

New research at the University of Leicester links shoplifting to your personality

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A new study by psychologists at the University of Leicester has identified dimensions of personality seen in persons prone to shoplifting. Three characteristics in his study stood out: Being male; unpleasant and antisocial; and disorganised and unreliable.

The study also found that younger and outgoing people are more likely to pilfer from stores or commit minor fraud.

In a paper published in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*, entitled, 'Shoplifting, unethical consumer behaviour, and personality', Dr Vincent Egan of the University of Leicester's School of Psychology and a postgraduate student, David Taylor, revealed that a person's inclination to shoplifting is related to their personality.

Dr Egan commented:

"I'm the kind of psychologist who thinks 'what kind of person does (or doesn't do) antisocial things?' when I think about the crimes people commit, so I sought to explore the personalities of people who shoplift or fraudulent in commercial settings, compared to those who claim to be honest. Most forensic psychological research with criminals focuses on sexual and violent offences, so it was interesting to think about different types of offender."

Their findings are based on a sample of 114 shoppers aged from 16 to 80 years of age who anonymously completed four questionnaires to

measure personality, consumer ethical beliefs, attitudes to shoplifting, and demographics. Analysis of the data found those lower in [emotional stability](#), higher in [extraversion](#) and lower on agreeableness, [conscientiousness](#) and intellect were more accepting of unethical consumer behaviour and shoplifting.

Dr Egan said: "My results suggest dishonest [consumer behaviour](#) is narrowly associated with how unpleasant and disorganised you are; separate to this, people who commit fraudulent crimes associated with benefitting at the expense of the seller may simply be younger and more outgoing so carried away by the moment."

Of the 114 sampled, 68 had never shoplifted, 30 had shoplifted more than a year ago, and 16 had shoplifted within the past year. The active shoplifters were significantly younger than the inactive shoplifters and those who had never shoplifted.

The results also found all the currently active shoplifters were male.

Dr Egan added: "This study looked at ordinary British people visiting a large superstore. It looked at a variety of ordinary shoppers, not just those who had been convicted of shoplifting. We extended thinking by looking at the casual kinds of fraud some people commit. By understanding the pathways into these kinds of offences, we can hopefully reduce them in the future."

He notes shoplifting is a major concern within the British retail industry; according to the Centre for Retail Research, Britain tops Europe's shoplifting league, with over £1.5 billion in shop property stolen per annum, which costs each household an additional £150. It is hoped that these findings will lead to proactive ways to combat such criminal activity.

Provided by University of Leicester

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