

1.6: Conflict View

A third perspective of how we define crime or create laws is referred to as conflict view, commonly associated with Karl Marx in the 1800s. **Conflict view** sees society as a collection of diverse groups that can include owners, workers, wealthy, poor, students, professionals, younger older, and more. This view recognizes that the creation of laws is unequal and may not have consensus like in the example discussed previously. ^[1]

Further, the conflict view takes a very Marxian perspective and suggests that these groups are often in constant conflict with one another. Unlike the consensus perspective, the conflict view would suggest that the crime definitions are controlled by those with wealth, power, and social position in society. Essentially, laws are made by a select group in society, and the laws protect the 'haves.' Criminality shapes the values of the ruling class and is not of 'moral consensus'. ^[2] There are many examples we use in the criminal justice field that demonstrates the conflict view in action.

Edwin Sutherland: White Collar Crime

Edwin Sutherland, a sociologist, first introduced white-collar crime during his presidential address at the American Sociological Society Meeting in 1939 and later published articles and books on the topic. ^[3] Specifically, he was concerned with the criminological community's preoccupation with the low-status offender and "street crimes" and the lack of attention given to crimes that were perpetrated by people in higher status occupations.

Sutherland wrote a book, *White Collar Crime*, that sparked lots of debate. ^[4] However, there is a limited focus on white-collar crime and even less enforcement of it in the United States. From the conflict view, this would be because white-collar and corporate crime is committed by the 'haves' and they write their laws and define what is or is not a crime. Going back to how we define crime in society, white-collar crime is still a contested one.

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Currently, there are different views of how one should define white-collar crime: defining white-collar crime based on the type of offender, type of offense, studying economic crime such as corporate and/or environmental law violations, health, and safety law violations, and/or the organizational culture rather than the offender or offense. The FBI studies white-collar crime in terms of offense, so official data for white-collar crime will not focus on the background of the offender, which can make the use of Uniform Crime Report Data, UCR data tricky to use if trying to determine a typical offender. The UCR will be covered more fully in chapter two, but it is data collected from police departments, and the FBI compiles reports. Again, conflict view may suggest the lack of focus on white-collar crime in U.S. society would be because the 'haves' creates the laws, not the 'have-nots.' ucr.fbi.gov/nibrs/nibrs_wcc.pdf

^[6]

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2. Boundless. (2016). The conflict perspective. *Sociology – Cochise College Boundless*, 26. ↩
3. Sutherland, E. (1940). White collar criminality. *American Sociological Review*, 5(1), 1-12. ↩
4. Sutherland, E. (1949). *White collar crime*. Dryden Press. ↩
5. Sutherland, E. (1949). *White collar crime*. Dryden Press. ↩
6. Barnett, C. (N.D.). The measurement of white-collar crime using: Uniform crime reporting (UCR) data. *U.S. Department of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigation* ↩

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