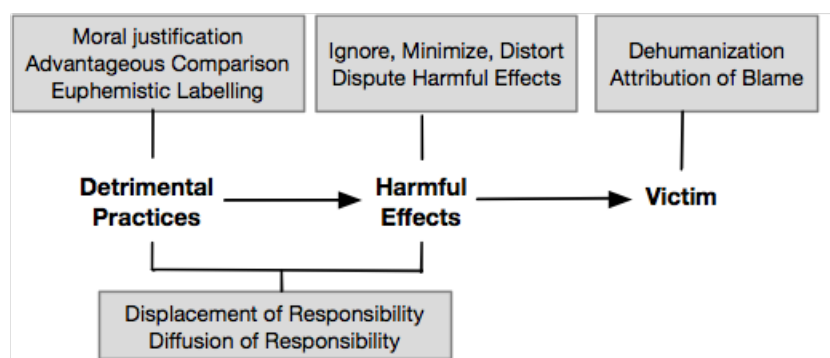


MANUAL FOR CONSTRUCTING MORAL DISENGAGEMENT SCALES

The theory of moral disengagement addresses how people disengage moral self-sanctions that regulate moral behavior from their harmful conduct. The detachment of moral self-sanctions enables people to behave harmfully but still retain a positive self-regard and live in peace with themselves.

Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement

Figure 1 presents schematically the eight mechanisms and locus of regulation at which moral self-sanctions are disengaged.



Behavior Locus

At the *behavior locus*, people sanctify harmful means by investing them with worthy social and moral ends. Righteous ends are used to justify harmful means. Harmful conduct is also rendered benign or even altruistic through advantageous comparison. Belief that one's harmful actions will prevent more human suffering than they cause makes the behavior look altruistic. Euphemistic language in its sanitizing and convoluted forms cloaks harmful behavior in innocuous language and removes humanity from it. These three mechanisms operating at the behavior locus – moral justification, advantageous comparison, and euphemistic language – are especially powerful because they serve a dual function. They engage morality in the harmful mission but disengage morality in its grim execution.

Agency Locus

At the *agency locus*, people evade personal accountability for harmful conduct by displacing responsibility to others and by dispersing it widely so that no one bears responsibility. In diffused responsibility, detaching the agent from the harmful action absolves wrongdoers of blame for the harm they cause.

Outcome Locus

At the *outcome locus*, perpetrators disregard, minimize, distort, or even dispute the injurious effects of their actions. As long as harmful effects are out of sight and out of mind there is no moral issue to contend with because no perceived harm has been done. Judging the harmfulness of given policies and practices is therefore the major battleground in moral disengagement.

Victim Locus

At the *victim locus*, perpetrators exclude those they maltreat from their category of humanity by divesting them of human qualities or attributing animalistic or demonic qualities to them. Rendering their victims subhuman weakens moral qualms over treating them harshly.

Additional moral disengagement at the victim locus involves blaming the victims for bringing maltreatment on themselves or attributing it to compelling circumstances. In this mode of self-exoneration, perpetrators view themselves as victims forced to behave injuriously by wrongdoers' offensive behavior or by force of circumstances.

Conceptual and Assessment Aspects of Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement is not a trait that can be assessed by a one-size-fits-all measure. Disengagement mechanisms operate across different aspects of life, but they are manifested differently depending on the sphere of activity (Bandura, 2016). For example, justifications for the death penalty focus on retribution, public safety, and preservation of the social order. In contrast, the tobacco industry justifies advertising campaigns designed to get youth hooked on smoking in terms of freedom of speech. Both examples use the moral justification mechanism, but they differ markedly in its form: capital punishment in terms of retribution, tobacco advertising in terms of free speech. As this example illustrates, measures of moral disengagement must be tailored to activity domains.

Constructing Scales of Moral Disengagement

Construction of valid measures of moral disengagement requires an informative conceptual analysis of how the different mechanisms of moral disengagement are manifested in particular domains of functioning. A vast array of documents on the internet provide a good deal of relevant information. These documents include articles, press accounts of litigation, internal organizational memos and planning documents, correspondence, conference proceedings and public statements. In-depth interviews with transgressors are an especially fertile source of moral disengagement. Books on how otherwise reputable individuals get caught up in deception is another highly informative source.

The book *Moral Disengagement* (Bandura, 2016) devotes entire chapters on how the eight mechanisms of moral disengagement are manifested in different spheres of life. They include the entertainment industry, gun industry, health impairing tobacco, lead, chemical and silicon-producing industries, finance industry, capital punishment, terrorism and military counterterrorism, and environmental degradation. In addition, this manual provides countless examples of the forms that moral disengagement takes across a wide variety of activity domains. The book and manual sources provide many excellent examples of how to construct items that represent each of the eight mechanisms of moral disengagement.

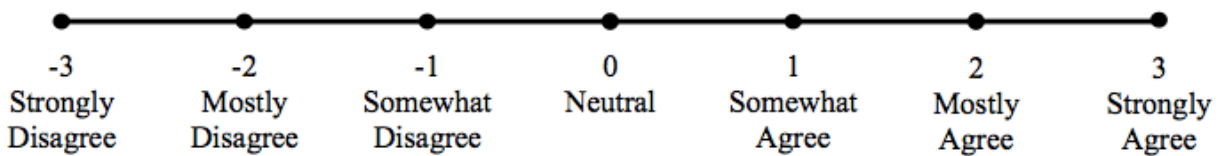
Item Analysis

Pretest the items with respondents who are similar to the target population. Use in-depth interview or focus groups. Ask individuals what the item measuring the core construct stands for. If it is ambiguous or misleading rewrite it.

Items for the same mode of moral disengagement should correlate with each other. Factor analyses verify the homogeneity of the items. Reliability places an upper limit on the maximum possible correlation that can be obtained among variables. Internal consistency reliabilities should be computed using Cronbach's alpha. If the reliability coefficients are low, discard or rewrite the items with low correlates.

Response Format

The conceptual analysis provides the information for constructing relevant scale items. Participants record their response on a Likert-type scale. As shown below, it is a bilateral 7-point scale containing equal progressively more positive and negative responses from a neutral midpoint.



The bimodal nature of the scale allows respondents to support or disavow moral disengagement practices. The items in the scale should be mixed rather than grouped by mode of moral disengagement.

Scoring

The responses can be scored in several ways depending on the purpose of the study:

- Sum of the responses for the entire set of moral disengagement items
- Sum of the responses separately for each mode of moral disengagement
- Sum of the responses for each locus of moral disengagement

Minimizing Response Biases

The standard assessment procedure includes a number of safeguards to minimize any potential effects of self-assessment. These safeguards are built into the instructions and mode of administration. Participants' responses are recorded privately without personal identification to reduce social evaluative concerns. The scale is identified by code number rather than by name. Respondents are informed that their responses will remain confidential and be used only with number codes by the research staff. To encourage frank answers, explain to respondents the importance of their contribution to the understanding of human behavior.

Omit the conceptual title of the scale when administering it to participants. If the conceptual title means different things to different people, the title could bias ratings.

Extension Cross-Culturally

Verification of causation cross-culturally requires precise translation of morally-relevant constructs into the language of the chosen culture. A bilingual panel of native speakers who are fluent in English should translate the relevant constructs into culturally-relevant forms. Discrepancies in translation should be resolved.

Conceptual equivalence is established by forward translation from English to the version of the target culture and backward translation from the targeted cultural version back to English. In the backward translation, the translated version should correspond conceptually to the English version.

Native translators should be fluent in English and familiar with the terminology of the area of study. The goal is conceptual and cultural equivalence not word-for-word literal likeness. Translators should strive for clear, concise translations, not long phrases. The level of language should fit the target population.

Verification of Causation

Verification of causation in the social sciences requires converging evidence from divergent methodologies. Because of social and ethical prohibitions, researchers are not at liberty to subject people to inhumane conditions. Experimental studies are therefore limited to relatively minor moral transgressions and hypothetical scenarios. Correlational studies, with multiple controls for other plausible determinants and statistical analyses to unravel the direction of causation, provide another source of empirical evidence. Case studies can also shed light on how individuals get caught up in social practices that violate their moral standards and strive to preserve a positive self-regard while behaving harmfully.

Archival and current public documents provide a rich body of data on moral disengagement in everyday life. Qualitative microcausal analyses of such data reveal intricate causal relationships as they occur under dynamic social conditions and over time. The *Moral Disengagement* book documents in considerable detail how converging evidence from divergent methodologies can advance understanding of the moral dimension of life and its psychosocial subversion.

Moral and Social Justification

Many harmful practices are justified on religious, social, economic, and constitutional grounds. In holy terror, perpetrators twist theology and see themselves as courageously doing God's will. Some practices that have auxiliary adverse effects are defended as serving the common good. Others are justified on economic grounds. Still others are vindicated by misconstruing the constitution as providing an absolute right.

Holy Violence

- Pope Urban II launched the Crusades on divine mandate, "I address those present, I proclaim it to those absent, Christ commands it. For all those going thither, there will be remission of sins if they come to the end of this fettered life."
- bin Laden also claimed that he was carrying out a religious duty: "We will continue this course because it is part of our religion and because Allah ordered us to carry out jihad so that the word of Allah may remain exalted to the heights."
- Paul Hill, a former Presbyterian minister, justified the killing of a doctor and his assistant outside an abortion clinic as carrying out God's will: "God's law positively requires us to defend helpless people."
- Yigal Amir, who assassinated the Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, similarly claimed to be acting on a divine mandate using the rabbinical pursuer's decree as moral justification. He felt no remorse over his perceived martyrdom: "I have no regrets. Everything I did was for the sake of God."

ISIS

A radical group of Sunni extremists portraying themselves as Islamic jihadists, pursued their military campaign in God's name.

- They construed attacks by their opponents as war against God. To crush any resistance to their ruthless rule, they staged public crucifixions, citing passages from the Quran stating that crucifixion is an appropriate punishment for those who "wage war on God and his messenger."
- They subjected women to brutal sexual violence, raping them and selling them as sex slaves. Sexual assault became spiritual acts. One of the militants claimed that according to Islam he was allowed to rape an unbeliever. And by raping her, "he is drawing closer to God."
- Children, called "cubs of the caliphate," were trained as fighters and suicide bombers
- Militants use sacred sanctions to carry out their brutal deeds in the name of Allah. Divine allegiance was repeatedly hollered during deadly violence. Everyone shouts, 'God is the greatest.'

Iraq War

- The initial justification for going to war with Iraq was that Saddam Hussein had stockpiled biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and was building a nuclear bomb.
- A companion justification was that the September 11 attacks were allegedly linked to Hussein thereby posing a threat to U.S. security.

- Bush’s national security advisor sounded the urgency for a preemptive military attack: “The problem here is that there will always be some uncertainty about how quickly he can acquire nuclear weapons. But we don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.”
- House Speaker John Boehner sounded the alarm: “These are barbarians. They intended to kill us. And if we don’t destroy them first, we’re gonna pay the price.”
- A leader in the House on national security, used a bestial metaphor in justifying bombardment of ISIS on Syrian soil: “To defeat ISIS,” he proclaimed, “we must cut off the head of the snake which exists in Syria.” The use of torture has also been justified using the ticking time bomb metaphor. The utilitarian justification condones torturing a foe to get the location of the bomb about to explode because it saves the lives of many.

Death Penalty

- Immanuel Kant justified the death penalty on the grounds that executing an egregious offender confirms his humanity by affirming his rationality and responsibility for his actions.
- Retributivists contend that wrongdoers deserve to be punished in the name of justice. The proportionate principle dictates that the severity of the punishment should fit the gravity of the crime. This principle is captured in the adage “an eye for an eye.” Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia put it succinctly: “You kill. You die. That’s fair.”
- “True justice and genuine mercy demand the hangman.”
- Saint Augustine claimed that God temporarily suspends the commandment “You shall not kill” and permits civil authorities to carry out particular executions for a just reason.
- Executioners grounded their role in the death penalty in moral deterrence and economic justifications. “We are taking a perfectly healthy human being and executing him. I had to make sure it was all right between me and God.” “I’d stop if I felt it were against my morals and the bible.”
- A prison chaplain found justifications for the death penalty in religious decree: “I believe that when the laws of men correspond with the laws of God, the laws of men become the laws of God. That enables me to support the death penalty.”
- “I believe in the death penalty. There needs to be death penalty to deter people from committing murder.”
- Governor Patski of New York justified capital punishment in terms of deterrence and public safety. “I have every confidence that it will continue to deter murders, and will continue to enhance public safety.”
- Virtually all executioners believe that executions save lives: “I believe in the death penalty. There needs to be a death penalty to deter people from committing murder.”
- Some favor economic justifications. “Death Row inmates are here too long, it is wrong for taxpayers, families, and us.”

Tobacco Industry

- Cigarettes, which are essentially a vehicle for nicotine, are one of the deadliest products that is marketed worldwide. In the U.S. alone, tobacco products contribute to about half a million deaths annually. Moral disengagement in this industry takes a variety of forms.

- Restriction on advertising and promotional practices opposed as violating constitutional rights. “Muzzling the speech rights of the tobacco companies and establishing a speech orthodoxy on the issue of tobacco consumption violates the basic tenets of the First Amendment. Singling out one industry for discriminatory treatments violates the basic tenants of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments.”
- In the Libertarian argument, smoking is an exercise of one’s freedom of choice. “And there certainly is nothing new about governments seeking more control over people’s lives. Recall, however, that the two major ideological political movements of our century, Fascism and Communism, sought just this while claiming the best interests of the governed peoples – with tragic consequences.”
- “We do not endorse positions which would take away the freedom of choice for smokers.”
- In economic justifications, the industry focuses on the economic benefits from the sales of tobacco products. “It is a major contributor to the U.S. economy and to its tax revenues.”

Gun Industry

- Constitutional justification is widely used. . . “the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms, is there to protect all of the other rights that we hold so dear.”
- “The founding fathers guaranteed this freedom because they knew no tyranny can ever rise among a people endowed with the right to keep and bear arms. That’s why you and your descendants need never fear fascism, state-run faith, refugee camps, brainwashing, ethnic cleansing, or especially, submission to the wanton will of criminals.”
- Producing increasingly more lethal automatic weapons is justified as providing better self-defense against violence. “If the gun has more stopping power, it is a more effective weapon.”

Television Industry

To justify the use of gratuitous violence, the television industry assigned a high moral purpose to the taking of human life in the likeness of a national character building service. Modeling violent solutions to problems, the proponents argue, builds character and establishes the measure of man.

- “The government wants kids to think there are values worth fighting for, and that’s basically what the leads on our show are doing.”
- “If people who break the society’s codes resist the law, we have to use violence to suppress them. In doing so we are in the mainstream of American morality.”

Environmental Degradation

There are three conceptions of nature that influence how it is managed.

- The religious conception views nature as a bountiful resource placed on earth by God for the taking. Proponents cite the bible that the Lord commands prolific reproduction and domination of nature and its varied species: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”
- A presidential candidate trumpeted the anthropocentric view of human exclusivity: “We were put on this Earth as creatures of God to have dominion over the Earth, to use it wisely and steward it wisely, but for our benefit not for the Earth’s benefit.”

- In the economic conception. Nature is a resource that individuals and societies can own and use in pursuit of their self-interest. According to this environmental ethic, transactions concerning natural resources should be governed by free-market principles without governmental intrusion. In the free market, products of the unfettered pursuit of self-interest within legal bounds contribute to the welfare of others.
- The ecological conception view human well-being as interdependently linked to the health of ecological systems. Because species are interdependent on each other, destruction of one species jeopardizes the ecological support of all life. The earth's resources are not inexhaustible. Natural resources must, therefore, be used in a sustainable way to preserve a plentiful and habitable planet for future generations.

Advantageous Comparison

How harmful practices are viewed is colored by what they are compared against. By exploiting the contrast principle, harmful products and practices are not only benign but even beneficial.

Environmental Degradation

- A pesticide provider reported that more people die from misuse of aspirin and bee stings than from pesticides. “But no one has seriously proposed eliminating the use of aspirin or exterminating all bees.”
- The same critic likened public concern over the ecological and health effects of pesticides to Joseph McCarthy’s anticomunist witch hunt.
- “If DDT kills some cats but saves many humans, if weed killer destroys a pocket of wildlife shelter but increases highway safety, so much the better.”
- The U.S. rejected the Kyoto Protocol to cut their national emission of heat-trapping gases, because large developing countries were exempted. Developing countries, in turn, rejected caps on their countries on the grounds that global warming is a problem the rich industrialized countries created, so they should be the ones to cut their emissions. Through comparative exoneration, both contending parties freed themselves from obligation to reduce their polluting practices and felt righteous in rejecting the Kyoto Protocol.

Gun Industry

- Gun lobbies oppose any effort to close the gun-show loophole, comparing gun shows with shows of benign products. “Gun shows are no different than book fairs, car shows or country cross-stitch shows.”
- In a frivolous comparative argument, a Senator likened banning sale of guns to psychotic individuals to banning individuals with “an eating disorder from buying a gun.”
- Justification for developing guns of increasing lethality: “Just like the fashion industry, the firearms industry likes to encourage new products to get people to buy its products.”
- Charlton Heston used the Nazi persecution of the Jews in comparative justification for people arming themselves. He likened gun-regulation advocates to the Gestapo in terms of their pervasive dictatorial power.
- Opposition to requiring gun purchasers to receive instructions on how to operate guns: “And why should we have training at all? We don’t have a literacy test for people to vote.”
- An opponent to any restrictions on the sale of enlarged magazines argued, “That’s like pointing a finger at Ford and blaming them for car deaths.”
- An NRA lobbyist likened expansion of background checks to Nazi Germany
- An NRA ad denounced President Obama as an “elitist hypocrite,” “Why is he skeptical about putting armed security in our schools when his kids are protected by armed guards at their schools?”

Finance Industry

- Head of the Morgan Chase bank expressed comparatively his displeasure with how federal officials interpreted financial losses during the economic crisis: “So we made a stupid error. I mean, if an airplane crashes, should we stop flying all airplanes?”

Euphemistic Language

Activities can take on different appearances, depending on what they are called. Euphemistic language is widely used to make harmful products and activities respectable and to reduce personal responsibility for it. Euphemistic moral disengagement takes four forms. In the sanitizing form, harmful behavior is cloaked in benign language. The convoluting form camouflages harmful behavior in unfathomable jargon. The agentless passive voice serves as another self-exonerative tool. The verbal circumlocutions create the appearance that reprehensible acts are the work of nameless forces rather than by individuals as agents of their actions. The specialized jargon of a legitimate enterprise is also misused to lend respectability to an illegitimate one. The examples illustrate each form in diverse activities.

Warfare

The horror of war requires extensive sanitizing and convoluting language.

- Bombing is called “coercive diplomacy”
- Bombing missions are described as “servicing the target” in the likeness of a public utility or as “visiting a sight” as if going on a recreational outing.
- Bombs are “force packages.” In the convoluted form, bombs are “vertically deployed anti-personnel devices”
- The attacks become “clean, surgical strikes,” eliciting imagery of curative activities
- Bombing gaffes are described as “outside current accuracy requirements.” The civilians the bombs killed are linguistically converted to “collateral damage”
- Soldiers “waste” people rather than kill them. Death tolls are reported with the acronym KIA, for “killed in action”
- Soldiers killed by misdirected missiles fired by their own forces are the tragic recipients of “friendly fire.”

Iraqi War

- Harsh methods bordering on torture are called “enhanced interrogation.”
- Outsourcing such interrogations to other countries was called “extraordinary rendition.”
- Secret prisons run by the CIA in foreign countries, outside U.S. legal jurisdiction, were dubbed “black sites.”
- Military doctrine using “overwhelming force” was dubbed “shock and awe.”
- An act granting massive surveillance was called “Patriot Act.”
- Iraqi detainees were designated as “unlawful combatants,” exempting them from the Geneva Conventions, which afford protection from abuse to prisoners of war.
- Misdirected attack that killed members of one’s own forces was further sanitized and obscured from “friendly fire” to “blue on blue.”

Drone Warfare

- Military officials call drones “birds”
- Weaponized drones are also called “uninhabited aerial vehicles”
- The synthesized information that places suspected terrorists on a watch list is called a “baseball card”
- Triumphs in drone strikes are called “touchdowns” and “jackpots”
- All slain bystanders are often categorized as “enemies killed in action” until proven otherwise posthumously.

ISIS

- ISIS calls suicide bombings a “martyrdom operation.”

Shuttle Explosion

- NASA’s account that the “recovered components” in “crew transfer containers” were the remains of the astronauts killed in the 1986 explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*

Finance Industry

- An “equity retreat” is a stock market crash
- The communal-sounding announcement that “there are some places we will exiting together” means that the company is shutting down some of its units
- Dismissals are clothed in softened or even promotive terms. The hapless workers are recipients of a “career alternative enhancement” or are placed in “non-duty, non-pay status.”
- A proposal is not rejected; is it “selected down.”
- Weakening key sections of a law designed to benefit Wall Street firms was linguistically minimized as “technical corrections”
- Financiers who contributed to the global economic crisis portrayed themselves as the victims of a metaphoric “tsunami.”
- Corporate offenses are attributed to isolated “bad apples” within the organization
- In the global economic crisis, investment brokers bundled bad home loans in complicated derivatives. Goldman Sachs sold them to unwitting clients and then bet that they would fail. Goldman Sachs claimed the did not mislead investors but merely gave them “incomplete information”
- Court settlements in which prosecutors dismiss corporate criminal charges in exchange for a fine, various concessions, and a pledge to adopt corporate reforms are misrepresented as “deferred prosecution.”
- Resume fraudsters sanitized their falsehood as “resume enhancement,” not lying

Tobacco Industry

- The harmful effects of smoking were masked by sanitizing language. Industry scientists converted the carcinogenicity of tobacco products to “specific biological activity.” Secondhand smoke became indoor air pollution or “ambient smoke”

Chemical Industry

- A memo to a subcommittee of the Manufacturing Chemists' Association recommended that the designation of vinyl chloride as a "cancer suspect agent," or "carcinogen" should be changed to a "hazardous chemical agent."

Mining Industry

- Coal dust that produces lung disease is renamed "nuisance dust"

Auto Industry

- Volkswagen devised an illegal software to reduce emissions in tests of their vehicles. They disguised it under the name "acoustic function"

Gun Industry

- In semantic slight of hand, President of the NRA Sandra Froman, turned guns into "free speech." She warned that "Today, if you say or do the wrong thing, you might look up from your desk to find that you are today's thought police victim."
- Militarized semiautomatic weapons used in mass killings are called "modern sporting rifles."

Television Industry

- The television industry cloaks gratuitous violence in an innocuous label, "action and adventure" programming
- At a Senate hearing on televised violence, a President of ABC described scenes of extreme violence as just scenes of "physical activity."
- Efforts to delineate violence get submerged in a linguistic quagmire

Capital Punishment

- At an early time the death penalty was called "judicial homicide"
- More recently it has been sanitized to "deprivation of life"
- Albert Camus, a strong opponent of the death penalty, described it starkly as "premeditated of murders."
- The set of drugs used in execution by injection is called a "cocktail."
- Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun characterized the death penalty as the "machinery of death"
- The term "more humane" is widely used in comparing execution methods. Critics dubbed the merciful language as a "veil of humaneness" for a gruesome task.

Environmental Degradation

- The acid rain that is killing lakes and forests is disguised by convoluted language as "transit particle deposition from an unidentifiable source"
- In a linguistic cleansing operation, a senior official at the Environmental Protection Agency banished the word "hazard" because it is "a trigger word that excites the American public needlessly"

- The nuclear power industry devised a unique lexicon for sanitizing nuclear mishaps. An explosion became an “energetic disassembly,” a fire became “rapid oxidation,” a reactor accident was a “normal aberration,” or a “plant transferent,” and plutonium contamination of workers was dubbed “plutonium has taken up residence”
- In sanitizing ecospeak, rewriting the Clean Air Act that reduced the demand to upgrade polluting plants was dubbed “Clear Skies”
- A uranium processing plant was called the “Feed Materials Processing Center,” suggestive of an animal feed processing plant.
- Lobbyists creatively disguise their efforts to shape laws and regulations to weaken protection of the environment.
- Corporations masqueraded under the name Citizens for Sensible Control of Acid Rain to defeat bills curbing acid rain.
- Utility companies and other organizations created the Endangered Species Reform Coalition to eviscerate the endangered species law.
- A host of polluters joined forces under the benevolently labeled Clean Air Working Group to gut the Clean Air Act.
- Real estate and gas and oil companies formed the National Wetlands Coalition, a seemingly environmentally friendly organization, to open up the nation’s wetlands for commercial development.
- The fishing industry cloaked itself in the Sea Lion Defense Fund, not to save endangered sea lions but to remove limits on fishing the sea lion’s favorite foods.

Watergate Euphemisms

- The Watergate burglars and government officials presiding over the covering of their crimes used the specialized jargon of legitimate enterprises to lend an aura of respectability to their crimes.
- Watergate burglars and government officials presiding over the coverup of crimes used the specialized jargon of legitimate enterprises to lend an aura of respectability to their crimes.
- They cloaked their crimes in metaphors of admirable teamwork and sportsmanship. In Watergate jargon, criminal conspiracy became a “game plan” and the conspirators were “team players” with qualities befitting the best sportsmen
- Their domestic spying operation was called a “new intelligence unit” in the likeness of a legitimate information-gathering agency.
- Like dutiful seaman, the burglars were “deep-sixing” incriminating documents, not destroying them illegally. Spying on people was “visual surveillance.”
- Lying was a “different version of the facts.”

Catholic Church

- A bishop convicted of shielding a priest who took thousands of pornographic photos of young girls’ genitals, euphemistically obscured the offense as “boundary violations” between an adult and a child.

Displacement of Responsibility

Displacement of responsibility operates by obscuring, minimizing, or denying personal accountability for the harm caused individually or collectively in social systems. Under displaced responsibility subordinates view themselves as simply carrying out orders issued by others and therefore, bear no responsibility for their actions.

Only obtuse authorities would leave themselves accusable of authorizing harmful practices. To protect themselves, authorities create mazy chains of authorization, sanction detrimental conduct surreptitiously, keep themselves intentionally uninformed, and devise insulating social arrangements that permit deniability of wrongdoing. To keep themselves intentionally uninformed authorities do not look for evidence of wrongdoing. Obvious questions that would reveal incriminating information remain unasked, so that officials do not find out what they do not want to know. Implicit agreements and insulating social arrangements are created that leave higher echelons free from blame. These self-protective practices are called “*willful blindness.*”

In another way of masking responsibility, industries enlist consultants and create front organizations that act on their behalf under a cloak of independence and credibility. Outsourcing vindication shifts the moral predicament to proxy agents.

Corporate Industries

- In an established practice, government prosecutors participate in shielding corporate executives from any responsibility for transgressions by the company they manage. Charges of wrongdoing are usually settled in plea bargaining by fines that companies pay without admitting nor denying any wrongdoing and no top executives indicted and penalized.
- In violation of the Clean Air Act, the chief executive of Volkswagen claimed no awareness that his company had developed and installed an illegal device to reduce emissions in tests of their vehicle worldwide. This complete disinterest in how their technicians achieved this remarkable emissions reduction suggests a severe case of intentional blindness.
- A wrongdoer described surreptitious removal of bad debts from the books, “Of course, there was never a direct order to cook the books, instead it was just a kind of willful neglect. No one would ever ask how the debt disappeared.”
- A division manager blamed the social structural impediments for failing to report antitrust violations. “I had no power to go higher. I do not report to anyone except my superiors.”
- Fourteen electrical manufacturers colluded in fixing prices and bidding for contracts in violation of the Antitrust Law. One of the smaller companies displaced responsibility for violating the law to fierce competitions. “You are a little fellow in the big industry . . . you have to go along.”
- In remarkable creativity, the managers of the electrical companies distanced themselves from responsibility by concocting a celestial agent in which the phase of the moon determined the company that “won” the bid.
- The head of one of the companies in the large-scale price fixing scandal acknowledged that he had an inkling that something was going on, but in classic intentional self-deception, he took no action to find out what it was: “[I]t was something that was going on outside of my orbit and I wasn’t curious about it.”

- A resume fraudster shifted the blame for falsifying his resume to a corrupt corporate culture. “I feel like a just man in an unjust system. Others are stealing, padding expenses and raising Cain, but are not losing their jobs.”

Tobacco Industry

- A tobacco company announced that “the choice of number of cigarettes smoked rests with the consumer and we don’t directly influence this decision in their direction.”

Lead Industry

- “I feel that the word of the Lead Industries Association might carry even more weight if some other agency, used as a screen, were utilized in order to do the job for us.”

Silica Industries

- An executive of an Institute funded by the industry suggested to industry leaders that they locate research on silicosis at the institute, using it as a proxy. That would enable “individual corporates to sponsor research surreptitiously, thereby avoiding accusations of conflict of interest.”

Catholic Church

- In dealing with child molesting priests, displacement of responsibility up the church hierarchy was the principal mode of self-exoneration by church officials. Having passed the evidence of molestation on to their superiors, they felt that they had fulfilled their responsibility.
- A church official was asked whether he checked on the outcome of his report. He restated his limited responsibility: “I don’t think it was my role to follow through.”
- Some offending priests were reassigned to active ministry in other parishes where they could continue the sexual abuse. The superior priest used the “just following orders” self-exoneration. “I was given the directions what to do.”
- Although the veil of secrecy and moral compromise operated throughout the church hierarchy, it was the underlings in the hierarchy who were indicted and who served prison time.

Death Penalty

- “We have a job to do. . . It is simply to carry out the order of the state. . . It’s not up to me to say yea or nay. That’s for the judge and juries. I’m not a part of the deal-making process. I’m here to do the job.”
- “It don’t bother me at all. The law says this and I follow it.”
- Jurors blame the opaque legal language of the sentencing instructions for their opinions: “To twelve people. . . off the street, to use the word ‘willful’ versus ‘deliberate’ versus ‘intentional’ – all that becomes foggy.”
- “My justification of the whole thing is, it’s not really my decision, it’s the law’s decision.”
- Abu Ghraib
- A guard in the Abu Ghraib military prison accepted the degrading practices toward Iraqi detainees as officially authorized: “One does not question orders when you’re in the military you automatically do what they say. It’s always, ‘Yes Sir, No Sir.’ You don’t question it. . . To be honest, the whole time I never really felt guilty because I was following orders and I was doing what I was supposed to do.”

- The Bush administration attributed the degrading abuse to “a few bad apples” acting entirely on their own.
- The army’s inspector general reported that their investigation revealed no “systemic” problems. “These abuses should be viewed as what they are – unauthorized actions taken by a few individuals.”

Genocide

- Self-exemption from inhumane acts via displacement of responsibility is most gruesomely revealed in institutionally sanctioned genocide. Nazi Adolf Eichmann, who managed the mass deportation of Jews to the extermination camps, portrayed himself as a mere functionary obeying orders: “I was not responsible, was not the master planner, the initiator or the one giving orders.”

Diffusion of Responsibility

The exercise of moral control is also weakened when personal agency is obscured by diffusing responsibility for detrimental behavior. Any harm done by a group can always be attributed largely to the behavior of others. There are three ways in which personal accountability is dispersed. The first is group decision making. The faceless group becomes the agent that does the deciding and the authorizing. Members can discount their contribution to the policies and practices arrived at collectively so they are not really responsible.

A division of labor also diffuses, and thereby diminishes, a sense of responsibility. Most undertakings require the services of many people, each performing subdivided jobs that seem harmless in themselves. After activities become routinized into detached subfunctions, people shift their attention from the morality of what they are doing to the operational details of the fragmented activity and efficiency in performing their specific job.

Collective action is the third form of moral disinhibition through diffused responsibility. Several psychosocial processes are at work. Collective action adds legitimacy to harmful means. Group actions also provide a sense of anonymity. As long as one remains personally unrecognizable, one need have little concern for adverse social evaluation. Amid many players acting together, one easily can discount one's contribution to the harm perpetrated by the group.

Finance Industry

- In a massive conspiracy to control the price and bidding war, fourteen electrical manufacturers divided the market for lucrative contracts, rigged the prices of the bids, and took turns being the lowest bidder. The conspiracy was the product of group decision making. This collective effort allowed individual participants to minimize their roles in the operation. Smaller firms viewed themselves as too unimportant to the industry giants to have had any influence on the legal scheme.
- A top official ordered subordinates to remove the bad debts from the books. They did so by misrepresenting outstanding debts as assets. One of the members cooking the books described the surreptitious authorization and collective willful evasion of how the debt mysteriously disappeared: "Of course there was never a direct order to cook the books, instead it was just a kind of willful neglect. No one would ever ask how the debt disappeared."

Death Penalty

- The most graphic example of moral self-exoneration through diffusion of responsibility occurs within the act of intentionally putting a human being to death. The institutional arrangement diffuses the agentic subfunctions across a variety of individuals, each performing only a small task in the division of labor. For example, each member of the strap-down team straps a particular part of the body: left leg, right leg, left arm and torso, right arm and torso, and head.
- A San Quentin guard who strapped down the offenders' legs to the electric chair in 126 executions. "I never pulled the trigger," he said. "I wasn't the executioner."

Television Industry

- A major controversy in the television industry was the heavy use of gratuitous violence on the erroneous belief that people crave violence. The authorizers are shrouded in mystery. Producer Ivor Tors described his frustrated at trying to pin down who authorized a network directive to inject more sex and violence into his programs: “Mr. Daly said that this came from Mr. Levy, but Mr. Levy at that time received instructions from Mr. Kintner. Again I have no firsthand knowledge whose suggestions it was. I knew only that I was told to put sex and violence in my show.”
- Diffusion of the creation and production process further reduces a sense of personal accountability for the final product. Writers produce scripts, rewriters alter them, directors fill in the details of the scenarios, and editors have a part in how filmed events are depicted by what they select from the lengthy footage.
- Another variant on the theme of nonresponsibility for televised violence is that the script, in the likeness of an impersonal agentic force, prescribes it. Not only does the dramatic format and script alleged mandate violence, the nature of the characters also allegedly dictate it.

Tobacco Industry

- Collective moral disengagement at the social system level quires a network of participants vindicating their harmful practices. As previously noted, tobacco products contribute to the premature death of about half a million people annually
- Promotion of this deadly product depends heavily on a vast network of otherwise considerate people engaged in a bewildering array of occupations.
- Tobacco executives who denied that tobacco products have harmful health effects.
- Chemists who discovered that ammonia increases the nicotine “kick” by speeding the body’s absorption of nicotine
- Biotech researchers who genetically engineered a tobacco seed that doubles the addictive nicotine content of tobacco plants, cultivated it abroad, and imported tons of it surreptitiously
- Advertisers who target youth with merchandising and advertising campaigns to get them hooked on the smoking habit
- Movie actors who agreed to smoke in their movies for a hefty fee
- Legislators with campaign contributors who exempted nicotine from drug legislation and passed preemption laws that block regulation of tobacco advertising
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which essentially banned low-nicotine tobacco by making farmers ineligible for government price supports if they grow low-nicotine varieties
- Trade representatives who threatened sanctions against countries that erect barriers against the importation of American cigarettes
- The U.S. government which opposed a worldwide ban on cigarette advertising and sponsorship of entertainment and sports events, even though the ban exempted countries if it violated their constitutions.

Negating Harmfulness

Judging the harmfulness of given policies and practices is the major battleground in moral disengagement. There is no moral issue if practices are judged to be harmless. Wrongdoers ignore, minimize, and dispute harmful effects. Wrongdoers also disparage the research as “junk science” and attribute nefarious motives and maniacal behavior to scientists. Another exonerative strategy is to argue that, because of the complicity and multicausation of human behavior its causes can never be unraveled.

Harmfulness is verified by empirical evidence. A three-step strategy is commonly used to negate empirical evidence of detrimental effects. Step 1 is outright denial of harmfulness. With mounting scientific evidence, the strategy turns to sowing doubt and controversy about research findings. The advocacy of the methodology is questioned, and the reliability and conclusiveness of the evidence are challenged. A tobacco executive described the strategy succinctly. “Doubt is our product since it is the best means of competing with the ‘body of fact’ that exists in the mind of the general public.” Scientists and research institutes funded by the industries are commonly enlisted as the source of doubt. Judgment of harmfulness should be suspended, they argue, in favor of more research. With further mounting evidence, step 3 trivializes the level of harm so no remedial or regulatory measures are warranted.

Coal Industry

- The head of a mining company proclaimed global warming a “hoax”

Silica Industries

- The seriousness of silicosis was trivialized: “Not infrequently we find nuisance dust exposures to be more injurious to the mechanical equipment than to workmen.”

Tobacco Industry

- As the surgeon general’s groundbreaking report was being prepared an industry counsel advised withholding from the surgeon general the troublesome results of their own commissioned research regarding cardiovascular disease
- Testifying in a state lawsuit, the chief executive of a tobacco company stated that he would neither examine the company’s past research nor order any studies of the effects of smoking, “I’m going to disengage for that debate of their product.” To avoid learning about the health effects, the company closed their laboratory.
- The biggest challenge for the tobacco industry was growing evidence of the toxicity of secondhand smoke. A public relations firm recommended two-step action plan to negate an EPA report which classified secondhand smoke as a carcinogen. The first step was to create a “sense of doubt” by attacking the science as flawed. In the second step, they minimized the harm “by comparison with risks associated with everyday activities.”
- The tobacco industry derogated research that demonstrates adverse health effects as “half-truths in the hands of fanatics,” “scientific malpractice,” and “Orwellian Official Science.”
- A tobacco company recruited scientists to refute influential paper demonstrating that secondhand smoke was associated with lung cancer. The company’s director of science discussed with the company’s top lawyer how to hide their involvement in the research.

- When research in one of the tobacco laboratories verified that nicotine is addictive, lawyers in a tobacco-law firm warned the company that such finds are “undesirable and dangerous” because they provide fodder for lawsuits.”

Television Industry

- Some personnel in the television industry argued that the effects of exposure to televised violence are unverifiable. Other personnel, invoking the empirically refuted catharsis view, claimed that exposure to televised violence is therapeutic rather than detrimental.
- “Nobody has been able to make a definitive statement about the effects of televised violence.”
- “Violence is a catharsis for kids.”
- “Exposure to properly presented conflict which results in violence acts as a therapeutic release for anger and self-hatred.”

Tobacco Industry

- “Second-hand tobacco smoke has been used with great success by the anti-tobacco activists to bolster the arguments for government intervention. . . However, the data continues to be inconclusive.”
- For years, the tobacco industry denied the addictive properties of nicotine. The strategies took several forms, initially straight-forward denial or minimization of adverse health effects.
- “Whether or not we succeed in discrediting the notion that ETS is a health risk, we can place the risk in context and thereby minimize it. Thus, non-smokers may still believe ETS is a health risk, but on par with driving a car, shoveling snow, etc. Low risk makes ETS an annoyance issue which can be handled by courtesy and tolerance.”

Lead Industry

The lead Industries Association had partially suppressed evidence of adverse effects of plastic pipe for potable water supplies. “We arranged to see the galley proof of the report and, through contacts with members of the advisory committee on the report, were able to secure elimination of a number of statements adverse to the use of lead stabilizers.”

Chemical Industry

- A former spokesman for the chemical industry argued that a ban on pesticides would have disastrous consequences. “If man were to follow the teachings of Miss Carson, we would return to the Dark Ages, and the insects and diseases and vermin would once again inherit the earth.”

Church

- In a pervasive cover-up, church officials concealed from legal authorities child sexual abuse by molesting priests
- Contrary to evidence of extensive sexual abuse of minors, an archbishop trivialized the incidence rate as “marvelous” in that only a few priests were accused of sexually molesting children

- The head of an archdiocese ordered the shredding of a list of credibly charged priests: A Monsignor in the same archdiocese discussed how to withhold information of sexual abuse of minors in future lawsuits against the church.
- A higher-echelon clergyman justified not reporting sexual abuse of an altar boy because the abusing priest was also having sex with a woman, he was “not a pure pedophile.”
- Church lawyers told church officials they did not have to report sexual crimes they were not legally obligated to do so or because the statute of limitations had expired
- In an elaborate scheme to protect offenders from law officials, the molesting priests were sent for treatment in New Mexico, which lacked a legal requirement to report evidence of child abuse.

Death Penalty

- Execution of innocent individuals is minimized as “a handful of cases,” and the common problems of inadequate lawyering by public defenders is downplayed: “In any large barrel, one can always find some bad apples.”
- Some jurors deny that their verdicts are consequential. They view their decisions as merely provisional, because at some point in the appeals process, an appellate judge ultimately will decide the question
- Even if a death sentence is upheld, jurors point to evidence that convicted inmates are rarely executed: “Ninety-nine percent of the time they don’t put you to death. You sit on death row and get old.”

Environmental Degradation

- Senator Inhofe characterized global warming as the “greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American People.”
- “If man were to follow the teaching of Miss Carson, we would return to the Dark Ages, and the insects and diseases and vermin would once again inherit the earth.”
- A prominent critic of climate science applied a harsh Darwinism to lower species. “Some will take over, others will die out or move on somewhere else.”

Iraqi War

- The defense department downplayed civilian casualties. “We can take comfort in the knowledge that this war has seen fewer tragic losses of civilian life than perhaps any war in modern history.”
- A US military commander explained why counts of urban deaths should be ignored on the grounds that such deaths were impossible to estimate reliably “and so all of us have opted not to do that” . . . “We don’t do body counts.”

Dehumanization and Disparagement

The final set of disengagement practices operates on the recipients of detrimental practices. The strength of moral self-censure depends on how perpetrators regard the people they harm. To perceive another as human activates empathetic and compassionate reactions through a sense of common humanity. Self-censure for cruel conduct can be disengaged or blunted by stripping people of human qualities. Once dehumanized, they are no longer viewed as persons with feelings, hopes, and concerns but as subhuman objects. If dispossessing one's foes of humanness does not weaken self-censure, it can be eliminated by attributing demonic or bestial qualities to them. In many walks of life, individuals disparage their adversaries as desperate beings driven by evil motives. This form of dehumanization is especially prevalent in disruption over the harmfulness of certain practices.

Holy Violence

- Bid Laden bestialized the American enemy as “a lowly people,” perpetrating acts that “the most ravenous of animals would not descend to.”
- Pope Urban launched the crusades with the following dehumanizing proclamation: “What a disgrace, if a race so despicable, degenerate, and enslaved by demons, should overcome a people endowed with faith in Almighty God.”
- An evangelical preacher called Muhammad a “demon-possessed pedophile.”
- An ISIS terrorist seated next to a human being he had beheaded called his victims “dogs.”

Gun Industry

- The gun industry turns its wrath on gun regulation as “political terrorism” promoted by “loony leftists” with “reporters perched like vultures at shootings.”
- Federal agents are “jack-booted government thugs.”
- The NRA executive characterized the mentally ill as “genuine monsters. . . that are so deranged, so evil, so possessed by voices and driven by demons that no sane person can even possibly comprehend them.”

Finance Industry

- Financial traders disparaged their clients as “muppets” (British slang for a stupid person who is easily manipulated)
- In a letter to his girlfriend a bond salesman boasted that he sold risky bonds to “widows and orphans” – Wall Street euphemisms for unsuspecting investors.
- In a memo to his bond salesman, the CEO of a Savings and Loan advised them, “And always remember the weak, meek, and ignorant are always good targets.”

Mining Industry

An explosion in the Upper Big Branch Mine fueled by combustive coal dust and methane buildups, killed 29 miners. The company was convicted of reckless violation of safety regulations.

- Regulators were treated as “enemies.” The CEO referred to federal lawmakers who called for tighter regulation of the mining industry as “crazies” and “greeniacs.”

Tobacco Industry

- The tobacco industry derogated research that demonstrates adverse health effects as “half-truths in the hands of fanatics,” “scientific malpractice,” and “Orwellian Official Science. . . “Scientific malpractice as statistical jiggery pokery”. . . “claptrap”. . . “colossal blunder.” Government officials were dubbed “nannies” and countries that regulate cigarette advertising “nanny states.”
- The industry attributed pathological conditions to people seeking regulation of tobacco products: “It should be recognized that smoking can be an emotional issue which can lead to obsessive behavior, reminiscent of the fanaticism by the prohibition movement.”
- Advocates of the tobacco industry characterized tobacco regulation as fascism and communism. “And there certainly is nothing new about governments seeking more control over people’s lives. Recall, however, that the two major ideological political movements of our century. Fascism and Communism, sought just this while claiming the best interests of the governed peoples – with tragic consequences.”

Silica Industries

- In their efforts to ward off pressure from lawmakers and labor unions to address the silicosis problem, spokespersons for silica industries disparaged lawyers as “parasites” and doctors who diagnosed silicosis as “quacks”

Lead Industry

- Lead pollutes the environment and impairs human health. A member in the lead industry called regulators “misguided zealots.”

Television Industry

Viewers are divested of human sensitivities or invested with base qualities that justify serving them gory offerings

- “Not as much action as some, but sufficient to keep the average bloodthirsty viewer fairly happy.”
- “Man’s mind is connected to his stomach, his groin, and his fists. It doesn’t float five feet above his body. Violence, therefore, cannot be eradicated.”
- “Make the villain all bad and have the hero kill him to give the audience a sense of fulfillment.”

Environmental Degradation

- The chemical industry and agribusiness went to great lengths to discredit Carson’s credibility as a scientist, disparaging her as a “hysterical woman” and the “nun of nature.”
- They disparaged not only Carson but also environmental advocates, linked stereotypically to the “anti-fluoridation leaguers, the organic garden faddists, and other beyond-the-fringe groups.”
- Environmentalists are called “doomsayers,” “scaremongers,” “global whiners,” “environmental wackos,” “tree huggers,” “Malthusians alarmists,” or “technological Pollyannas.”
- Bloggers who claim that environmental problems are partly of human doing are called “kooks” and “nutters”

- The British press labeled Prince Charles, who called for a sustainable stewardship of the environment a “loony eccentric prince who talked to plants.”
- An individual proposed for the office of national science advisor described climate scientists as a “glassy-eyed cult.”

Catholic Church

- The president of a Catholic advocacy group disparaged children who were sexually abused by molesting priests as a “pitiful bunch of malcontents.” He also ridiculed civil lawsuits as a “witch-hunt” against the Catholic Church carried out by “church-chasing” attorneys.

Death Penalty

- Supreme Court Justice Breyer argued that the constitutionality of the death penalty itself should be reexamined. Justice Scalia disparaged Breyer’s judicial analysis “gobbledygook.”
- Executioners distance themselves from condemned inmates by depersonalization: “I don’t try to get to know them. By not knowing them, you can do your job. Getting to know them makes it though.” Gruesome crimes make it easy to view condemned inmates as subhuman and beastly beings.
- Death penalty abolitionists are denounced as “saboteurs” on a “holy crusade” to “grind the system of capital punishment to a halt.”

ISIS

- Opponents were viewed as “infidels” and “devil worshippers”
- A beheader kneeling beside a decapitated corpse degraded his victims to “dogs.” “Surely, the holiday [Ramadan] won’t be complete without a picture with one of the dogs’ corpses.”
- To model gruesome killings and desensitize revulsion to them, children were shown videos and witnessed beheadings and stonings. For one training session, after viewing beheading videos, the youth practiced beheadings on three captured Syrian soldiers. Teachers ordered the students to pass around the severed heads.
- In a video of thorough dehumanization, children were shown playing with severed heads and poking fun at the decapitated bodies

Abu Ghraib

- Abu Ghraib guards degraded, humiliated and animalized Iraqi detainees. Naked detainees were forced to wear leashes and crawl for hours like dogs, to bark to the sound of a whistle, to crawl with guards mounted on their backs like jockeys, to wear women’s underwear and to engage in humiliating sexual acts with bestial attributions for the very behavior the guards coerced: “Look what these animals do when you leave them alone for two seconds.”

Iraqi War

- Newspaper portrayals of the Muslim enemy relied heavily on three metaphoric forms of dehumanization
- The first type of dehumanizing metaphor characterized the enemy in animalistic terms with the rat metaphor as the favorite one. Here are some of the newspaper headlines: “Soldiers mop up

Taliban's rat's nest in Afghanistan," "Captured: Saddam caught in hole 'just like a rat,'" "Terrorists, like rats and cockroaches, skulk in the dark."

- The second type of dehumanizing metaphor characterizes the enemy as a pernicious disease: "Only Muslim leaders can remove spreading cancer of Islamic terrorism," "Al Qaeda mutating like a virus."
- In the third dehumanizing metaphor, military actions designed to capture enemies are framed in animal-linked hunting metaphors. The enemy as "prey" is hunted, tracked down, snared, caged, and "kept on a short leash."

Genocide

- Dehumanization laid the foundation for the Nazi genocidal mission. Jewish people were degraded as a genetically inferior race that had to be eradicated. The Nazis portrayed Jews in demeaning caricatures. Movie posters depicted them as rats.
- Dehumanization is not confined to speech but can also be expressed behaviorally. In the death camps they were stripped of their personal identity and assigned numbers, and treated as subhuman beings.
- Arab mainstream press, on television, and on radical websites. Jews are depicted in the most malignant and demonic terms. In a sermon at the Grand Mosque in Mecca, a prominent imam declared that Jews are "the scum of the earth whom Allah cursed and turned into apes and pigs."
- President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran declared, in a metaphor combining disease and bestial qualities, that the world powers have created a black and dirty microbe named the Zionist regime and have unleashed it like a savage animal on the nations of the region.

Attribution of Blame

Blaming victims for bringing harsh treatment on themselves by their witless and provocative behavior is another method operating within the victim locus that serves self-exonerative purposes. Conflict-laden transactions typically involve reciprocally escalative acts. One can select from the chain of events a defensive act by one's adversaries and portray it as the initiating provocation. One then blames the adversaries for bringing suffering on themselves by their instigative belligerent behavior. External attribution of blame turns the perpetrator into a faultless victim, driven to injurious actions by forcible provocation.

Self-exoneration is also achievable by viewing one's harmful conduct as forced by compelling circumstances rather than as a personal decision. Fixing the blame on others or on compelling circumstances not only excuses one's injurious actions but can even make retaliation seem self-righteous. Blaming the victim differ from diffusion and displacement of responsibility in terms of who is at fault for the harm and where moral disengagement occurs in the process of moral control. Faulting victims is victim blaming. Shifting the blame for harmful practices up the chain of command or dispersing it widely is agent blaming.

Bin Laden

- Osama bin Laden characterized his terrorist activities as “defensive jihad,” compelled by “debauched infidels” bent on enslaving the Muslim world

Lead Industry

- A spokesperson for the Lead Industries Association (LIA) placed the blame for child lead poisoning on the children themselves. They were alleged to have subnormal appetites or the disease known as “pica” which caused them to chew on inedible articles. They were subnormal to start with, the industry claimed rather than cognitively impaired by lead poisoning.
- LIA's director of health and safety also blamed and disparaged “ignorant parents” for their children's lead poisoning by “lead paint mistakenly applied by ignorant parents to cribs, play pens and other juvenile furniture and subsequently chewed off and ingested.
- In the Association's view, “childhood lead poisoning is essentially a problem of slum dwellings and relatively ignorant parents.”

Tobacco Industry

- The tobacco industry vigorously fights depictions of the physical ravages of smoking on cigarette packages. The industry contends that their general cigarette warning labels specify health hazards. If individuals choose to smoke, it is their fault if they develop health problems.
- The industry advertised and marketed cigarettes with deceptive descriptions such as “low tar,” and “light” suggesting that they were less hazardous to health. Manufacturers set the nicotine in cigarettes at a level that would ensure addiction. Smokers compensated for low nicotine delivery in so-called light cigarettes by inhaling more deeply or smoking more cigarettes. The smokers were blamed for their pattern of smoking behavior. “The choice of number of cigarettes smoked rests with the consumer and we don't [sic] directly influence this decision in either direction.”

Sexual Assault

- Rapists blame women for bringing the sexual assault on themselves. In assaulters' self-exoneration, the women should not have been in situations known as risky for sexual assaults; they should not have been drinking, flirting or dressing in a seductive fashion. In exonerative claims about the sexual assault itself, the victims made it up to get back at the accused person. They never said "no," so it was consensual.

Catholic Church

- Some church officials blamed the victims claiming that the children were lying
- A Reverend who hosted a weekly show on a Catholic television network, blamed children for priests' sexual abuse. He claimed that in a "lot of cases, the . . . youngster is the seducer."
- A nun working in one of the parishes reported concern that a priest was receiving child pornography in the mail. She was branded a troublemaker who was trying "to stir up conflict" and accused of having suspect motives.
- A study commissioned by the American bishops attributed the clergy sexual abuse, in part to the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, a conclusion dubbed "blame Woodstock."