Edwin Sutherland's pioneering work on white collar crime has had a lasting influence on criminology, law enforcement, and public policy. His theory broadened the scope of crime research and underscored the importance of addressing criminality among the socially and economically privileged.

## **Influence on Legal Frameworks**

Sutherland's concept prompted the development of specific laws and regulatory bodies aimed at combating white collar crime, such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act and the establishment of financial oversight agencies. These measures seek to enhance transparency, accountability, and deterrence.

## **Continued Academic and Practical Relevance**

The study of white collar crime remains a critical area in criminology and criminal justice. Researchers continue to build on Sutherland's work, exploring new dimensions such as cybercrime, corporate governance, and global financial crimes, ensuring the theory's relevance in the modern context.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

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

Edwin Sutherland was an American sociologist and criminologist known for introducing the concept of 'white collar crime' in 1939, highlighting crimes committed by individuals in professional and business settings.

## **What is the definition of white collar crime according to Edwin Sutherland?**

Edwin Sutherland defined white collar crime as crimes committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of their occupation.

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

Sutherland's concept expanded the study of crime by including offenses committed by the affluent and powerful, challenging the traditional focus on street crime and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

## **What are some examples of white collar crimes outlined by Edwin Sutherland?**

Examples of white collar crimes include fraud, embezzlement, insider trading, bribery, and corporate theft, all typically committed by professionals in business or government roles.

## **Why was Edwin Sutherland's theory on white collar crime controversial?**

His theory was controversial because it challenged the prevailing notion that crime was primarily a lower-class phenomenon, drawing attention to illegal activities committed by the elite, which were often overlooked or under-prosecuted.

## **How has Edwin Sutherland's concept of white collar crime influenced modern law enforcement?**

Sutherland's concept has led to increased awareness, research, and the development of specialized units in law enforcement agencies focused on investigating and prosecuting white collar crimes.

## **What impact did Edwin Sutherland's work have on corporate accountability?**

His work brought scrutiny to corporate behaviors, encouraging regulations and policies aimed at holding businesses and their leaders accountable for illegal and unethical practices.

## **Are white collar crimes considered less harmful than other types of crimes according to Edwin Sutherland?**

No, Edwin Sutherland argued that white collar crimes can be as harmful, if

not more so, than traditional street crimes, as they can cause significant financial damage and undermine social trust.

## Additional Resources

### 1. *White Collar Crime* by Edwin H. Sutherland

This seminal book by Edwin Sutherland introduced the concept of white collar crime, challenging traditional views that crime is only associated with poverty and lower classes. Sutherland defines white collar crime as offenses committed by a person of respectability and high social status during their occupation. The book explores various types of corporate and occupational crimes, emphasizing the social and economic impacts. It remains a foundational text in criminology and white collar crime studies.

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

This book provides an in-depth analysis of white collar crime through the lens of opportunity theory, explaining how offenders exploit organizational and occupational opportunities to commit crimes. The authors combine empirical research with theory to explore the causes, patterns, and prevention of white collar offenses. It also discusses the role of social networks and organizational culture in facilitating crime.

### 3. *White-Collar Crime: The Essentials* by Brian K. Payne

A concise yet comprehensive introduction to white collar crime, this book covers key theories, types of offenses, and case studies. Payne discusses the historical development of the concept, including Sutherland's contributions, and examines contemporary issues such as corporate fraud, cybercrime, and regulatory responses. The book is accessible for students and professionals interested in understanding the complexities of white collar crime.

### 4. *Corporate Crime and Punishment* by David Hess

David Hess critically examines the enforcement and regulatory challenges associated with corporate crime. The book discusses how corporations evade responsibility and the effectiveness of legal sanctions. It also explores policy reforms and strategies to improve corporate accountability, drawing on landmark cases and regulatory frameworks.

### 5. *White Collar Crime: Law and Practice* by Paul J. Zwier

This book offers a practical perspective on the legal aspects of white collar crime, providing detailed coverage of statutes, case law, and prosecutorial strategies. Zwier discusses various offenses including fraud, embezzlement, insider trading, and bribery, as well as defense tactics. It serves as a valuable resource for legal practitioners, students, and law enforcement officials.

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

Friedrichs explores the social construction and perception of white collar crime, analyzing how society defines and responds to such offenses. The book addresses the disparity in punishment between white collar and street crimes

and investigates the influence of power and privilege. Through empirical research, it highlights the challenges in detecting and prosecuting these crimes.

7. *Understanding White-Collar Crime: An Opportunity Perspective* by Michael L. Benson and Francis T. Cullen

This text delves into the sociological and criminological theories underpinning white collar crime, particularly focusing on how opportunities within social structures facilitate criminal behavior. The authors review empirical data and case studies to illustrate patterns and preventive measures. It is highly regarded for bridging theory and practical insights in white collar crime research.

8. *White Collar Crime: A Text/Reader* edited by Brian K. Payne

Combining scholarly articles and foundational texts, this reader provides a comprehensive overview of white collar crime research and theory. It includes classic works such as Sutherland's original writings alongside contemporary studies that address evolving forms of economic and corporate crime. The collection is ideal for students and researchers seeking a broad understanding of the field.

9. *Criminology and White Collar Crime* by Michael L. Benson

This book integrates criminological theory with the study of white collar crime, emphasizing the role of social structures, organizational culture, and regulatory environments. Benson offers a thorough analysis of different types of white collar offenses and the challenges in enforcement and prevention. The work is notable for its empirical rigor and theoretical contributions to the discipline.

## **White Collar Crime Edwin Sutherland**

White Collar Crime Edwin Sutherland

### **Related Articles**

- [west side story study guide questions](#)
- [wheel of time dragon reborn](#)
- [winnie the pooh in latin](#)

[Back to Home](#)