

Stephen L. Eliason¹

Illegal Hunting and Angling: The Neutralization of Wildlife Law Violations

ABSTRACT

This study provides a descriptive account of rationalizations for poaching used by wildlife law violators. There has been little research on motivations for poaching. This study uses qualitative data obtained from surveys and in-depth interviews with wildlife law violators and conservation officers in Kentucky to examine rationalizations used by wildlife law violators to excuse and justify participation in this type of illegal activity. Comments from conservation officers and violators revealed widespread use of rationalizations, with denial of responsibility being most common. The study also used claims of entitlement, defense of necessity, and denial of necessity of the law. Findings contribute to our knowledge of why people illegally take wildlife resources.

Keywords: conservation officers, fishing, hunting, poaching, wildlife law violators

Illegal taking of wildlife is a serious problem in today's society. The problem of wildlife law violation is well documented in the literature (Eliason, 1999; Forsyth, Gramling & Wooddell, 1998; Muth & Bowe, 1998). Although some claim the poaching problem has been blown out of proportion and really is a minor problem (Beattie, Giles, & Cowles, 1977), others have indicated wildlife law violations are a significant

problem that needs to be addressed (Gavitt, 1989; Hall, 1992). Some even have claimed it has reached a crisis level because of the volume of wildlife that is lost to this unlawful activity (Musgrave, Parker, & Wolok, 1993). McGrath (1992) reported that poaching became an issue in Newfoundland and Labrador in the early 1980s when the government wanted to promote big game hunting by non-residents in an effort to expand the tourist industry.

One thing is clear from previous research: Many instances of wildlife law violation never come to the attention of law enforcement authorities. Green, Phillips, and Black (1988, p. 59), citing work of Kaminsky (1974) and Vilkitis (1968), state “. . . it is clear that only small proportions of all violations and violators come to the attention of authorities.” They reported that ratios of discovered offenses to actual offenses ranged from 1:83 to 1:30. Citing the work of Smith (1982), Hall (1992, p. 534) reported that deer poacher detection rates “. . . in California, Idaho, and Maine were estimated to be 2.2%, 1.1%, and 1.2%, respectively.” These studies suggest known poaching offenses represent only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the actual amount of poaching taking place.

Many wildlife law violations take place during established hunting and fishing seasons. Muth and Bowe (1998, p. 15) claim hunters and anglers often poach during regular hunting and fishing seasons, where it can be done under the “cover” of a legitimate recreational activity.

Some of the earliest studies of poaching examined socioeconomic characteristics of poachers (Green et al., 1998; Sawhill & Winkell, 1974; Shafer, Amidon, & Severinghaus, 1972). More recent studies have been characterized by the development of typologies identifying specific motivations for participation in poaching activities (Brymer, 1991; Forsyth et al., 1998; Glover & Baskett, 1984; Muth & Bowe, 1998).

Individuals poach for a variety of reasons. Some do it for commercial reasons because of profits derived from the sale of wildlife parts. Other reasons suggested include such factors as obtaining a trophy specimen for personal use, thrill killing, necessity of obtaining food for survival, and antagonism toward the government (Muth & Bowe, 1998). Muth and Bowe state: “Empirical verification of the existence of many of these motives in the real-world poaching population has yet to be confirmed by a cumulative body of social scientific research” (p. 13).

Sykes and Matza (1957) introduced neutralization theory to the sociological literature. Contrary to the popular notion that individuals who violate the law do so because they have sub-cultural values at odds with those held by members of conventional society, neutralization theory suggests individuals who violate the law are, in fact, committed to the rules and laws of society. However, they make exceptions to rules with rationalizations called neutralization techniques (Sykes & Matza). These are devices used temporarily to excuse or justify behavior that runs counter to dominant normative standards of society. According to Sykes and Matza, they are unrecognized extensions of “defenses to crimes,” seen as valid by the offender but not by society at large.

There are 10 neutralization techniques in the literature (Forsyth & Evans, 1998). Sykes and Matza (1957) identified five in their original formulation of the theory:

1. The Denial of Responsibility (i.e., it was an accident, mistake, or due to forces beyond the person’s control);
2. The Denial of Injury (i.e., no one was hurt because of the activity);
3. The Denial of the Victim (i.e., the victim had it coming);
4. The Condemnation of the Condemners (i.e., law enforcement officers are hypocrites and/or motivated by spite); and
5. The Appeal to Higher Loyalties (i.e., demands of more intimate groups such as friends or family take precedence over demands of society).

Five additional neutralization techniques were subsequently introduced after Sykes and Matza’s (1957) original study. Minor (1981, p. 6) provided the first of these:

6. The Defense of Necessity (i.e., even if something is considered morally wrong, it is okay if it is perceived as necessary).

Klockars (1974) introduced the next:

7. The Metaphor of the Ledger (i.e., an individual feels all of his/her good qualities make up for the instance(s) in which they violated the law

Coleman (1994) introduced the final three techniques:

8. The Denial of the Necessity of the Law (i.e., occurs when individuals feel the law is not fair or just, and use this as justification for engaging in deviance;

9. The Claim that Everybody Else is Doing it (i.e., an individual feels if everyone else is doing something, they should be able to do it also without getting punished); and
10. The Claim of Entitlement (i.e., the individual feels that he or she is entitled to the gains of a crime).

Sykes and Matza (1957) believed individuals used these techniques both before and after engaging in illegal activity. Thus, they are not justifications simply for involvement after the fact but also serve as important motivations for participation prior to the activity. These techniques also allow individuals to avoid having a guilty conscience and a negative self-image.

Neutralizations and rationalizations have been identified as factors related to poaching in Louisiana (Forsyth & Marckese, 1993a) and in the western United States (Eliason & Dodder, 1999). It is, therefore, assumed that individuals who violate wildlife laws are committed to the dominant normative standards of society. Using neutralization techniques, they are able to engage in various wildlife law violations without developing a guilty conscience and negative self-image. This study extends previous research on poaching and neutralization by examining the rationalizations used by illegal hunters and anglers in a different geographical area. This is important because as Muth and Bowe (1998, p. 10) state "An important point of departure for research on poaching should be the comprehensive identification and classification of the motivations for poaching." Poaching needs to be examined in all of its forms, including illegal angling.

Neutralization theory was chosen for this study because of its utility and explanatory weight in accounting for the reasons individuals engage in poaching behavior. Given the complexity of the phenomenon, other theories also would be applicable to the study of poaching violation. Rational choice theory would be useful to explain many instances of poaching because of its emphasis on situational factors and motives (Clarke & Cornish, 2001). Given the opportunity, individuals may be tempted to poach in certain situations. Different motives may include poaching to obtain money, food, a thrill, or a trophy specimen (Muth & Bowe, 1998).

Another way to approach the topic of poaching would be to look at the thrills it provides those who commit these acts. In his discussion of "sneaky thrills," Katz (1988, p. 52) argues that some property crimes cannot be explained by

material necessity and, instead, possess an “exciting attraction.” He notes that offenders commit crimes such as shoplifting, vandalism, and joy riding to see if they can get away with it or because it is fun. In studies of Louisiana poachers, Forsyth and Marckese (1993b) and Forsyth et al. (1998) found that excitement and exhilaration were factors in offenders’ decisions to poach.

Some scholars have found support for Sutherland’s differential association theory (Curcione, 1992; Forsyth, 1993; Green, 1990; Scialfa, 1992) and contend that individuals who poach learn how to do so from close friends and family members. It is within the context of these tight knit, intimate social groups, according to Sutherland, that individuals learn not only how to commit specific crimes but also how to rationalize them. In his typology of poachers, Brymer (1991) identified one type as that of “local rural hunters.” For these individuals who reside in rural areas, illegal hunting is a part of their lifestyle. Killing game illegally is accepted as a way of life as long as one does it for the right reason: use of the animal for food, which the defense of necessity or possibly the claim of entitlement could justify. Describing this type of poaching subculture, Brymer (1991) states,

Hunting is the performance of a traditional role. . . . The game taken is also used and wastage is negatively sanctioned, as in the oft-used phrase (especially when socializing younger members), “If you’re not going to eat it, don’t kill it; and if you do kill it, you damned well be *ready* to eat it! . . .” Forms of poaching include taking game out of season, or without a proper license, or by other illegal means. Game laws are often viewed as arbitrary and illegitimate invasions of the state into a traditional activity that is governed by its members. (p. 181)

The implementation of conservation laws designed to protect wildlife populations generated hostility among some residents of rural communities toward the government (Warren, 1992). Looking at events in historical perspective, Jacoby (2001) noted that in rural communities with conservation came, “. . . the transformation of previously acceptable practices into illegal acts: hunting or fishing redefined as poaching, foraging as trespassing, the setting of fires as arson, and the cutting of trees as timber theft.” (p. 2). Jacoby claims that many rural people reacted to these new laws with hostility and that members of these communities supported violations of such laws.

Also, Forsyth and Marckese (1993a) reported that in rural Louisiana the expansion of the oil industry brought with it a middle class that needed recreation, including hunting and fishing, so conservation laws came into existence to protect the wildlife resources for these individuals. However, these same laws criminalized many of the traditional hunting and fishing activities of the local residents who previously had supplemented their diet with wild game.

This paper uses a broader definition of poaching than some definitions found in the literature. For example, Muth and Bowe (1998) distinguished between intentional and unintentional violations and defined poaching as intentional violations of the law. I define poaching as the illegal taking of wildlife resources. This definition is all-encompassing and means any violation of the law while taking or attempting to take wildlife is considered poaching. I recognize at the outset, however, that there are degrees of seriousness with poaching violations. Some are considered relatively minor offenses—fishing without a license—while others—spotlighting deer or taking trophy deer out of season—are treated as very serious offenses (Green, 2002). Nonetheless, when taken collectively, every wildlife law violation is serious. Because of the scale on which they occur, less serious violations such as hunting or fishing without a license result in less revenue for wildlife agencies to use for the propagation of wildlife.

Violators in this study had been cited and convicted of a wide variety of offenses. They ranged from relatively minor violations—fishing without a license or taking one fish over the limit—to more serious offenses—spotlighting deer and taking deer out of season.

Methods

I used the approach known as interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 1989). It refers to “. . . the attempt to make the world of problematic lived experience of ordinary people directly available to the reader. The interactionist interprets these worlds” (Denzin, p. 7). Extensive quotes from violators and conservation officers are presented. In contrast to a traditional quantitative survey methodology utilizing questions with close-ended response categories forcing subjects to select from predetermined response categories chosen by the researcher, this approach allows respondents to speak for themselves and

permits their social world to be captured in full detail. The researcher then summarizes and interprets comments. Associated with the hunting subculture for approximately two decades, I am uniquely familiar with the phenomenon of wildlife law violation and have conducted research on the topic of poaching.

I used methodological triangulation to collect qualitative data (Denzin, 1970). In the first phase, a mail survey was sent to individuals cited and convicted for wildlife violations in Kentucky during 1999 (N = 2,791). Another survey was sent in April 2001 to Kentucky Conservation and Boating officers (N = 146). One-hundred thirteen surveys were returned from violators (response rate = 4%), and 29 were returned from conservation officers (response rate = 20%). Surveys contained a series of open-ended questions designed to let respondents answer in their own words, and provide detailed responses (Dillman, 1978).

The response rates were low for both surveys, especially the one for violators. Given the illegal nature of their behavior it is difficult to achieve a high response rate with the violator population, many of whom may be embarrassed about their misdeeds and fearful of additional repercussions for divulging information about their participation in illegal activities. However, this limitation can be ameliorated by gathering responses in detail from those who are willing to share their experiences and then analyzing the data from a qualitative perspective and presenting a “thick description” of the phenomenon (Geertz, 1973).

Qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches must deal with the same issues when asking for information about sensitive and/or illegal subjects (i.e., sexual behavior, crime, and income) in that individuals may refuse to participate or—if they do choose to participate—refuse to provide the information, lie, or mislead the researcher. The researcher’s task is to determine how credible is the information respondents provide.

In the second phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with violators and conservation officers who agreed to participate by providing their telephone numbers on surveys returned. Thirty-three in-depth interviews were conducted with violators; 24, with conservation officers. Interviews lasted from 15 to 60 minutes. Violators were asked to describe the offense they were cited

for, the type of animal or fish taken, and to indicate their motivation for doing it. Conservation officers were asked about rationalizations they hear from violators in the field and about their perception of the extent of the poaching problem. As with prior research on poachers and game wardens, the questions were intended to be “. . . guides to discussion rather than generators of specific responses” (Forsyth, 1994, p. 50). This approach allowed me to glean pertinent information from their responses.

Results and Discussion

Conservation officers were asked to indicate the most common violations encountered in the field. As the following comments of conservation officers suggest, most offenses they deal with are relatively minor and involve licensing violations. In addition, many occur during established hunting and fishing seasons as well. This contrasts with the general perception much of the public has of poaching offenses, which they often view as consisting of flagrant out-of-season offenses. One warden in his late 30s with several years of experience stated the following:

Spotlighting, hunting without license, fishing without license, hunting without permission, keeping short fish.

Another warden in his mid forties with more than 20 years experience identified the following offenses:

People fishing without license, fishing without permission, failure to have appropriate materials (life preserver, fire extinguisher), failure to tag and appropriately check deer, littering streams/lakes, and illegal baiting for turkey, dove, duck and geese.

And finally, an officer in his late fifties with more than 30 years experience said the following:

Hunting without license and tags, failure to tag, trespassing, or hunting without permission.

Denial of Responsibility

Many subjects denied responsibility for acts they committed, claiming their misbehavior was the result of an accident or mistake, or due to ignorance of the laws and regulations pertaining to the activity they were involved in. For example, a 55 year old person, a homemaker with a graduate degree, described being cited for fishing without a license while taking some individuals out for a day of fishing:

I was cited for fishing with two 12-year old boys at Cave Run Lake. They were not my children but a situation where children had no one to take them fishing. I also had a foreign Chinese student with me. I am a 55 year old lady and I was trying to provide an enrichment experience for some folks who would not usually get to go fishing. I had not fished for 15 years probably and did not remember that I needed a fishing license or that my Chinese friend needed one. . . . I wasn't even interested in them catching fish—just having an afternoon out.

Another common finding was that subjects would get cited for fishing without a license and claim that they were not fishing—they were just “playing around” or happened to “cast it a couple of times,” but steadfastly maintained they were not in the act of fishing. A 23-year old male, who was a food preparation worker with some college education, said the following:

I picked up my friend's fishing pole and cast it a few times while the game warden approached us in his boat. [It was] totally uncalled for. I had no intentions of fishing, I hate fishing.

Other subjects had similar responses. A 29-year old person who worked as a customer service representative described the offense for which she was cited:

For 'fishing' without a fishing license. Which I thought was very wrong 'cause I wasn't fishing. I happened to be with my husband who was fishing, and he had a license.

A self employed, 59-year old male, a high school graduate, said the following:

I was working on my dock doing some repair work. I set my fishing pole in the water while I was working and had not purchased my fishing license for the new year.

However, wardens indicated that they didn't go about citing individuals at will. The wardens I spoke with said they would not cite someone for fishing without a license unless they could go to court and testify that they actually witnessed the individual in the act of fishing. One warden defined the act of fishing as "pole in hand, baited line in water."

Some individuals claimed that for various reasons, such as being excited over harvesting a deer, they forgot to tag the animal. A 59-year old person with a graduate degree, who is the president and owner of his own company, described his offense:

Killed deer, field dressed, failed to tag, excited with hunting partners, game warden drove up, we were talking with him and we noticed I had forgotten to tag deer, thus a citation . . . the only one I have ever received. No intent to do anything illegal. . . . [I was] excited about the kill, distracted, no intention to do anything illegal. I have no reason to hunt illegally. I have hunted for 30+ years and never [received] a citation.

A 21-year old farmer said the following about his deer hunting offense: "I forgot to put the information on the tag."

Other responses from respondents that reflected various attempts to deny responsibility include the following comments. A 43-year old person with a college degree, who worked as an engineering manager, related the following experience:

[I was cited for] fishing out of Paris Landing State Park. It is very unclear where the border of Tennessee and Kentucky meet in the area just up river. . . . I was under the [impression] that the river channel is the border. . . . I normally purchase a Kentucky out-of-state fishing license. On this occasion I had forgotten the license. . . . I was upset that the officer wrote the citation. . . . I guess Kentucky has zero tolerance for offenders.

A 35 year old investigator with a Bachelor of Science degree said the following:

Fishing [without a license]. I buy a combo license every year, which expires on Feb. 28. I was fishing on a pond next to my home on March 1st or 2nd. I plainly just forgot my license had expired a day or two before. It was merely an oversight and not intentional. As a landowner, I am not required to purchase deer tags but do so every year because I know the money will help to serve wildlife causes. I explained this to the warden who cited me and actually tried to overcharge me according to the individuals to whom I sent the fine. . . . I was very disappointed in his discretionary skills.

Several other responses reflected claims of an accident or ignorance:

1. Accident: "I did it on accident, but it was still a humbling experience."
2. Ignorance of the law:" I do understand that this is not a valid excuse to avoid penalties (fines), but it was the only reason."
3. Uneducated in fishing regulations: [I] had no idea that I would be in violation just fishing from my own property.

As these comments suggest, many individuals will plead ignorance rather than admit responsibility for poaching offenses. It would be useful for hunter education programs to stress that lack of knowledge of the law is no excuse for illegal hunting and fishing.

Claim of Entitlement

The claim of entitlement neutralization technique suggests some individuals feel they are somehow entitled to the gains of a crime they commit. Two respondents believed it was their right to fish without purchasing a fishing license. A 23-year old respondent with a college degree stated the following:

I was cited for fishing without a permit. I feel it was BS. A person should be able to fish/hunt when ever. The law should be happy we are doing something with our time other than drug dealing/drinking and driving!

A 22-year old male who had some high school education and worked as a laborer said the following:

Because I had a fishing pole and I was already at the river so I just figured I[’d] cast my line in the water a few times. God’s little fish are for everybody even if they can’t afford a fishing license. Some people are poor—does that [mean] they can’t eat God’s fish?

Denial of the Necessity of the Law

Two individuals believed the laws regarding illegal taking of game were not fair. They believed laws were an infringement of their rights as citizens. These responses were similar to motivations of *Poaching as a Traditional Right of Use* and *Disagreement with Specific Regulations* identified by Muth and Bowe (1998). For example, while describing a deer-tagging violation he had been for which he had been cited, a 55-year old landowner, who was a minister-pastor of a church, made the following comment: “I did feel it was not against the law. The law was passed unfairly. The deer are on our farms, not on the farms or homes of [the] disabled, or [the] retired.”

A 48-year old teacher with a graduate degree was cited for fishing without a license on her family’s boat dock and made the following remark about the experience:

It was the 4th of July weekend. I was fishing with my daughter, which is totally legal. But I got up quickly and gave my pole to my husband so I looked guilty to the officer who was viewing me from afar with binoculars. I resent the fact that I was on my own dock. That doesn’t seem fair.

Defense of Necessity

Some individuals claimed they violated the law because they were poor and needed food. Conservation officers said this would have been true 20 or 30 years ago but not in this day and age because of the variety of social programs now available to help those who are economically disadvantaged. As Glover and Baskett (1984) reported, it seems more socially acceptable for persons to indicate they illegally took game for food rather than for other reasons, such as a trophy or the thrill of the kill. The following statements from respondents indicate that violating wildlife laws is viewed as acceptable if it is perceived as necessary for the survival or well being of one’s family. In

the following comment, a 30-year old person with a GED certificate who was employed as a mig welder tried to justify his misbehavior:

... if they do call me a poacher, they better hope their shoes are tied tight!
It didn't bother me 'cause I was only supporting my family.

A 45-year old electronics technician with an associate degree defended his position on taking wildlife illegally for food:

Though I seldom hunt and do so legally, I have been laid off 6 months now. . . . I would not hesitate to take a deer if we had to have the meat to eat on. I feel this is a God-given right left over from the old days. I live on the river, way out in the sticks and have total respect for wildlife and the laws protecting them and would not hesitate to turn in someone who kills only for the sport of it. However, when it comes to feeding my family I would do what I have to do.

A 23-year old person who worked in youth ministry claimed that he did not have enough money to purchase a fishing license but wanted to have some fun:

I was visiting a friend that I grew up with. We used to fish legally a lot. We wanted to just fish for one afternoon and did not want to keep any fish, so I did not buy a license. I also was paying my way through college and did not have much money. Buying food seemed more important than the fishing license.

Recreation and Excitement

Although not 1 of the 10 recognized neutralization techniques, some individuals said they were motivated to engage in illegal behavior because of the excitement involved in participating. This is consistent with Muth and Bowe (1998) who state that people sometimes will engage in poaching "... for the purpose of experiencing the satisfactions associated with hunting and fishing as a legitimate recreational activity." (p. 15). It also is applicable to the work of Katz (1988), who claims that the intrinsic "sneaky thrills" associated with certain offenses provide a strong motivation for some individuals to participate in them.

Katz (1988) states “The excitement of the challenge in the deviant project—an excitement that the acquisition would not have were it not deviant—is experienced as an external provocation that works independently on the self” (pp. 56-57).

The thrill of such deviant activities is that they possess an inherent element of risk and are participated in by offenders because the experience is “fun,” similar to ambulatory sports contests and games (Katz, 1988, pp. 66-67). Some of these individuals believed they could get away with not purchasing a license for the activity in which they were engaged. For example, a 46-year old refrigeration service person claimed that he “. . . tried to get away with it.” The following comments are from a 60-year old retired nonresident registered nurse:

It was Easter Sunday and one of those beautiful spring days you wait all winter for. We had called the local [store] and they were not open and our nearby boat dock was not open. We always buy a license in Kentucky and Florida where we winter. I thought I could just fish from the bank and it was too early for boat patrols—I was wrong! Lesson learned—we get our license very early now.

A 23 year old self-employed person described this experience:

[I was cited for] no license. I was rabbit hunting [on the] first day of [the] season. I didn’t have a chance to get [a] license until the next day so I thought I would be alright one day.

Conservation officers were asked to provide some excuses they hear from individuals caught violating wildlife laws. Their responses substantiated many of those provided by the violators. They consistently said violators used denial of responsibility through ignorance, forgetfulness, or lack of knowledge regarding the law. Frequent excuses/rationalizations also included the idea there was an over abundance of game and that the population needed to be reduced or they did it to feed their family. A warden in the mid-40s stated the following:

Most of the excuses consist of “I didn’t know.” Most violators say that they were unable to get ahold of hunting or fishing guides, which are very avail-

able at sportsmen centers or the place from where they have purchased their licenses to hunt or fish.

A warden in the late 20s provided some of the common rationalizations he hears from violators:

Some of the reasons I hear are, 'I didn't know it was illegal.' 'There are too many deer/turkey anyway.' 'Didn't understand the hunting/fishing guide.' 'I'm just trying to feed my family.' Occasionally I will catch someone that will admit they knew it was wrong and deserved to get caught.

Conclusion

This research offers support for neutralization theory and suggests individuals who engage in wildlife law violations in Kentucky use various rationalizations to justify unlawful behavior. The neutralization process is a cognitive dissonance reduction strategy, and individuals who use it are able successfully to alleviate guilt that would normally be associated with law violating behavior by neutralizing any definition of themselves as criminals.

Unlawful hunting and fishing activities are serious problems in today's world (Hummel, 1983). Gibbons (1972) notes these activities represent a significant type of lawbreaking, especially in rural areas. However, many in society do not take the problems very seriously because the activities are viewed as less serious, perhaps even trivial, when compared to other types of unlawful behavior.

An important first step in changing this situation involves bringing attention to the issue of poaching and educating people on the negative consequences this type of unlawful behavior has on wildlife populations. Also, along with safety issues and ethics, compliance with the law should be stressed more in hunter education courses. There already are many laws in place to protect wildlife resources, and additional ones are not necessary to control poaching activities. As Stockdale (1993) noted, the English had some of the harshest laws and punishments, including the death penalty; nevertheless, poaching persisted.

Poaching research is still in its infancy, and much work needs to be done so wildlife agencies can develop solutions to these problems (Muth, 1998). It is

thought that poaching occurs for a variety of reasons. These reasons need to be documented further and validated by human dimensions researchers. Future research should examine rationalizations and motivations used in other geographic and cultural areas. Knowledge of the regional and cultural variations in motivations for poaching is necessary for educational programs of individual state agencies effectively to address the issue.

Researchers should also study poaching from different theoretical perspectives, including rational choice theory. With its emphasis upon understanding “the details of criminal decision making” (Clarke & Cornish, 2001, p. 32), this theory has the potential to improve greatly our understanding of specific involvement decisions related to the crime of poaching, including “. . . becoming involved for the first time (initiation), continued involvement (habituation), and ceasing to offend (desistance)” (Clarke & Cornish, p. 24).

Future research also should explore further poaching in the context of Katz’s (1988) notion of “sneaky thrills.” It is essential to understand the criminal experience in order to explain crime. Katz (pp. 43-44) states, “By making the understanding of criminal experience the first priority . . . we discover phenomenologically grounded leads to a comprehensive theory.” It seems logical that the motivations of thrills and excitement would account for a large portion of poaching offenses. Case studies of individual offenders would be a fruitful method for expanding this line of thought. There is an excitement associated with legitimate sport hunting and fishing activities; done illegally, it may provide offenders with an even greater thrill. As mentioned previously, Muth and Bowe (1998) have noted that illegal hunting and fishing may be done to experience the same satisfactions associated with their legitimate counterparts.

Research also needs to be done on conservation officers who enforce wildlife laws (Eliason, 2003). Do they enforce certain wildlife laws more vigorously than they do others? Do they treat violators equally, or are there social and/or personal factors that influence their dealings with individuals? Historically, there has been a paucity of research on these specialized law enforcement officers in a position to offer a wealth of information on the poaching problem.

Note

- ¹ Correspondence should be sent to Stephen L. Eliason, Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Criminology, 322 Rader Hall, Morehead State University, Morehead, KY 40351. E-mail s.eliason@moreheadstate.edu

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