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The Role of Values in White-Collar Crime

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology at Massey University.

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ABSTRACT

White-collar crime is a serious type of crime. Research suggests that it is the most costly type of crime. In spite of it's considerable public profile, little is known about white-collar crime. This is due to considerable problems with theory and data. White-collar crime is difficult to study because it is usually well concealed and official data is contaminated by many offenders who are not of white-collar status. This lack of good information has contributed to the failure to develop a widely accepted theory of white-collar crime. Many theories of crime predict that criminals are deficient in either cognitive abilities or they are influenced by deviant subcultures. Most white-collar offenders do not show these deficiencies, instead demonstrating considerable cognitive abilities and a strong influence by normative values. Coleman's Integrated Theory of White-Collar Crime was suggested to be able to account for the normative characteristics of the white-collar offender. The theory suggests that white-collar crime is motivated and facilitated by an imbalance of normative social values. Material gain is valued above prohibitions which society places on acceptable ways of achieving it. One implication of this theory was tested by two hypotheses. Because white-collar crime is facilitated by normative social values, it was suggested that beliefs and values relating to it can be studied in the normative social environment. It was hypothesised that the social emphasis placed on material gain would cause employees of competitive organisations to perceive some white-collar crimes as less serious than employees of noncompetitive organisations. The hypotheses were not supported. There were a number of possible explanations for this, the most likely being problems with sampling and deficiencies in the hypotheses. While the hypotheses may or may not have been valid, the examination of the social environment of white-collar crime was stressed as an important new way to examine social influences on white-collar crime.

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