

Trash Talk: Fee Evasion and Techniques of Neutralization by Older Women in Response to Rising Garbage Collection Fees

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ABSTRACT

Trash and crime are not ordinarily mentioned in the same breath, but rising costs to dispose of rubbish are leading some to engage in criminal behavior. Costs for rubbish disposal have become much more expensive recently due to many factors, including rising land prices, strict environmental regulations, and host fees paid to localities to accept landfills. Add to this the current world-wide economic crisis which has left many scrambling just to make ends meet. This is especially true for older individuals on a fixed income. These individuals, however, are creative economic actors. Two ways some innovative individuals have found to pare rubbish removal costs are fee avoidance and undesirable diversion. In this project, older women found ways to cut their household costs by 'sharing' rubbish collection costs with neighbors. Unfortunately, for the actors, this behavior is a crime. While it is unlikely that the women trash sharers in this study will ever find themselves in prison for fee avoidance or borough ordinance violations, the increase in this type of economic coping strategy should be of interest to criminologists. As the population ages and inequality increases, many older females may feel that they must break the law in order to afford basic services. Economic stimulus packages that do not address the needs of older Americans will only exacerbate the problems of older Americans.

Introduction

Trash and crime are not ordinarily mentioned in the same breath, but rising costs to dispose of rubbish are leading some to engage in criminal behavior. In a capitalistic society consumers are encouraged to splurge on products they do not necessarily need, but are impelled, through slick marketing, to want. Consumers are also prodded to ignore the massive piles of waste left behind by this conspicuous consumption—indeed, once it goes into the trash can it is out of sight and out of mind (de Coverly et al., 2008). That is until the bill to cart it off arrives. Costs for rubbish disposal have become much more expensive recently due to many factors, including rising land prices, strict environmental regulations, and host fees paid to localities to accept landfills (Fullerton and Kinnaman, 1994). Add to this the current world-wide economic crisis (The Economist, 2009), which has left many scrambling just to make

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ends meet. This is especially true for older individuals on a fixed income (*AARP Magazine*, 2009). These individuals, however, are creative economic actors. Many less well-off women working in the informal economy in urban USA (Venkatesh, 2006) find varied ways to earn extra money “off the books” to supplement their meager incomes. This applies especially to many older women who have lived through several economic downturns in their lifetimes, which has led them to become especially adept at finding ways to cut their household budgets.

Two ways some innovative individuals have found to pare rubbish removal costs are ‘fee avoidance’ and ‘undesirable diversion’ (Recycle Indiana, 2009). So called ‘fee avoidance’ strategies include taking trash to work or to friends or relatives with unlimited trash service, overstuffing bins, cancelling service and placing trash with the neighbors. In the USA town, which is the focus of the study behind this paper, agreeing to cancel one trash collection bill and share costs with a neighbor is a violation of a borough ordinance and is a summary violation (PA Criminal Code, 2009). In much the same way that the term tax avoidance represents legal ways to limit income tax liabilities, perhaps then it is reasonable to suggest that *fee evasion*, like ‘tax evasion’, should be the term better suited to describe illegal actions regarding nonpayment of such dues.

All individual households in this borough in the USA are required by ordinance to have trash service with the contracted corporation. Undesirable diversion activities include unauthorized use of institutional or business dumpsters, trash burying and burning, and throwing trash in vacant lots. Dumping trash in a dumpster not belonging to the individual can result in a ‘theft of services’ charge and is also a summary violation (PA Criminal Code). While ‘theft of services’ is typically applied to TV service cable splicers; phone phreakers (Clough and Mungo, 1992), and those who steal electricity etc, individuals dumping trash illegally in Pennsylvania USA have been cited for theft of services according to Criminal Code 3926 (Fulton, 2009; PA Criminal Code, 2009). These techniques lead to a reduction or complete elimination of garbage fees, but in most states are also crimes (RealPolice, 2009). While some research has focused on fee avoidance (Fullerton and Kinnaman, 1994; Fullerton and Walls, 2007; Recycle Indiana, 2009), no known research addresses the justifications employed by individuals to neutralize their illegal fee evasion actions. The females in this project who engage in this criminal behavior justify their actions through one or more techniques of neutralization (Sykes and Matza, 1957). It is this behavior and these justifications that will be examined in this project.

Trash talk

While waste has long been a concern for the ecological and physical science disciplines, only recently have some general studies modeling choices and costs of trash disposal for individual consumers been conducted (de Coverly et al, 2008; Fullerton and Kinnaman, 1994; Fullerton and Walls, 2007; Rathje, 1992; Recycle Indiana, 2009). Among these studies is a simple theoretical general equilibrium model developed by Fullerton and Kinnaman (2009: 78-79) to ascertain which of three disposal options is most efficient. Options include garbage, recycling, and illicit burning or dumping. They found that the optimal fee structure is a deposit-refund system. In another similar project, with funding provided by a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, the State of Indiana conducted a study to determine the most effective and efficient garbage disposal method (Recycle Indiana,

2009). Their findings indicate that the ‘pay-as-you-throw’ option best serves the needs of the state and individual home owners. These and other studies, however, do little more than pay lip service to the idea that individuals may find other options to their town’s favored rubbish removal method, including criminal options. This gap in the literature offers an opportunity for criminologists.

With the exception of the alleged association between organized crime and waste haulers (IASOC, 2006), very few criminological studies have been conducted on the disposition of waste. While not criminologists, Fullerton and Walls (2007: 2) examine options to legal avenues of rubbish disposal and argue that the currently favored pay-as-you-throw rubbish disposal programs offer opportunities for individuals to reduce their fees in one of several ways. Legal options include recycling, composting, and consuming less in the first place. Illegal options include burning trash, throwing household trash into a commercial dumpster, or throwing it by the side of the road (Fullerton and Walls, 2007: 2). Most studies, however, do not address the issue of illegal options or justifications for engaging in this behavior, largely because we are socialized not to think about it (de Coverly et. al., 2008; Fullerton and Walls, 2007). The ubiquitous household trash bin operates as a gateway between visible consumption and the silent, invisible centralized waste mountain. The shapes and sizes of these bins not only dictate waste practices, but waste costs (de Coverly et. al., 2008). The one opportunity we have to think about trash comes with the monthly/quarterly bill.

Individual household costs for rubbish removal depend in large part on the methods used. There are three different methods, including municipal collection, refuse/garbage districts, and private subscription. When it comes to determining how much to charge citizens for trash service, no single factor is more important for gaining public acceptance regarding the costs than the perceived fairness of the rate structure. This assessment of fairness, to a great extent, rests on the public’s *perception* that the rates are fair, as well as the customs and traditions of the community. Past practices are an important part of that perception. Other components of rate structure fairness include the impact on senior citizens, low-income households, and large families (Fullerton and Walls, 2007; Recycle Indiana, 2009; Bent Society, 2008).

Past practices of waste management in the town in this project include competitive bidding by corporations for the right to be the sole carrier. Due to increased operating costs and the lack of competitive bids received from refuse haulers, however, garbage rates doubled recently. This was perceived as unfair by the older females on a fixed income who had no choice but to pay the higher rates, or find another way of coping. Many of these women chose the latter. They are in good company—of the 2,732 residential units in this town only 1,118 are employing the required services of the sole authorized rubbish carrier even though it is a violation of a borough ordinance to do so (Thompson, 2009). Some of these individuals have chosen a form of ‘fee evasion’, which has reduced their garbage bill, but because the behavior is a summary violation of a borough ordinance and therefore a crime (PA Criminal Code, 2009; Recycle Indiana, 2009), has also necessitated justifications for the deviant behavior (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

In this project, the municipality in question employs a refuse/garbage district method, which means a single company is chosen through competitive bidding to collect and

dispose of the town's trash (Erie.gov, 2009). This pickup is regulated by town ordinance, meaning that households that do not sign up for the service can be charged with a summary violation (PA Criminal Code, 2009; Watson, 2009). Older females on a fixed income who own, or are purchasing their homes, were chosen as the subjects of this study for several reasons. The household budget is often under their control, women live longer than men and often remain in their homes long after their spouses have died, economic troubles hit older, retired Americans harder because of their fixed income, and females generally have lower retirement incomes than men, which increases the need to budget wisely (Census Bureau, 2009; U.S. Department of Labor, 2009).

The concern in this project is that rising utility costs may be turning older females into criminals. These fee evaders, however, do not consider themselves to be criminals—their justifications appeal to the inequity of the situation. This unlawful behavior provides a unique opportunity to explore how the older females justify their actions and protect their sense of self.

Neutralization theory (Sykes and Matza, 1957) suggests that individuals who are generally law abiding seek to justify their behavior when they deviate from the norm. A plethora of research exists on Sykes and Matza's techniques of neutralization, but most projects focus on young delinquents or middle aged offenders. As no research articles addressing neutralization techniques of older females was found, this project should be of interest to criminologists, because, at the time of writing, it is the only known article that applies this deviance theory to the illicit behavior of older Americans.

Techniques of neutralization

The theory of neutralization was introduced by Sykes and Matza (1957) fifty-one years ago in an attempt to address the 'roots of juvenile delinquency'. Sykes and Matza agreed with Sutherland's (1955) contention that delinquency is learned, but suggest that relatively little attention had been paid to the specific content of what is learned. Their five techniques of neutralization provided the first attempt to delineate techniques used to 'shield individuals from the force of his own internalized values and the reactions of conforming others' (Sykes and Matza, 1957: 669). This lessening of the effectiveness of social controls need not be applied only to juveniles as Sykes and Matza argue. Anyone trying to justify behavior they know to be outside the norm may seek to maintain their positive self image by applying one of these techniques. The five techniques are *denial of responsibility*, *denial of injury*, *denial of the victim*, *condemnation of the condemners*, and *appeal to high loyalties*. The females in this study rationalized their deviant behavior in one of several ways; by claiming a lack of a victim, employing the appeal to higher loyalties, or claiming denial of responsibility. Interviewees admitted that they know trash sharing is outside what is considered normal, but see themselves as the injured party and feel their deviance from the norm is justified.

While originally applied to juveniles (Sykes and Matza, 1957), techniques of neutralization have been used to explain behavior in various settings and among specific individuals including auto thieves (Copes, 2003); business and marketing (Stratton, Vitell and Pelton, 1994); corporate crime (Piquero et al., 2005); deer poachers (Eliason and Dodder, 1999); genocide (Alvarez, 1997); hit men (Levi,

1981); pedophilia (de Young, 1988); rape (Skully and Marolla, 1984); self-esteem (Costello, 2000); shoplifters (Cromwell and Thurman, 2003); and veterinary deviance (Gauthier, 2001).

Neutralization research directly focused on women is less frequent than that pertaining to males, but some does exist. Heltsley and Calhoun (2003) explore neutralization techniques used by beauty pageant mothers to justify their children's participation in six national beauty pageants in a year's time. Interviewees used 'condemnation of condemners' most often, followed by 'denial of injury' to counteract critiques of their parenting skills and motivations for entering their children in so many pageants. Interviewees were critical also of the media's role in creating the perception that pageants were exploiting young girls (Heltsley and Calhoun, 2003: 94).

Additional neutralization research on females includes articles on domestic violence (Ferraro and Johnson, 1982); and theft of supplies by nurses (Dabney, 1995). Ferraro and Johnson (1982) were concerned with why so many women remain in abusive relationships. They found that like offenders, victims of domestic abuse employed neutralizations to justify their spouse's abusive behavior. Techniques employed include appeal to the salvation ethic, the denial of the victimizer, the denial of injury, the denial of victimization, the denial of options, and the appeal to higher loyalties. Ferraro and Johnson conclude that:

'The process of victimization is not synonymous with experiencing violent attacks from a spouse. Rationalizing the violence inhibits a sense of outrage and efforts to escape abuse. Only after rationalizations are rejected does the victimization process begin' (Ferraro and Johnson, 1982: 324).

The women in the current project are certainly not victims of violence, but they are victims of circumstances beyond their control when utility rates rise unexpectedly and their meager finances are squeezed further.

As mentioned above, another project devoted to females examines neutralization techniques used by hospital nurses who steal supplies and medicines from their workplace (Dabney, 1995). Dabney's article focuses on deviant behavior among nurses, including supply theft, drug theft, drug use, and procedural shortcuts. Interviews with 25 registered nurses working in hospitals indicated that techniques of neutralization were used both a priori and post hoc to justify their deviance. With so little neutralization research explaining women's behavior and choices, and none analyzing older females specifically, this project is necessary to expand criminological knowledge of deviant behavior and to develop policy that would ease the economic burden of older women.

Methodology

This survey research was conducted in a small central Pennsylvania town beginning in 2006 — where snowball sampling was employed. Twenty-seven females were interviewed. While the principal investigator had knowledge that several of these women were splitting garbage collection fees, the extent of the behavior was unknown. Therefore, these interviews were conducted under the premise that interviewees would be asked what they thought about the recent garbage service rate

hikes. Discussions of garbage sharing came about as a result of the interviews. The scope of this project was narrowed to homeowners because apartment and assisted living residents usually do not have to pay for trash service separately from their rent. It was also deemed preferable to interview older females on fixed incomes because they would be the most likely to be affected by utility rate increases, as their retirement incomes are generally not as large as males (Census Bureau, 2009). Initially, older males were interviewed but because there were no trash sharers among them and because the main focus of this project is older women, their data are not included in this article.

An older female acquaintance of the primary investigator who engages in trash sharing provided names of women whom she knew to be involved in the same activity and became this project's primary informant. A sister of the informant was also helpful in providing names of those over 65 on a fixed income who owned their homes. Open-ended questions were used to ascertain whether these individuals engaged in trash sharing or knew anyone that did. The interviews were conducted in person or over the phone according to the interviewee's preference. Because most interviewees preferred phone interviews, most were conducted in this manner and generally lasted from 10 to 30 minutes. Those taking part in interviews conducted in person were given consent forms informing them of relevant research ethics and their rights, all of which were signed. Verbal consent was obtained for those who participated in phone interviews. Most of the initial interviews were conducted in the summer of 2006, with follow-up questions and additional interviews conducted in each of the following years up to the present. The interviewee's comments were analyzed for terminology reflecting the five techniques of neutralization. For example, an individual who employs the *denial of victim* neutralization would blame the corporation for raising prices beyond what is perceived as fair. Their actions would be perceived as righting a wrong by transforming the victim into an entity deserving punishment (Sykes and Matza, 1957). For those women who were helping out a neighbor, the *appeal to higher loyalties* might be employed as this neutralization asserts that friendships are more important than the law.

Findings

In an effort to reduce the amount of money they pay for garbage collection, older female interviewees on a fixed income in the small town studied in this project have found someone to double up and effectively split their garbage bill. This 'fee evasion' technique involves one individual cancelling her refuse collection bill and leaving her trash at the other's house for pickup (Recycle Indiana, 2009). By splitting the bill, each individual pays only half the cost of service. This behavior, while efficient and economical, is also a violation of a borough ordinance, or summary violation (Fulton, 2009; PA Criminal Code, 2009; Watson, 2009). In other words, it is a crime.

The interviewees in this study are all women who used fee evasion tactics for paying their garbage bills. Their mean age is 72.8, with an age range from 33 to 96. The majority of the interviewees (n=23) are over 65. Four younger 'accomplices' are 33, 37, 49, and 53 years old. These younger women also own their own homes, are divorced or unmarried, and live next door to the individual with whom they are trash sharing. In these four cases it was the elder women who initiated the unlawful behavior. The comments and justifications of these four accomplices are included as

well. All the other fee evaders (n=14) were paired with women of similar ages and were retired homeowners who are over the age of 65. This results in a total of 27 interviewees in all, just over half of whom are fee evaders. Of the women over 65, all own or are purchasing their own homes and have a mean yearly retirement income of \$19,350, in a county with an average wage of \$28,000 (Census Bureau, 2000). The four younger accomplices have an average income of \$39,680, excluding child support in the case of two of the individuals.

As stated in the methods section, initially the extent of garbage sharing was unknown. These women were interviewed under the premise of examining their responses to the recent rate hike. Those who shared their garbage bill admitted to it in the interviews. Conversations were analyzed for components of the techniques of neutralization and three were found to be the most prevalent—*denial of the victim*, *denial of responsibility*, and *appeal to higher loyalties* (Sykes and Matza, 1957). The *condemnation of condemners* was also expressed, but less often than the others.

Denial of the Victim

This neutralization is employed when the deviant accepts the responsibility for their actions, but the moral indignation of self and others may be neutralized by an insistence that the injury is not wrong in view of perceived wrongdoing on the part of the corporation (Sykes and Matza, 1957). The primary informant was one of the individuals who felt that the trash collection corporation was greedy and would never miss the money lost due to sharing costs with a neighbor. She explained that her main reason for seeking someone to share costs with was economic. This 92-year-old widow, who has a retirement income of \$30,000 per year, said:

'I don't have a great lot of garbage, mostly living by myself. It's just too much money. The heating bill already doubled and I'm afraid I won't have enough money to cover my bills. If I live too much longer I don't know if my retirement fund will handle it—then what will I do?'

This interviewee does not consider herself to be deviant, but instead blames the rubbish collection corporation for charging too much money. Sykes and Matza's (1957) *denial of the victim* technique best explains her motivation. While she acknowledges that her action is not normal, she asserts that the waste collection corporation is 'charging too much' and is therefore an 'appropriate target' (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Sykes and Matza (1957: 668) explain that those using this technique feel that their behavior is a form of rightful retaliation or punishment. The individual is moved into the position of avenger and the victim, who was perceived to have unfairly doubled the price of trash collection, is transformed into a wrong-doer.

Another interviewee, who echoes the informant's *denial of the victim* rationalization, said the garbage company is, 'just being greedy...and really, how much trash can you make if you live alone?' This 79-year-old also justified her participation in trash sharing by transforming the corporation into the wrong-doer, thereby denying the existence of a victim. Another of the oldest interviewees (age 96) also asserts that it is the greed of the corporation that has led her to look for alternatives. 'They just charge too much,' she said. The doubling of the yearly trash rates was the impetus for the charges of greed and wrong-doing on the part of the corporation, according to these interviewees.

A central component of the denial of the victim technique of neutralization is the suspicion that the victim is crooked and therefore fair game. For example, a 68 year-old female who is trash sharing with a neighbor said:

'I thought it (sharing) was a good idea. I give her (a neighbor) \$33 every three months. It's a lot more now than it used to be. It used to be \$26 every three months. Now it's \$63. Someone (at the corporation) got a raise or is in cahoots.'

These fee evading women all expressed that the garbage industry reaps sizable profits and would never miss the revenue lost through trash sharing. The 68-year-old female who believed that the corporation is engaging in shenanigans is also expressing the *condemnation of the condemners* technique of neutralization (Sykes and Matza, 1957: 668). She is effectively shifting attention away from her own deviant behavior onto the hypocritical corporation. Others in this study may agree that the corporation is at fault, but frame it differently.

Denial of responsibility

Sykes and Matza (1957) state that individuals employing this neutralization technique assert that their deviant acts are outside of the individuals and beyond their control. Several female fee evaders stated that they had no choice in the matter in the decision to split the trash fee. According to one interviewee, the rise in several utility rates—heat, electric, and trash—are beyond her control. Trash sharing, then, is something she was 'forced' into doing, which is a key component of the denial of responsibility technique (Sykes and Matza, 1957: 668).

Another who expressed denial of responsibility is a young mother of three who is fearful of layoffs at her manufacturing plant where she works and the economic situation of the country in general. There has been a general slowdown in her industry and her firm is cutting everyone's hours to the bare minimum. Without her part-time job she would not be able to afford her mortgage. With the slowdown any bit of extra money she can save is appreciated and is not considered a deviant activity, but a necessity. She is therefore expressing a denial of responsibility in that the current economic state of affairs is beyond her control (Sykes and Matza, 1957: 668). A final neutralization technique reported by many of the younger women was the appeal to higher loyalties.

Appeal to higher loyalties

The 'accomplices' in this study reported that they were just trying to help out a neighbor as their excuse for trash sharing. When individuals act to protect a friend or neighbor and the law be damned, they are engaging in the *appeal to higher loyalties* technique. In a sort of sisterhood of the traveling trash, one young accomplice picks the trash up off the elder's porch and takes it to the street to place with her own. 'On cold, icy days this is a blessing' said the older trash sharer. This accomplice justifies her behavior with the *appeal to higher loyalties* by stating, 'she has so little trash—it's not fair that she has to pay the same price as I do. I have several bags a week and she only has one little bag.' The single mother of two does not feel what she is doing is unlawful, but is instead 'just helping out a neighbor.'

This helping a neighbor sentiment was echoed by all four of the younger accomplices. For example, the 33-year-old accomplice of one older woman said:

'I did it to help her save money. The price they're charging is outrageous—truly outrageous! She doesn't have that much trash—it's just senseless. It's not worth it to her to pay the full amount.'

Other trash sharers did not want to admit their participation in trash sharing because of their position in the community. One well-known 75 year-old female who was rumored to trash share adamantly stated that she 'did not' share trash collection. After explaining that her name would not be mentioned in the project she admitted that she had shared collection with her neighbor who was an 'older' widow. 'That is not for public knowledge,' she said. She was assured by the primary investigator that her identity and the identity of her neighbor would remain confidential. After being reassured, she claimed her reasons for sharing were entirely altruistic, thus employing the *appeal to higher loyalties* technique. Her 87 year-old neighbor, who has since passed away, 'just didn't have that much trash'. She had a small income and so we did it with her. We split the cost because the neighbor (despite a large disparity in incomes) did not want to accept charity.' She wanted to make clear that she is no longer sharing with anyone and that on trash day, 'every house has trash out now', meaning that no one in her neighborhood is engaging in the illicit behavior.

Another interviewee who insists on paying her half of the costs shares with a neighbor who would take the trash without charging, but understands that no matter how high or low the income, charity is a dirty word. This 95 year-old female says that the trash corporation allows each home to have six bags out for collection each week and that she seldom has more than one small bag. Her neighbor, in an *appeal to higher authority*, offered to take her trash for free, but was turned down flat. 'I don't want anyone to pay for me,' she said. 'I can pay my own way.' This interviewee insists on paying her fair share.

Conformers

Among the 13 women interviewed who are not trash sharers, pride in conformity is evident². Some comments include:

Mary: *I'm happy with them (trash company). I don't want to change.*

JoAnn: *It's not a problem for me. The price is not too high. I would pay what they ask because I can't do it by myself.*

Sylvia: *I don't worry about these things. My husband does it.*

Others, however, claim that if the opportunity came up they would definitely share:

Kelly: *I did not share (when the price rose) but I would share if it came up.*

Gloria: *I live outside the town limits and pay different rates, but would probably share if I lived in town.*

² The names were changed to protect the identity of the interviewees.

Most of these interviewees are either still married or have children who live nearby who handle their economic affairs for them. In the case of one of these women (Mary) her son takes care of her finances. She has so much faith in her son that she does not even know how much the trash bill is or how often it is paid. Those who said they would share if the circumstances were different were not concerned that the act was deviant, but merely expressed an interest in saving money where possible.

Discussion

Apart from what the British and some other nations refer to as fly-tipping (Home Office, 2008), trash and crime are not generally mentioned in the same breath. However, Western societies are changing in order to cope with global warming issues and the emerging Green Criminology movement (Beirne and South, 2007) is a response to issues of corporate harms and the move towards increasingly criminalizing the 'not so usual suspects.' This paper demonstrates a need to consider the impacts of such issues and the social policies used to deal with them, especially in the case of older individuals on fixed incomes. While recycling and composting make a dent in the 4.5 pounds of trash per person per day Americans generate, the problem will only grow, as will the price to remove it (Fullerton and Walls, 2007). As this price increases, creative individuals will find ways to avoid and evade paying it. When these techniques include illegal dumping, the problem becomes a concern for all. When the alternative to paying high refuse disposal rates becomes fee evasion by trash sharing, corporations lose revenue. Consequences of this lower income stream may include laying off workers and fewer days of service to customers. In general then, trash sharing causes problems. The corporations, however, are not the focus of this project. The elderly individuals in this study who are negatively affected by rising utility rates feel they are being forced into criminal behavior. Policy makers who are allowing utility companies to deregulate and thereby increase rates dramatically (Cassie, 2008) must take into consideration the economic situation of older individuals who are on fixed incomes and specifically older females, who due to their overall lower income, are especially taxed when utility rates rise. Communities in several states have developed a Pay As You Throw (PAYT) plan. This policy is more equitable than the situation described in this project as it impacts upon single people and smaller households. However, PAYT schemes may in turn impact harshly upon larger households on low income. In PAYT programs, individuals do not pay a set monthly fee, but instead pay only for the bags of trash they dump. While there are possibilities for fee evasion in this plan as well, it is the perception of fairness that is most important for users, and, arguably, this type of service offers the most equitable solution (Recycle Indiana, 2009) – at least for single occupant or smaller households and larger relatively affluent households.

While it is unlikely that the women trash sharers in this study will ever find themselves in prison for fee evasion or theft of services, the increase in this type of economic coping strategy should be of interest to criminologists. As the population ages and inequality increases, many older females may feel that they must break the law in order to afford basic services. Economic stimulus packages that do not address the needs of older Americans will only exacerbate the problems of older Americans.

While this project is one of only a few projects that examine the techniques of neutralization used by females, it does have certain limitations. The sample is small and not generalizable. In addition, a study comparing the economic coping strategies

of older women and men is warranted. Males may employ the same set of neutralizations as women, but for different reasons. Men may be very unlikely to admit to a neighbor that they can't afford to pay their trash bill and may instead dispose of the trash in a public dumpster, which, if caught, could result in a theft of services summary violation per criminal code 3926 (PA Criminal Code). Or, worse, they may just dump trash by the roadside.

The financial well-being of our older citizens is being threatened by the economic uncertainty our country is currently facing. While many have found creative ways to cope, this deviant behavior may eventually cost them the freedom and independence they desire and deserve.

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