

Book Review

Dion, M., Weisstub, D., & Richet, J. (Eds.). (2016). *Financial crimes: Psychological, technological, and ethical issues*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG.

Reviewed by Peter A. Kindle, Ph.D, CPA, LMSW
University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota

Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, Volume 14, Number 2 (2017)
Copyright 2017, ASWB

This text may be freely shared among individuals, but it may not be republished in any medium without express written consent from the authors and advance notification of ASWB.

This 68th volume in the International Library of Ethics, Law, and the New Medicine series is edited by three academics, two Canadian and one French, but their full credentials are not provided in the book. Like other books in this series, this one attempts to take an international and interdisciplinary focus on the subject—in this case the subject is white collar crime. The 31 contributors have provided 17 chapters grouped into four sections with brief introductory and concluding sections penned by the editors. As is common in edited books, the tone and approach vary substantially between chapters with little attention to providing a logical sequence or connection between chapters. Endnotes are provided for chapters indicating clearly the independent development of each contribution. Accordingly, the typical reader will not be approaching this book as a whole, but focusing narrowly on individual chapters that appear relevant at the time. This book is clearly intended for library collections and will be useful to criminologists and social scientists in a forensic field.

The first section of four chapters defines financial crimes from a broad perspective without any significant attention to white collar crime itself and suggests some policy implications to restrict this type of criminal activity. The first reports on the high corruption levels perceived by respondents in Greece and Cyprus in comparison with other European nations. Policy recommendations are suggested to improve the deficits in the rule of law, government accountability, and government

transparency in both nations. The second and third chapters are secondary data analyses predicting tax evasion (an example of a financial crime) using World Economic Forum data and cross-national information sharing to reduce tax evasion using data from Sweden. The fourth chapter promotes a return to the use of letters of marque in international trade to provide a control mechanism to reduce money laundering and terrorist financing through financial institutions.

The four chapters comprising the second section of the book are more strongly focused on white collar crime and may be of greater interest to some social workers as it contains a degree of psychological inquiry into those who commit financial crimes (Chapter Five), those who are susceptible to financial crime victimization (Chapters Six and Seven). This section concludes with a good summary of the various theories proposed to explain white collar crime (Chapter Eight). As literature reviews, these chapters do have value, but the empirical evidence underlying the psychological processes proposed is weak, the predictive capability of forensic psychiatry lacking, and the assertion that susceptibility increases with financial desperation and cognitive deficiencies is hardly surprising.

The third section takes a sociological turn as the focus is on organizational contexts for financial crimes. The ninth chapter summarizes the internal and external forces that contribute to an environment conducive to financial crimes with special attention to incentives, manipulation through communication

distortion, misuse of authority, and normative peer pressure. This chapter would be a good primer for young adults entering the workforce as it provides a useful framework for understanding some of the more subtle influences at work in every workplace. Chapter Ten is another secondary data analysis predicting the muting of bribery practices in several developing countries when corporations install independent boards of directors. The relevance of this chapter to developed countries is questionable. The eleventh chapter takes a decidedly theological turn as it defines institutional corruption as structural sin and makes a strong appeal for individual integrity when facing environmental forces of corruption. The focus is on bribery, and this chapter, along with the next, argue that there can be no compromising with structural sin (Chapter Eleven) or condoning of any mythological grey areas that may endorse bribes (Chapter Twelve). Combined, these two chapters make what is essentially a Christian argument and an ethical argument (ala Aristotle and Kant) against any form of bribery.

The final section purports to be about the technological influence on financial crimes, but begins with an interesting attempt to persuade the reader that evidence-based profiling in forensic psychology is the future means of addressing fraud. This is the most heavily researched chapter in the book based on the length of the reference list, but it does seem to contradict the conclusions of Chapter Five that is best understood as suggesting that psychological profiles are simply not possible. The remaining chapters do focus on the challenges of controlling transnational financial crimes due to globalization and technology (Chapter Fourteen), how technology is enabling the illicit drug trade (Chapter Fifteen) and how hopeless it is to try and sustain drug prohibition, and two chapters (Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen) on the virtually impossible task of monitoring money laundering because of technology, primarily due to the conflictual responsibilities of financial institutions tasked with protecting client privacy while reporting suspicious activity. Perversely, financial institutions over-report and law enforcement is overwhelmed

with trivia, which alone hampers meaningful data mining.

I simply cannot imagine a reader who would choose to read this book from cover-to-cover because of the wide variability in subject matter among the chapters. Its primary value lies in the literature reviews that many of the chapters provide because a good summary of the research in any area may always serve a useful function. The discussions of the organizational context for financial crimes in the third section are also worthy of review and reflection. On the other hand, the regression chapters explaining the use of secondary data could have been profitably omitted and redirected to the peer review literature where the quality of the work would have been enhanced by rigorous peer review.

The subtitle suggests that this book understands financial crimes from three discrete perspectives. My assessment of the psychological view is that the research is weak, inconclusive, and mired in dated psychological theories of personality development and disorders. The technological viewpoints do not appear to be written by technology experts as most of the conclusions and suggestions are about non-technological solutions to the problems technology has made possible. The ethical view is really only addressed at length in two chapters where an equivalency of criminal actions with unethical, immoral, and even sinful behavior is presumed. There are only three pages in the book that address the most pressing question about white collar crime, and that is, why is white collar crime treated with such lax attention by law enforcement and such light sentences by the courts? Here lies a social justice issue that should have been paramount in this book, and it is nearly neglected.