INTEGRATED THEORIES OF WHITE COLLAR CRIME

A number of students of white collar crime have attempted to develop *integrated theories* of such crime that incorporate insights from different theoretical traditions and account for white collar crime on several different levels.

James William Coleman (1987) developed an integrated theory that centers on the coincidence of appropriate motivation and opportunity. A culture generates motives for lawbreaking when it emphasizes "possessive individualism," competition, and materialism; justifies rationalizations; and removes unified restraining influences. A built-in structure of opportunity renders white collar crime both less vulnerable to legal controls and sanctions (due to the disproportionate power of elites in the formulation and administration of the law) and open to a variety of attractive possibilities for disregarding or violating the laws that do exist. In the private sector, the attractiveness of illicit opportunities increases as profitability declines; the organizational rhetoric of condemning illegal activity comes into conflict with the conditions (diffusion of responsibility, deniability, and lack of authentic objections) that promote such activity. Various factors, including the structure of opportunity, the nature of financial reimbursement, and the occupational subculture, can render some occupations more conducive to illegality than others. Accordingly, white collar crime is most pervasive in societies that have a culture of competition, in organizations that are financially pressured, and in occupations with special opportunities and subcultural values that promote illegality.

John Braithwaite (1989a) based his integrative theory on two traditions: structural Marxist theory (first articulated by Dutch criminologist Willem A. Bonger), which links both white collar and conventional crime with the promotion of egoism in capitalist societies; and differential association theory (first developed by Sutherland), which holds that both white collar and conventional crime are learned relative to differential opportunity. Accordingly, nations with high levels of inequality of wealth and power will have high rates of both white collar and conventional crime because they produce a broad range of illegitimate opportunities that are more rewarding than legal opportunities. Organizational crime specifically is a response to relatively more attractive illegitimate opportunities and the subcultural value system that rationalizes taking advantage of them. For Braithwaite, the theoretical challenge is to construct a "tipping point" explanation that predicts when a stake in noncompliance outbalances a stake in conformity with the law. His critical tipping factor is *differential shaming*: Conduct tips in the direction that avoids the more potent shaming (disapproval), whether it comes from within the organization or from the state. Involvement in white collar criminal conduct can then be understood as a function of relative vulnerability to shaming; crime flourishes in organizations that shield members from shaming and pressure them to produce and is controlled in organizations that take proactive measures to expose law violators to shame. Braithwaite accordingly regarded differential shaming as the missing link integrating two contradictory traditions (subcultural and control).

There are certainly other versions of integrated theories of white collar crime. Some of the mainstream theories discussed earlier in this chapter, including Charles Tittle's control balance theory and John Hagan's power-control theory, could be classified as integrated theories, insofar as they take into account multiple variables, such as predispositions, provocations, opportunities, constraints, mal-distributions of power, and differential levels of parental control. Critical criminologists who address corporate crime typically adopt an integrated theoretical approach, taking into account variables operating on the level of the organization of the economy, corporate structure, market forces, organizational culture, interpersonal workgroup dynamics, rationalizations, and identity factors, among others (Punch 1999; Gobert and Punch 2003; Tombs and Whyte 2007b). Those who have addressed state-corporate crime, and crimes of states, have also drawn upon and amplified integrated approaches (see Box 8.10).