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Techniques of Neutralization and Animal Rights Activists

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Abstract

Neutralization theory posits that criminals assuage feelings of guilt they feel as a consequence of their actions by developing thoughts that justify their deviant behavior. The process is believed to occur prior to the act, and is seen as enabling the deviant behavior. A large body of research has been conducted demonstrating that neutralization “techniques” are used by many criminals. The present work seeks to determine if members of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) use techniques of neutralization. The method used was a content analysis of anonymous communiqués written by the ALF. The results indicate that ALF members do indeed use various techniques of neutralization to justify their actions, including what *may* be a newly identified technique, “appeal to a higher moral principle.” Moreover, as the ALF is motivated by a particular ideology, it seems reasonable to conclude that these techniques were developed in the minds of the communiqué authors prior to the criminal actions they perpetrated.

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