

AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF MALE AND  
FEMALE SHOPLIFTING BEHAVIOR

Joseph H. Miller, Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond  
Michael Budden, Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond  
Martha Kirk, D.H. Holmes, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research paper is to investigate the shoplifting behavior of males and females. A total of 249 shoplifting cases were examined in this research project. A chi-square analysis was used to determine if there are significant differences between the shoplifting behavior of males and females. Significant differences were found on three of the five null hypotheses that were examined.

INTRODUCTION

Estimates of the cost of goods stolen from retail stores vary considerably, but most observers agree that shoplifting is definitely on the increase. The FBI asserts that three times as many consumers were arrested for shoplifting in 1976 as in 1970 (Nation's Business 1978). It has been estimated that store losses from shoplifting are approximately four percent of store sales and that about \$31 billion worth of goods are stolen annually (Nation's Business 1978).

Some retailers are using elaborate detection systems such as sensors and electronic scanning to halt shoplifting. Valuable merchandise, like expensive watches and fine jewelry, is often displayed in locked cases. Self-service operations have attempted to discourage through the use of one-way mirrors, dressing rooms with attendants, highly visible television cameras, and store detectives. In order to encourage store personnel to be more aware of shoplifters, some stores have even employed "stealing squads"--people whose job it is to shoplift merchandise and then inform management on how to prevent such thefts (Lowry 1983).

Very little academic research has been done in the area of shoplifting. Some of the research to date has attempted to study the economic effects of shoplifting on the economy and on business (Faria 1977 and Bush 1974.) Other research has examined the use of parental influence to prevent juvenile shoplifting (Fugate 1980), different methods used to combat shoplifting (Faria 1977 and Menkus 1979), and case history analysis to determine when and where shoplifting occurs (Budden, Miller, and Yeargain 1983). In reviewing the literature, we found there to be a shortage of data concerning the demographic characteristics of shoplifters.

Objectives

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the shoplifting behavior of males and females. In this paper the following null hypotheses are examined:

- H<sub>1</sub> There are no significant differences between the shoplifting behavior of males and females when comparisons are made on the basis of race.
- H<sub>2</sub> There are no significant differences between the shoplifting behavior of males and females when comparisons are made based on age.
- H<sub>3</sub> There are no significant differences between the shoplifting behavior of males and females when

comparisons are made based on the time of day in which the shoplifting occurred.

- H<sub>4</sub> There are no significant differences between the shoplifting behavior of males and females when comparisons are made based on the cost of the merchandise stolen.
- H<sub>5</sub> There are no significant differences between the shoplifting behavior of males and females when comparisons are made on the day of the week on which the shoplifting occurred.

Methodology

Sample. A total of 249 shoplifting cases were examined in this research project. The data were collected from a medium-priced regional department store located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The sample consisted of all shoplifting cases that occurred over a four-year period: 1979-1982.

A chi-square analysis was used to determine if there are significant differences between the shoplifting behavior of males and females. This nonparametric statistic was calculated using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences computer program. The .05 level of significance was used as a basis for rejecting the null hypothesis.

Data Collection Instrument. The data collection instrument consisted of 18 questions. These questions consisted of demographic classification questions, open-ended questions and multiple choice questions. The answers to these questions were taken from the shoplifting case reports that were filled out by the department store's security personnel immediately after the individual was arrested for shoplifting.

Limitations of the Study

This research study has certain limitations which should be considered in the total evaluation of this project. First, the data were collected from only one department store located in one mid-size southern city. One should therefore exercise caution before attempting universal generalizations. A second limitation centers on the subjects used in this research project--only those who were apprehended for shoplifting. The data may be biased toward the amateur shoplifter since they are more likely to be caught than are the "professional" shoplifters.

Findings

The chi-square test of significance indicates that the null hypothesis, H<sub>1</sub>, should be rejected (p=.0007). Table I indicates that there are significant differences between the shoplifting behavior of males and females when comparisons are made on the basis of race. It also appears that black males are more likely to shoplift than are white males, and that white females are more likely to shoplift than are white males.

TABLE 1

Race Comparisons of Males and Females Who Were Apprehended for Shoplifting

	Males	Females
White	17	75
Black	63	94

$p = .0007$

Research hypothesis  $H_2$  should also be rejected ( $p = .0001$ ). The data illustrate that there is a significant difference between the shoplifting behavior of males and females when comparisons were made based on age. Young males (12-17) are more likely to shoplift than are young females. The incidence of shoplifting committed by females is very high in the 18-34 age range.

TABLE 2

Age Comparisons of Males and Females Who Were Apprehended for Shoplifting

	Males	Females
12-17	44	38
18-34	32	101
35-64	4	30

$p = .0001$

The chi-square test performed on the data contained in Table 3 indicates that research hypothesis number three ( $H_3$ ) should not be rejected. There appears to be no significant differences between the shoplifting behavior of males and females when comparisons were based on the time of day in which the shoplifting occurred.

TABLE 3

Time of Day Comparisons of Males and Females Who Were Apprehended for Shoplifting

	Males	Females
9:00 A.M.- 12:59 P.M.	18	28
1:00 P.M.- 4:56 P.M.	47	98
5:00 P.M.- 9:00 P.M.	15	43

$p = .3527$

Research hypothesis  $H_4$ --"There are no significant differences between the shoplifting behavior of males and females when comparisons are made based on the cost of the merchandise stolen"-- should be rejected. The data contained in Table 4 indicate that the cost of items stolen by males is less than the cost of items stolen by females.

TABLE 4

Cost of Goods Stolen as Compared with the Sex of the Shoplifter

	Males	Females
\$1-20	31	17
\$21-51	22	56
\$51-100	13	42
\$101-200	7	33
\$200+	7	21

$p = .0001$

When research hypothesis  $H_5$  was examined, there appeared to be no significant differences between males and females with regard to the day of the week on which the shoplifting event occurred. Both males and females did most of their shoplifting on Saturday, the best day for getting "lost in the crowd" regardless of one's sex.

TABLE 5

Day of the Week in Which the Shoplifting Event Occurred as Compared with the Sex of the Shoplifter

	Males	Females
Monday	14	22
Tuesday	13	16
Wednesday	13	33
Thursday	10	23
Friday	8	30
Saturday	22	45

$p = .3670$

### Conclusions

This research study indicates that from a consumer behavior point of view there are a number of significant differences between the shoplifting behavior of males and females:

Black males are more likely to commit acts of shoplifting than are white males.

White females are more likely to shoplift than are white males.

Young males (12-17 years of age) are more likely to shoplift than are young females the same age.

Females between the ages of 18-34 and 35-64 are more likely to shoplift than are males the same age.

The cost of the items stolen by males is less than the cost of the items stolen by females.

This study also has strong implications from a retail management point of view. It provides a profile of the consumers who are most likely to commit acts of shoplifting. This profile could be used by store security personnel as a means of determining which consumers to track when they enter a store.

The results of this research do not provide unequivocal answers to the questions regarding the similarities and differences of male and female shoplifters. It is the hope of the authors that this paper will stimulate additional research in the area of consumer shoplifting behavior.

#### References

- Budden, Michael C.; Joseph H. Miller, Jr., and John W. Yeargain, "Workshop on Shoplifting: Problem, Detection and Legal Ramifications," Proceedings of the Southwestern Small Business Institute, (1983), p. 130.
- Bush, Ronald F.; Lewis A. Palumbo, Paul Busch, and Joseph F. Hair, Jr., "Consumer Shoplifting and Employee Theft: The Impact on the Retailer," Proceedings of the Southern Marketing Association, (1974) pp. 180-182.
- Dickinson, Roger A., Retail Management with Cases (Austin, Texas: Austin Press, 1981).
- Faria, Anthony J., "Minimizing Shoplifting Losses: Some Practical Guidelines," Journal of Small Business Management, (October, 1977), p. 37.
- Fugate, Douglas L., "A View on the Use of Parental Influence to Prevent Juvenile Shoplifting," Proceedings of the Southern Marketing Association, (1980), pp. 76-79.
- Guffey, Hugh J., Jr.; James R. Harris, and J. Ford Laumer, Jr., "Shopper Attitudes Toward Shoplifting and Shoplifting Prevention Devices," Journal of Retailing, (Fall, 1979), p. 77.
- "How Shoplifting is Draining the Economy," Business Week, (October 15, 1978), p. 119.
- Lowry, James R., Retail Management (Cincinnati: Southwestern Publishing Company, 1983).
- Menkus, Belden, "Combating Shoplifting--Experience in a Religious Articles Store," The CPA Journal. (October 1979), p. 87.
- Messenger, Carol, "Losses Hit \$5 Billion Annually," Stores, (October, 1975), p. 25.
- Mills, Michael K., "Managing Employee Theft in Retail Stores: What Can We Learn from Exchange Theory," Proceedings of the Southern Marketing Association, (1979), pp. 347-350.
- National Coalition to Prevent Shoplifting, 5-A-5, Atlanta Mart, Atlanta, Georgia, 1982.
- Nulty, Peter, "Sensoromatic Collars the Shoplifter," Fortune, (Feb. 25, 1980), p. 116.
- Rogers, Susan M., "More than One Way to Catch a Thief," Chain Store Age Executive, (April, 1982), p. 39.
- Summey, John H.; Sion Raveed, and Neil Richardson, "Shoplifting: Why, Where, How Often, and Possible Deterrents: A Randomized Response Measurement Approach," Proceedings of the Southern Marketing Association, (1979), pp. 232-233.
- Tatham, Ronald L., "Employees' Views on Theft in Retailing," Journal of Retailing, (Fall 1974), pp. 49-55.
- "The High Cost of Shoplifting," Nation's Business, (November 1978), p.44.
- Wilks, Robert E., "Fraudulent Behavior by Consumers," Journal of Marketing, (October 1978), pp. 67-75.