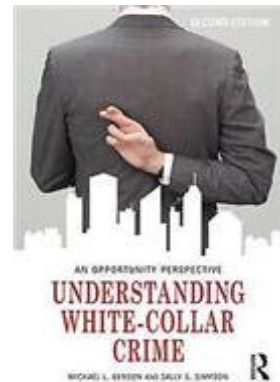


Understanding White-Collar Crime: An Opportunity Perspective

by M.L. Benson and S.S. Simpson
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Reviewed by Douglas M.C. Allan



Considering what it sets out to achieve, placing opportunity at the centre of white-collar crime discussions, Benson and Simpson’s second edition of *Understanding White-Collar Crime* hits its target.

The book begins with an introduction to white-collar crime and the white-collar criminal using a comparison of the offender-based versus offense-based approaches to defining white-collar crime. The reader is then introduced to both the Yale studies on white-collar crime by Wheeler et al., (1988), and the Frost and Rhodes study from the same period in what is a deliberate effort to guide the reader to the conclusion that without opportunity, crime will not occur. In Part II, we are offered Sutherland’s (1983) differential association theory, Hirschi’s (1969) control theory, Merton’s (1938) anomie theory, rational choice theory (Becker, 1962), and finally, an integrated theory as proposed by Braithwaite (1989).

Setting Braithwaite’s integrated approach aside for the moment, two of the remaining four major theoretical explanations are those that you would expect to see here, however the work of Murphy and Robinson (2008) on the *Maximiser* is an obvious area where thinking around anomie/strain theory has evolved and should, one suspects, be considered for inclusion. Moreover, the presence of control theory, while not common nor “widely accepted as an explanation for white-collar crime” (Yeager, 2010: 245), usefully introduces the work of Lasley (1988) as a way of situating control theory in the domain of white-collar crime studies.

In Part III the authors provide a focused, yet limited (in scope) exploration of some crime types traditionally associated with white-collar crime including health care, mortgage, securities, markets financial crimes as well as a few

corporate violence crimes including environmental, workplace and manufacturing offences. In Part IV the authors then set out to differentiate between a symbolic construction, and a sociodemographic approach to account for why some turn to crime while others with the same opportunities and access do not. Lastly, in Part V the authors introduce control and prevention of financial crime via a combination of legal and extra-legal controls before looking towards opportunities for the future research and study in white-collar crime.

In his review of Benson and Simpson's first edition *White-Collar Crime: An Opportunity Perspective*, Yeager (2010) questioned the lack of critical consideration of the influence of the political economy in that version, and called it out on the series editor's assumption that Benson and Simpson made the claim of an original link between opportunity and the study of white-collar crime, "[i]n point in fact, analysing opportunity structures in regard to crimes of the bourgeoisie, the well-to-do, or corporations for that matter, has been a well-established perspective." Instead, I would suggest that what Benson and Simpson sought to achieve was to bring together a range of disparate lines of thinking into a largely coherent picture of the role opportunity plays in white-collar crime and the academic discourse surrounding it. Have they succeeded? In short, "yes," but it could contain more while still achieving its intended outcomes.

As to who this text is the most useful for, Yeager (2010) recommended it as a suitable undergraduate text "to be juxtapositioned alongside more critical and theoretical material." Where this text has also found a following is in postgraduate studies for students from professional backgrounds not previously schooled in criminological or sociological thinking as a foundation level academic text that sets out the basic concepts associated with a *what works* study of white-collar crime. In this book, Benson and Simpson have—in a very succinct manner—conveyed the importance of opportunity to those seeking to understand both the crime and the criminal.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Douglas M.C. Allan is a lecturer in white-collar and financial crime in the Australian Graduate School of Policing and Security, Charles Sturt University.

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