

THE LOGIC OF WHITE COLLAR CRIME DEFINITION

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ABSTRACT

Approaches to the definition of white collar crime depend upon implicit cognitive schemas, especially implicit notions of the definition of definition. Definitional variations will therefore depend upon different implicit perspectives and the particular purposes derived from them. Methods flowing from these implicit perspectives and purposes include the implicative method, the denotative method, the analytic method, and the synthetic method, as well as correlational, causal, and descriptive methods. The fact that those using the various methods seem to have no conscious awareness of doing so adds to definitional confusion. The paper explores various definitional disputes in terms of this implicit logic of definition in an effort to bring assumptions to the surface and clarify the nature of the debate in hopes of facilitating progress in white collar crime definition.

Keywords: *white collar crime*

The problem of definition in criminology is much more serious than we tend to admit (Ball and Curry, 1995). It plagues fields as diverse as gang research, hate crime debates, and investigations of white collar crime. How can we discuss a topic intelligently if we cannot agree on its meaning? How is it possible to compare research results if operational definitions differ even more than apples and oranges? Can criminology pretend to scientific status if it treats these questions superficially, avoiding responsibility by arguing that such questions are only relevant to the philosophy of science and not to social scientists themselves? As Ball and Curry (1996) have pointed out with respect to the problem of defining "gangs," criminological definitions are necessary (Robinson, 1950), some definitions are better than others (Ayer, 1971), and criteria exist by which their relative "truth value" can be assessed (Bentley and Dewey, 1971)

To the extent that these three assertions are correct, it may be worthwhile to take a step back and look at the problem of white collar crime definition from another angle, that of the "definition of definition" itself. If criminologists are too busy arguing to examine their premises, will clarity ever come? We hope to contribute to the debate by taking a

somewhat different tack, approaching the problem through the logic of definition itself.

The problem is certainly important enough to beg further examination. It is easy to forget the revolutionary power of Sutherland's definition, a potential still far from realization. Sutherland was not only defining white collar offenses as crime but was redefining criminology and reformulating sociology. We should remember that Caldwell (1959: 282-283) went so far as to criticize Sutherland's definition as a threat to science itself and charged that it was really designed "for the establishment of a new social order" that would make sociologists "mechanics of collectivism."

Newman (1958) realized that the new definition would have to make social power central to criminology, putting it at odds with the criminal law out of which it had come. Had the new definition been fully embraced, the functionalist paradigm that dominated sociology would have had to give way to something more along the lines of conflict theory or social construction theory. That is why Newman called the concept of "white collar crime" one of the most important developments in criminology since WW II and why Mannheim "proposed award-

ing Sutherland a Nobel Prize in criminology for his work on white-collar crime, if such an award had existed" (Poveda, 1994: 32).

Nevertheless, in the almost seventy years since Sutherland first used the term, many criminologists have suggested either abandoning it entirely in favor of a wider notion of "crimes of the powerful," deviance of the "elite," "corporate and governmental" deviance, "violations of human rights and equalitarianism" or even "exploitation," while others have demanded a much more narrow definition restricted to something like legally defined "violation of trust." Some defended it by making a virtue of its ambiguity, insisting that it is the very ambiguity surrounding these offenses that makes them sociologically interesting and that efforts to force an artificial precision deflect attention from the inconsistencies and contradictions that comprise social life (Aubert, 1952). Occasionally we hear it said that nearly everyone already understands the term on an intuitional basis, which is sufficient. Many logicians have shown that those pointing to some phenomenon and agreeing to call it by a certain name are usually drawing upon a body of implicit knowledge extrinsic to it, including heuristic rules for what to see as well as how to see it, even if they are unable to articulate the implicit rules governing their observation and interpretation (Baker and Hacker, 1984). Empirical evidence suggests that the perspectives with which we approach the problem of definition depend upon cognitive mapping structures or "schemas" (which have also been called frames, scripts, inferential sets, prototypes, or information-processing constructs) that organize our thinking (Entman, 1989). Even when different observers see roughly the same thing, its various aspects tend to differ immensely in salience. One suspects that these heuristic rules, especially those governing "how to see it," are really what separate the various camps of criminologists. Logicians also tend to agree that there are no perfectly "correct" definitions of a term except in closed logical systems such as mathematics. The "truth value" of a definition depends in large part upon the purpose for which we wish to use the definition. Another criterion for judging the truth value of a definition is its level of generality. The more generally applicable a definition, the better it tends to serve its purposes. At the 1996 conference of white collar crime scholars hosted by the National White Collar Crime Center (Helmkamp et al., 1996), for example, Simon (1996) was quite candid in admitting that his major purpose is to critique social power and that although (or perhaps because)

he is a great admirer of Sutherland, he finds the more general term, "elite deviance," superior to that of "white collar crime" for his purpose.

Simon's position illustrates the fact that language has not only informative purposes but also affective and promotional purposes. In using an ethical concept, for example, we are not describing the world but taking an attitude toward it. Affective use of language is designed to produce certain emotional reactions. Promotional use is designed to produce certain behavioral reactions. For some criminologists, "white collar crime" seems to be essentially an ethical concept.

While ethical purposes may seem to "bias" our definitions, some would argue that all information carries interpretations and that efforts at purely informational (i.e., "objective" or "scientific") definitions are not only heartless but also impossible. Ethical approaches such as Simon's stress that whether we like it or not, we cannot escape either ideology or power when we deal with definitions affecting social policy and that honesty therefore demands articulated commitment to a definite ethical perspective and a clear political purpose. Approaches like Tappan's (1947) or Caldwell's (1958) only seem more "objective" and less affective or promotional because they assume the ethics of the status quo. Beyond questions of perspectives and purposes, however, there are those concerned with the methodology of definition, and they must be made explicit if we are to understand the tacit rules by which white collar crime is being defined by various criminologists.

Methods of Definition

The major methods of definition include the implicative method, the denotative method, the analytical method, the synthetic method, the correlational method, the causal method, and the descriptive method. The first four tend to combine certain strengths with specific weaknesses. The other three methods are essentially fallacious. White collar crime scholars vary in their perspectives, purposes, and implicit methods of definition, but rarely is any of the logic made very explicit.

The Implicative Method

The implicative method is sometimes called the contextual method. It implies a definition through use of the word in a total context that suggests its meaning (Baker and Hacker, 1984). One of the appeals of the implicative method lies in the way

in which it can provide a richer meaning to a term such as white collar crime by giving an actual portrayal of the phenomenon, illustrating various nuances of meaning in a way that can probably never be captured by a more precise definition. This method characterizes the sensitive literary treatment or the insightful case study, and the complexities of white collar crime lend it to this approach. In this sense, Sutherland's "best" definition might be White Collar Crime, apart from any effort to be more "exact."

Aubert's insistence that we embrace the "ambiguities" of white collar crime as the most interesting sociological aspect of the phenomenon is perhaps best honored by the implicative approach. Meier (1996) argues that we have made considerable progress in white collar crime research and theory without dealing very effectively with the lack of a clear definition and suggests that a general conception may actually be more efficacious. On the other hand, some have criticized white collar crime scholarship most vigorously on the grounds that it seems to appeal to those with a "journalistic" rather than a "scientific" bent and tends toward the study of the sensational rather than the most representative cases, thus distorting the picture (Nelken, 1994; Croall, 2001).

The implicative method of definition tends to give us a better sense of the dynamics of the phenomenon as a process. When studies such as that of Sutherland make an effort to set forth a succinct definition in addition to the largely implicative definition embedded in a series of case studies, there is often a sense that the succinct definition is inadequate in comparison to the contextual treatment itself. Often the author is accused of violating his or her own definition in the course of the elaborated study. Some more sophisticated students are tempted to discard the formal definition and search the "text" (including various subtexts) for the "real meaning" of the term. Those inclined to the literary approach may even attempt a "deconstruction" in an effort to elucidate the latent meanings.

Part of the appeal of the implicative method is that it allows room for all sorts of approaches, thus keeping things open, but it does this by keeping the boundaries fuzzy. It may be the most satisfactory method of definition in the exploratory stages of research and theorizing about a phenomenon such as white collar crime, but implications are called such partly because they convey somewhat different connotations to different people. Many hidden

connotations in an implicative definition may slip by without theoretical debate or empirical testing, simply because they were implied rather than clearly proclaimed. Thus, part of the problem in deciding the truth-value of implicative definitions is a matter of deciding whether we wish to keep everything open to interpretation and let a thousand flowers bloom or whether we have reached the point in white collar crime studies where general exploration must give way to theoretical specification and specific hypothesis-testing.

The Denotative Method

Sometimes called the exemplification method, the denotative method proceeds by listing specific *examples* denoted by the term. As everyone knows, this is often an excellent pedagogical approach for explaining a concept to undergraduates. One problem with definition by examples, however, is that, as with the implicative method, there is a tendency to choose the most dramatic of them, which leads to thinking in extreme terms rather than scientific representation.

The denotative method is actually based on what logicians call *ostensive* definition as reflected by those who say that they cannot define a term but can recognize the phenomenon and (perhaps) give examples of it, such as in Justice Stewart's famous remark about obscenity--"I can't define it, but I know it when I see it." There are two reasons to reject ostensive definitions in dealing with white collar crime theory, research, or policymaking. Although it can be said that one has a *clear* idea of a phenomenon when one can recognize examples of it immediately, the idea has not become *distinct* until one can communicate the characteristics differentiating that phenomenon from others. We have no way of knowing whether Justice Stewart had a clear conception of "obscenity," but he certainly had no distinct idea of it. Furthermore, even if he had pointed to many specific examples, he would still have been drawing on a body of implicit, unarticulated knowledge, his own "schemas" based on unshared heuristic rules for what to see and how to see it, the unrecognized rules for observation and interpretation to which we referred earlier.

In a complex society, interpreters may not share background assumptions and may therefore see something different in the same phenomenon. To complicate matters further, culture in complex societies is in constant change, so that ostensive definitions change as patterns shift, which seems

to be true of the phrase "white collar" in the term white collar crime. With the growth of the middle class after World War II, the white collar workers of today differ considerably from the high status executives to which Sutherland applied the term, and white collar crime such as computer crime (considered the fastest growing form of white collar crime today) was literally inconceivable at that time. While Gordon (1996) takes the emergence of such new "technological crimes" to indicate that Sutherland's definition is outmoded, the emergence of new types of white collar crime offenders and different examples of white collar crime is perfectly congruent with that definition.

Definition is a matter of abstraction, sometimes a process through which we gradually become aware of a new element in our experience and name it, sometimes as an empirical generalization, and sometimes through increased awareness of the complexity of a particular phenomenon to the point of grasping it in a new way. Friedrichs (1995) maintains that in the case of white collar crime definition this tends to occur in three stages beginning with a *polemical definition, then a typological definition, and finally an operational definition. In a more general sense, however, the first step in such abstraction involves an intuition of some unity underlying a multitude of particulars, followed by a second that involves a deeper appreciation of the complexity inherent in the perceived unity, but without being able to grasp this complexity, and then a third step that usually involves achievement of either an analytical or synthetic definition (Robinson, 1950). It is to these two definitional methods that we now turn.*

Analytical Definition

The method called definition by analysis proceeds by breaking a phenomenon into constituent *parts*, with a listing of all the parts defining it. Exact definition by analysis as in a science such as chemistry will yield a listing of properties each of which is not only defined specifically but also weighted according to an analytic formula. If a weighting of properties cannot be achieved, we may settle for an ordinal ranking. The sorts of properties selected will, of course, lead in certain directions, with both research and theory heavily influenced by the resulting definitions. A legal definition that will allow us to "prove" a case if we establish each of its constituent points requires the analytical method. These properties, of course, should be distinguishing characteristics, either singly

or collectively.

A typology is actually a somewhat less exact analytical definition. Perhaps the most basic question for an analytical definition of white collar crime is whether the properties or types are to be "offender-based" or "offense-based." More debate at the National White Crime Center conference centered around this question than around any other (Helmkamp et al, 1996). Coleman (1996) argued for the "classical" approach taken by Sutherland, which stressed the offender-based characteristics of respectability or high social status, contrasting it (as have many others) with that taken by Edelhertz (1970), who emphasized illegal acts committed by "nonphysical means and by concealment" in order "to obtain money or property...or to obtain business or personal advantage," which focuses on the properties inherent in the offense. Although it is true that the study of white collar crime only became more acceptable in criminology as the radical implications of Sutherland's definition were blunted by shifting the focus of definition from types of offenders to types of offenses (Poveda, 1994), it is important to remember that Sutherland actually emphasized both sides of his definition and that *White Collar Crime* spends much more space investigating the nature of the offenses committed "in the course of one's occupation" than on the characteristics of the offenders themselves. The real question is whether a proper definition can be based on *both* offender and offense properties and whether acceptable typologies can reflect both sides of the definition.

As an early advocate of Sutherland's general approach, Geis (1962) nevertheless pleaded for clarification of Sutherland's definition through specification of constituent subtypes, partly because he felt that this would facilitate its incorporation into criminology and partly because he questioned Sutherland's application of differential opportunity theory to all white collar crime and considered it likely that specific theories would have to be developed for each of its various forms. This suggests that he regarded "white collar crime" not as a clear and distinct term but more of what logicians call a "covering term" to refer in general to a set of more specifically defined crimes which could then be the focus of investigation. Although he originally hoped that the legal codes might provide the basis for this more exact set of specifications, Geis (1996) eventually came to argue that law-based approaches led to such operational definitions as those used by the Yale studies, actually diluting the powerful theoretical and policy

implications carried by the original formulation by relying on subtypes based on data obtained for federal prosecutions including bribery, embezzlement, income tax evasion, false claims, mail fraud, securities violations, antitrust offenses, and credit fraud (Weisburd et al., 1990). The problem here is that such a typology simply adopts an "expedient definition" by defining white collar crime in terms of available data rather than inherent properties or analytic subtypes. The result is a definition that, along with the data flowing from it, provides support for the very conservative theoretical positions that are so dismissive of white collar crime.

One of the most fruitful outcomes of the analytic approach is the development of a theoretical continuum that provides either incremental measurement or an ordinal typology by which we locate qualitative leaps along the continuum, as when a gang makes the leap to organized crime (Ball and Curry, 1995). The key to development of a theoretically fruitful continuum, of course, lies in selection of the dimension whose poles define it. The use of a continuum can combine the analytic and synthetic methods, which is another reason why it is so appealing. Thus, for example, Edelhertz's (1970) typology has defined white collar crime in terms of a continuum of crime by "concealment and guile" ranging from (a) virtually ad hoc, individual crimes committed outside an occupation to (b) more systematic abuses of trust preying on an organization, to (c) crimes committed by legitimate businesses to (d) fundamentally illegal businesses. Such a continuum gives not only a picture of different types of white collar crime but shows their relationship along a particular axis.

Jamieson's (1996) use of a continuum of organization also brings out the relationship of different forms of white collar crime to one another, this time by using degree of organization as the criterion by which to construct a continuum ranging from individual actions at one end to deviant actions of persons operating in specialized roles within highly complex organizations at the other end. Her definitional continuum leads us to think of organizational theory as the key to white collar crime studies, with increasingly instrumental, coordinated, complex deviant behavior, increasing access to wealth and power, increased capacity to exert influence over social control processes, and increasingly non-confrontational and diffused victimization patterns as we move toward to the "specialized roles in highly complex organizations" end of the continuum.

One powerful sub-strategy of analytic definition

is the comparison-and-contrast approach. It is especially powerful in helping us move from clear to distinct ideas (Ayer, 1971). This definitional approach has the added advantage that it can clarify the meaning of many different but related terms simultaneously. Although nearly all logicians agree that we should be cautious about defining any phenomenon in terms of what it is *not*, it is very common to define collar crime at least in part by stressing how it differs from ordinary crime. It is common to compare-and-contrast white collar crime, organized crime, professional crime, and ordinary crime, at least with undergraduates, although we tend to conclude the exercise by explaining that the lines are becoming very blurred as the once different but overlapping properties seem to be losing many of their former distinctions.

Perspectives and purposes will probably guide our determination of the criteria for delineating typology. Today these seem to include classification by *context* (e.g., setting such as corporation, government agency, or professional service or organizational *level* such as individual, workgroup, or organization), status or *position* of offender (e.g., wealthy or middle class), primary *victims* (e.g., general public or individual clients), principal form of *harm* (e.g., economic loss or physical injury), and *legal category* such as antitrust violation or fraud (Friedrichs, 1995). Using offender motivation and context of the offense as principles of classification, Edelhertz (1970) classified white collar crimes as personal crimes (e.g., credit card fraud, welfare fraud and the like committed outside one's occupation), abuses of trust (e.g., embezzlement), business crimes, and con games, differing from most sociologists, who would probably consider (sociologically) the last of these to be professional crime or organized crime. Friedrichs' (1995) typology makes white collar crime a rather loose covering term including corporate, occupational, governmental, state-corporate, finance, enterprise, "contrepreneurial," "techno," and avocational crime, as well as "crimes of globalization," mentioning "cognate," "hybrid," and "residual" forms, while defending many of them as having at a minimum "a close generic relationship" with white collar crime.

Of course, analytic definitions have their disadvantages. By tearing a term out of context, analytic definitions may actually deprive it of much of its meaning. If they assume the same properties throughout a phenomenon, they deflect theoretical attention away from variations. If they define

in terms of constituent subtypes, however, the definition becomes looser, and the more various the subtypes included, the more the term becomes a linguistic convenience, first a useful "covering term" and then perhaps a suggestive "metaphor," and then basically meaningless.

The fact is that all the white collar crime typologies mix "apples and oranges" to some extent, especially those that are essentially *ad hoc* rather than conceptual. Typological categories defined by such phrases as "crimes committed by the state," for example, mix everything from bribe-taking to genocide, crimes that have little in common except that they all take place in the same institutional setting. We need fewer *ad hoc* typologies and more theoretical typologies.

Synthetic Definition

Definition by synthesis is sometimes also called the relational method. Rather than analyzing the phenomenon in terms of subtypes, this approach locates it as a subtype itself within a larger frame. While analytical definitions tend to operate with some *implicit* theory, synthetic definitions are usually superior in providing an understanding of the phenomenon in terms of a more comprehensive concept or even a different paradigm.

If successful, synthetic definition will open fruitful new avenues for theory and research. If misplaced, it will add to the confusion. Sutherland's definition of white collar violations as "crimes" offers the most dramatic example of a definition by synthesis precisely because it located these offenses in a new and very powerful context, casting them in a different light. Tappan's (1947) response was almost visceral, reacting to Sutherland's broadening of the concept "crime" by going to the other extreme and insisting that the term only be applied to behaviors leading to conviction in a criminal court, something that would have kept criminologists from studying crime rates based on reported offenses or developing self-report methodologies and victimization surveys, much less producing a fruitful critique of criminal law.

Although Clinard and Quinney (1967) used analytical definition by typology to divide white collar crime into corporate and occupational crime, corporate crime can be subsumed under occupational crime, bringing all of "white collar crime" under the latter category. Thus, Green's redefinition drops the "high status" property and classifies "occupational crime" as organizational, state-authority,

professional, and individual, negating the emphasis on social power. Taking an entirely opposite tack, Ermann and Lundman (1978) incorporate white collar crime into a larger frame called "corporate and governmental *deviance*," **maintaining more of both key properties in their definition while avoiding Tappan's criticism by abandoning the term "crime."** Simon and Eitzen (1983) prefer to define the more comprehensive frame as "elite deviance," using a still broader definition for the "occupations" property and putting the emphasis even more clearly upon the status/power property.

Correlational Definitions

A great deal of the confusion in efforts to define white collar crime may be traced to conflating correlates with intrinsic, analytic properties. Is "high status" or "abuse of power" to be defined as the fundamental property of white collar crime (Simon, 1996), or do we gain more truth value through a definition that treats them as important correlates with a high inter-correlation? Is "violation of trust" (Shapiro, 1990) the only property of white collar crime by definition, or is it a common correlate that makes a critical difference in the nature of the crime? Should "concealment and guile" (Edelhertz, 1970) be regarded as a definitional property or a correlate? The problem here is that when we define any related characteristic as a necessary and sufficient property, we are engaging in tautology. We can study the effect of variations in degrees of "high status" or "violations of trust" or "guile and concealment," but we cannot question their importance.

Croall (2001) lists the *properties* of white collar crime as invisibility, abuse of trust, technical or "insider knowledge," complexity, organization, diffusion of responsibility, ambiguous legal and criminal status, lack of intent, low rate of detention and prosecution, and lenient sentences. Surely, the last four of these are merely correlates. If the laws were amended to give major price-fixing activities a much less ambiguous criminal status and such behavior came to be prosecuted intensely with harsh sentences for convicted offenders, would it no longer be a white collar crime?

Causal Definition

Some extant definitions actually define white collar crime in terms of causes, but this too treats as definitional properties what should really be causal

hypotheses. Thus, Braithwaite (1985: 3) has pointed out how Sutherland's definition in terms of the characteristics of "high status" perpetrators results in "an unfortunate mixing of definition and explanation," a problem that Shapiro (1990: 347) insists "precludes the possibility of exploring empirically the relationship between social class and crime—the very reason Sutherland coined the phrase." Although some have objected by pointing out that offender-based characteristics such as age are commonly used in legal definitions, that Sutherland's definition is so cogent precisely because it points to all sorts of differences between the crimes of "high status" and "low status" offenders, and that we can still distinguish between degrees of "high status" just as we can in terms of offender age for delinquency research, it is still true that one of the chief reasons for his emphasis on offender characteristics seems to have been his commitment to differential association theory. As Shapiro (1990) herself noted, Sutherland more than once referred to white collar crime in terms of breaches of "trust," but a definition that focused exclusively on the characteristics of the offenses would have allowed explanations based on pathology, which he was determined to combat.

When Burgess (1950) insisted that "white collar crimes" could not be crimes because they did not fit the "criminal-making process" common to all crimes, he was arguing for a blatantly causal definition. Insisting that "crimes" were "made" by labeling, he argued that these violations could not be defined as crimes simply because those involved did not regard themselves as criminals and were not so regarded by society. In some ways the definitional dispute came down to a causal argument over whether differential association was the only contender for a general theory of crime causation or whether crime was actually constructed through socially effective labeling.

Hirschi and Gottfredson (1987) seem to have fallen into the same trap as Sutherland and Burgess, being so committed to their theory that criminality in general is the result of tendencies to pursue short-term gratification directly with little consideration of long-range consequences that they also mix definition and explanation. Thus, they define white collar crime in such an unusual way that it appears to be relatively rare, very similar to other forms of law-breaking, committed by offenders similar to those who commit other crimes, and accurately measured by UCR data. It seems clear that they

began with a causal schema that led to a definition of white collar crime which proved their point. Even the "consensus definition" accepted at the National White Collar Crime conference (Helmkamp et al., 1996:iii) included the causal fiat, "for personal or organizational gain."

Descriptive Definition

Pragmatism as a philosophical paradigm produced an emphasis upon what logicians call descriptive definitions. Taking an approach almost opposite to that of describing the phenomenon in terms of causes, it instead defines in terms of consequences (Bentley and Dewey, 1947). Thus, in the pragmatic tradition of symbolic interactionism, labeling theory defines crime in terms of reactions to behavior. Anyone familiar with the sociology of knowledge should not be surprised by the fact that Tappan's (1947) refutation of Sutherland came in the same year that descriptive definition was first articulated. Tappan insisted upon a descriptive definition when he maintained that violations could only be defined as "crimes" when the consequences entailed conviction in criminal court. In labeling theory, the "cause" that defines "crime" lies in the reactions to behavior, so that Burgess's causal definition is also a descriptive definition.

Descriptive definitions based on consequences need not, however, confine themselves to the offender's reaction to his or her own violations or society's reactions thereto. There are as many ways to define by consequences as there are consequences, and social psychological reactions may not be the most salient, particularly in defining crime. Two centuries ago the classical school of criminology repudiated a labeling approach that based criminal law upon widely varying moral reactions to various behaviors and specified the more "objective" criterion of consequent harm as the most salient set of consequences, even to the point of making punitive sanctions commensurate with degree of harm. White collar crime scholars such as Reiman (1979), by comparing the calculated economic loss and personal injury produced by white collar crime to that quantified for ordinary crime, have shown that the harm consequent to the former far exceeds that produced by the latter when identical measures are applied, thus effectively defining white collar crime as "crime" in terms of the salient set of consequences identified by the classical school. That is really a descriptive definition.

Conclusion

Because white collar crime definitions spring from different perspectives, one key to possible resolution lies in discovering and clarifying the tacit rules that different scholars are using to determine which of the innumerable features of a particular phenomenon are most salient for definitional purposes. Complementary approaches that combine the best of the analytical and synthetic methods tend to be superior, and they can be fleshed out through the implicative and denotative methods. Even when a definition has been accepted, however, new definitions often become necessary, either because of changes in the phenomenon itself or changes in the purpose for which definition is required. Thus, for example, the rise of the service economy and the expansion of the middle class after World War II changed the definition of the "white collar" employee.

Robinson (1950) stresses that the best way to approach a definition is as an ongoing *activity*. Can we have a "working definition" of white collar crime coherent enough to allow criminologists to compare research findings and advance theory without turning it into dogma? To this point, the closest thing we have to definitional agreement is the "con-

sensus definition" developed at the National White Collar Crime Center conference, which (although marred by the causal stipulation with which it ends) reads as follows: White collar crimes are illegal or unethical acts that violate fiduciary responsibility or public trust committed by an individual or organization, usually during the course of legitimate occupational activity, by persons of high or respectable social status for personal or organizational gain (Helmkamp et al, 1996: 15).

The fact of general agreement on the above definition suggests that it is wrong to assume that significant consensus on a definition of white collar crime is impossible. This particular definition retains Sutherland's focus upon violations of trust by people of significant status and power, keeping it essentially to violations occurring in the course of legitimate occupations. It remains for criminologists to clarify some sort of working definition even further by reference to the logic of definition itself, avoiding correlational and causal stipulations such as the one that slipped into the conference definition and being especially careful about incorporation of descriptive elements. Even that definition must be flexible enough to change with perspectives purposes and shifts in the nature of the phenomenon being defined.

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