Glossing Over Shoplifting: How Thieves Act Normal

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Although criminals are known to put on a façade of normalcy while offending, no study has cat-egorized the various ways they do so in a theoretically informed manner. We address this gap in the literature by drawing on Goffman's notion of body gloss to explore how shoplifters "act nor-mal" as they enter a store, take possession of and conceal a target, and exit. Our data consist of in-depth descriptions and explanations of active shoplifters who simulated shoplifting at retail stores while wearing an eye-tracking device. We find shoplifters' normalcy-generating actions reflect two of the three types of body gloss outlined by Goffman, and that the type used depends on the stage of shoplifting. Implications for theory and research are discussed.

Attempting to appear normal in the course of committing crime is as commonplace as crime itself. Criminals portray normalcy to observers—(potential) victims and control agents—to minimize unwanted attention before, during, and after completing offenses. Robbers, for example, avoid alerting their targets by initiating contact through customary questions like "Do you have the time?" (Wright and Decker 1997:98; see also Anderson 1999; Jacobs 2000, 2012; Katz 1988). Burglars legitimize their presence at residences by knocking on the door, ringing the doorbell, and dressing as service technicians; when confronted, they concoct a plausible and non-threatening story to explain their presence, such as "I was lookin' for so and so. Does he still live here?" (Wright and Decker 1994:108). While driving stolen vehicles, auto thieves create an illusion of normalcy by strictly following traffic rules and dressing "like the average Joe" (Cherbonneau and Copes 2006:200).

Although it is widely recognized that offenders attempt to get away with crime by acting nor-mal, no study has categorized the variety of ways this happens in a theoretically informed manner.

In other words, we know that criminals try to pass as law-abiding citizens, but how—abstractly speaking—do they do so and why in particular manners? That is an important issue to address because, one, a primary goal of science is categorization and, two, good concepts are a necessary ingredient in the development of good theory (Bailey 1994; Cooney and Phillips 2002; Homans 1967; Yoon 2009).

This article draws on Goffman's (1959, 1963, 1971) dramaturgical perspective, specifically his notions of stigma management and body gloss, to examine how shoplifters convey impressions of normalcy while inside a store. We begin by interweaving our reviews of stigma management, prior research on shoplifting, and the notion of body gloss. Then we describe our method and data, namely qualitative information obtained during interviews with active shoplifters who simulated shoplifting at national retail stores while wearing an eye-tracking device to record their actions/behaviors. Last, we present our findings and conclude by discussing their implications for theory and research.

MANAGING IDENTITY

As explained by Goffman (1963), a person's social identity consists of a number of characteristics associated with the individual, such as being rich or poor, law-abiding or criminal. A stigma is any characteristic perceived as bad. Stigmas are not always immediately discernible; in any given social interaction, the number of persons who are aware of an individual's stigma can range from none to everyone. Thus, stigmatized persons are either discredited or discreditable. A discredited character is a person whose stigma is known to others, while a discreditable character has a stigma unknown to others. Discreditable persons are perceived as normal unless their stigma has been ascertained by or disclosed to others, at which point they become discredited. A shoplifter, then, is discreditable until his or her offense is detected, at which point the person becomes discredited as a criminal.

Discreditable persons present themselves as normal because being discredited can result in negative consequences. These consequences can be immediate and long-lasting. In the immediate, for instance, being discredited as an offender may result in expulsion from a store or arrest, whereas the long-term effects may be imprisonment or difficulty in being hired due to a criminal record.

Stigma management is a person's way of concealing or, in some cases, revealing their stigma. This involves making a number of decisions: whether to display, tell, let on, or lie about the stigma, and with whom, how, when and where. In essence, the stigmatized person seeks to control the social information about their stigma that others receive. There are several techniques of stigma management, which are differentiated according to how they openly present or keep secret the "bad" trait during a social interaction. These techniques are defensive cowering; hostility toward non-stigmatized persons; engaging in normification (making the case for why a stigmatized person should be treated as normal); covering (admitting one's stigma but taking strides to minimize its effect on interaction); and, passing as normal—which is our focus below.

The Shoplifting Context

Shoplifting is perhaps the most common of all predatory offenses (Clarke 2002; Hayes and Cardone 2006). It is committed by males and females of all age groups, ethnicities, and

socioeconomic statuses (Hirtenlehner et al. 2014; Klemke 1992; Shteir 2011).[1] According to the most recent publicly available estimates, 27 million persons shoplift annually in the United States (NASP 2006). It is so commonplace as to be a massive financial detriment to retail businesses, which pass on the cost to consumers. Some estimates suggest $13 billion worth of goods are shoplifted each year in the United States alone, and more than $100 billion worldwide (NASP 2006).

Given the pervasiveness of shoplifting, some shoplifters may neutralize, excuse, or justify their offenses by claiming "everybody does it" (see Cromwell and Thurman 2003; Scott and Lyman 1968; Sykes and Matza 1957). However, this does not mean shoplifters are unconcerned with the consequences of being caught. Shoplifters worry not only about formal punishment (e.g., arrest, jail time, fines) but also informal sanction, such as a stigmatized reputation among their families, friends, employers, or the community as a whole. Regardless of their individual characteristics, all shoplifters share the common goal of trying to avoid detection and identification as shoplifters.

One strategy shoplifters employ to evade apprehension is blending in with other shoppers so as to be hidden in plain sight (see, e.g., Caputo 2008). The best case scenario is to be so inconspicuous as to garner no or hardly any attention at all from observers—"to be present but of no concern" (Goffman 1971:257); some shoplifters refer to this as "getting over" (Caputo and King 2011). When shoplifters attract the unwanted attention of others, they deflect it by reaffirming their roles as normal shoppers (Katz 1988). Prior research suggests that shoppers and store employees are hesitant to interpret other persons' actions as shoplifting without unambiguous evidence or input from other shoppers or employees (Bickman 1979; Gelfand et al. 1973). Shoplifters take advantage of this propensity by diffusing suspicion through gestures that convey normalcy or simply by moving away; the former technique is meant to prompt the onlooker to give the benefit of the doubt, and the latter to result in the "out of sight, out of mind" tendency (Goffman 1971).

To know how to avoid or to deflect attention from observers, shoplifters produce a mental scheme of how a person acts, looks, and speaks while playing the role of a shopper (Gill 2007; Katz 1988). This involves considering what would make someone appear as a shopper in the view of others, which itself relies heavily on one's recollection of actually being a shopper. This is what Goffman (1971) refers to as self-enactment: "a simulation of the self, a calculated bit of acting, an impersonation of oneself" (p. 269). In this case, it is impersonation of oneself as a shopper. The goal is to self-enact in such a way as to successfully indicate an honorable intention—namely shopping—to observers.

Body Gloss

Research demonstrates that shoplifters and other criminals (e.g., burglars and robbers) put on a façade of normalcy when offending. Though empirical examples abound (see, e.g., Caputo 2008; Katz 1988), these instances have yet to be conceptually organized in a theoretically informed manner, despite the importance of that step for theory development (see Bailey 1994; Cooney and Phillips 2002; Homans 1967; Yoon 2009). We suggest that Goffman's (1971) notion and typology of body gloss could serve this function.

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[1]For thorough overviews of shoplifting research, see Farrington (1999), Gill (2007), and Klemke (1992).

Body gloss is defined as "relatively self-conscious gesticulations an individual can perform with his whole body in order to give pointed evidence concerning some passing issue at hand, the evidence to be obtainable by anyone in the situation who cares to perceive him" (Goffman 1971:128; see also Goffman 1969). The application of body gloss is a way for an individual to prevent being perceived as doing something wrong, correct for an offense that has already occurred, or free the offender from the undesirable character implications accompanying offensive behavior. Goffman outlined three types of body gloss: orientation gloss, circumspection gloss, and overplay gloss.

Orientation gloss involves providing evidence that one is engaging in whatever activity is thought of as normal for that particular social situation. This form of gloss allows a deviant to establish physical orientation to a situation, regardless of his or her inner intentions, thereby enabling others to become comfortable with the individual's presence. One example is "[a]n individual waiting in a hallway for a coffee machine to do its work may, instead of merely standing there as if loitering or 'away,'" which are deviant acts, "set[s] about helping the machine function—realigning the cup, tapping the spout" (Goffman 1971:131).

Circumspection gloss involves providing overt gestural evidence to dispel specific threats that the individual thinks may be perceived by observers; in this way, a person avoids being stigmatized and suffering the negative consequences that follow suit. Consider an example: "On crowded New York subways, where women have had reason to accuse standees of mashing, a man may hold on to a center post with both hands fixed to the pole high up so everyone can see that whatever happens, his hands did not do it" (Goffman 1971:133).

Overplay gloss is done to minimize the negative effects of a stigmatizing behavior that is in progress. "[T]he individual . . . express[es] some dissociation from the constraints in the situation" by "graphically enact[ing] his predicament in order to make sure it has been seen; only then can he perform unambiguous evidence that his serious self is not constrained by the predicament" (p. 136). Put more plainly, overplay gloss amounts to cloaking a deviant act in a playful action. For instance, "[a] girl having to pass through a knot of party guests"—which can be deemed rude—"employs a broad swimming motion to cut her way through" (Goffman 1971:135).

Goffman's (1971) explanations and examples of body gloss concern situations in which the individual in question did not have underlying predatory intentions—as do shoplifters. The concept of body gloss may prove to be a useful model for examining how shoplifters or other criminals avoid and deflect unwanted attention from potential observers. To more fully explore this line of thinking, we pose two deceptively simple questions that remain unanswered, yet deserve further scrutiny: Do shoplifters cover themselves in each type of body gloss? If yes, how so? By answering these questions, researchers will better understand the application of body gloss to shoplifting and other offenses.

METHOD AND DATA

Offender-based research has a storied history (see, e.g., Shaw 1930; Sutherland 1937). The current study follows in the emerging "St. Louis School" tradition of interviewing active offenders about their motives for and methods of criminal activity (see, e.g., Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Jacobs 1999, 2000; Jacques and Reynald 2012; Miller 2001; Topalli 2005; Wright and Decker

1994, 1997). Among the strengths of this method is that offenders' descriptions provide in-depth insights into their decision making at each stage of a given criminal incident.[2]

For the present study, a total of 39 active shoplifters were interviewed. Participants were mostly male (71.8%), white (56.4%), currently employed (51.9%), and had obtained no higher than a high school diploma (92.3%). The average age was about 24 years old; the youngest was 18 years old and the oldest was 56 years old. Participants typically consumed on a weekly basis alcohol (79.5%) and marijuana (51.3%).

During interviews (the procedure for which is described below), we asked participants about their prior shoplifting experiences. Participants had shoplifted 7.95 times on average over the previous six months, with three as the modal number of stores shoplifted. They most commonly stole food (41.0%), followed by clothing (30.8%), health and beauty products (25.6%), electronics (25.6%), and alcohol (5.1%). The average number of items shoplifted at one time was two items, with an average value of $45.00. Participants most commonly targeted discount stores (66.7%), followed by grocery stores (48.7%) and department stores (46.2%); less common targets were drug stores (15.4%) and gas stations (15.4%). About a third of the sample had been caught by an employee while shoplifting; one-fifth had been arrested for this crime.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling and snowball sampling (see Jacques and Wright 2008; Wright et al. 1992). First, a purposive sample of college students was recruited in two ways: a trained graduate student recruited college students from classes with large enrollments (e.g., Introduction to Criminal Justice) at a large public university, and from a subject pool bank in the Department of Psychology; both forms of recruitment produced about 40% of the participants (80% total). Second, snowball sampling was used; initial recruits were asked to inform their associates (e.g., friends, family) about the study. Approximately 20% of the participants were recruited via snowball sampling. To remunerate participants for their time and effort, each was paid $75.

Qualitative interview data were collected by having participants "simulate"—that is, act out—shoplifting while wearing an eye-tracking device[3] and, immediately afterward, interviewing them about their decision making as they watched the video of their simulation. The simulations and interviews occurred at four stores of two nationally known chain retailers (i.e., two stores of each retailer). The retailers' managers allowed the research team full access to four stores in a

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[2]For a discussion of further strengths, see Jacques and Wright (2012) and Wright and Decker (1994).

[3]The eye-tracking device is a novel methodological tool in criminology, but it has been used in economics and marketing research to study how consumers choose products and brands in different types of displays and print advertisements (see, e.g., Chandon et al. 2008; Reutskaja et al. 2011). The eye-tracking device consists of two very small cameras mounted to a pair of black glasses with no lenses. The cameras are wired by a small cord to a laptop computer connected to a backpack-like device that straps through the participants' arms/shoulders and onto their back. The eye-tracking device is slim, weighs about five pounds, and is inconspicuous to persons more than a few feet away, as from that distance it looks like nothing more than someone with glasses who is also wearing a backpack. The eye-tracking device collects real-time data through a dual camera system. One camera is projected outward and records the wearer's line of sight, while another camera is projected toward the wearer's right eye and records its movement. In other words, the camera projected outward records the entire visual process as the wearer scans the store's layout, aisles, shelves, ceilings, other shoppers and store staff, whereas the camera projected inward records the distance between the movements of the other eye's gaze. The camera system thus simultaneously records the movement of one eye and the direct gaze of the other eye. Proprietary software is used to combine the two recordings into a single image that displays a reticle (i.e., "crosshair" or fixation cross) on what a person is specifically looking at within their line of sight during any given millisecond. The recorded images with the crosshair superimposed can be watched as a contemporaneous video.

metropolitan area located in the Midwest United States. Researchers spent two days at each store (four days total) during regular weekday store hours. At each site, only security personnel and a few selected employees (e.g., manager on duty) were aware of the ongoing study. Management also agreed not to arrest or to prosecute any participant for prior unsolved crimes or for stealing merchandise while participating in the research.

Data collection began with each shoplifter when he or she arrived at a pre-determined store's main entrance and was greeted by a research team member, and from there was escorted to a private interview room (e.g., employee break room, storage room) that was off-limits to employees during interviewing. After obtaining consent, the participant was fitted with the eye-tracking device. Then the participant was accompanied by a research team member to the outside of the store's main entrance. Once there, the team member relayed information to the participant to mentally prime them for the simulation. The participant was told (1) to shoplift as usual; (2) no employees—"except the manager"—or shoppers know of their role in the research and thus someone may attempt to apprehend them for shoplifting if spotted offending, and (3) should this occur, to cooperate with the individual, as the manager would immediately free them of any criminal wrongdoing.[4] Then the participant was sent inside the store to simulate shoplifting. The simulation involved the participant shoplifting items as he or she normally would; the items were later returned to the store by the researchers. The simulation was complete once the participant exited the store.

For our purposes, among the strengths of using the eye-tracking device is that it records exactly what a participant is looking at and for how long. The recording allows real-time documentation of the shoplifter's journey as they navigate the store and make decisions in search of items to steal. The real-time video provides both visual footage and audio streaming of the shoplifter's decision making that is not possible with previously used methods, such as verbal protocol in which participants walk through a store and talk hypothetically about shoplifting (see, e.g., Carmel-Gilfilen 2013; Carroll and Weaver 1986) or covert observations of shoplifters via closed circuit monitoring (Dabney, Hollinger, and Dugan 2004). The video recordings thus serve as valuable memory prompts during the interview process.

After the participant completed the simulation by exiting the store, a research team escorted the individual back to the interview room to begin the interview. There were three broad sets of questions. To begin, the participants were asked close-ended questions about their demographic characteristics (e.g., age, highest level of education attained, employment history), criminal involvements besides shoplifting (e.g., drug use or commission of offenses like assault), and criminal record (e.g., number of times arrested and imprisoned). This was immediately followed by closed- and open-ended questions about previous shoplifting experiences (e.g., types of stores usually targeted, items typically shoplifted, techniques used to shoplift). The third and final part of the interview involved the participants watching their respective eye-tracking video on a computer screen with the research team. Watching the video was done continuously frame by frame like a movie. The participants described their shoplifting journey through the store: for example, how and why they made decisions to move throughout the store and selected an item; shoplifting tactics adopted; which routes were taken and why. The video could be rewound or stopped at any point when the participant wanted to clarify or elaborate on their description or the research team

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[4]During the study, no participant was stopped and accused of shoplifting by an employee or bystander. However, a few employees mentioned to us in side conversations that they suspected—but did not witness—shoplifting by our participants.

had a probing question. Each narrative was audio and visually recorded. Once this part of the interview was completed, a research team member escorted the participant out of the store.

As with all interview-based studies, this one has limitations. One possibility is that simulated shoplifting does not adequately reflect real shoplifting. We asked participants whether they had shoplifted as they usually would during the simulation; 20 of our 38 participants reported "yes" (52.6%); 17 reported "kind of" (44.7%); and 1 said "no" (2.6%). Thus, almost all participants (97.3%) believed the simulation to at least partially mirror how they usually shoplift. A second possibility is that participants provided faulty information because they were unable to recall certain details, were intentionally lying, or were exaggerating in an effort to placate interviewers. To minimize these problems, participants were assured of confidentiality and asked to clarify any unusual, inconsistent, or evasive responses. Despite precautions taken to ensure internal validity, it is nonetheless possible that some participants provided inaccurate information.

The audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim. With the aid of a qualitative analysis software package, NVivo Version 10, the files were coded with identification tags corresponding to our research questions and emergent findings. The first stage of coding consisted of reading through each transcript and labeling its parts with broad tags to capture the stages of the shoplifters' journey, such as "entrance," "taking possession," and "exit." Next, two research team members filtered the broad tags several times to create smaller tags that classified and illuminated narrower areas. For instance, data coded as "taking possession" were then divided up into the various methods of doing so, such as "pocket" and "place in bag." These smaller tags gave way to emergent themes (such as normalcy), which categorized shoplifters' subjective perceptions and objective actions into areas identified by prior research (e.g., Goffman 1963, 1971) and by the participants themselves as relevant to understanding the execution of their offenses (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

SHOPLIFTERS' USES OF BODY GLOSS

There are three distinct stages in the shoplifter's journey. Stage I consists of entering the store and searching for a target. Stage II includes taking possession of the target and concealing it. The final stage, Stage III, is leaving the store; it involves moving toward the exit and walking through the doors, which concludes the journey. Below, we address the following questions: Do shoplifters use body gloss during each stage of the journey? If yes, do they use orientation, circumspection, and/or overplay? And how exactly do they apply the gloss?

Stage I: Entering and Searching For a Target

To appear as normal shoppers, shoplifters typically used orientation gloss when entering the store and searching for items to steal. In other words, they engaged "in . . . recognizable activity patently occasioned by objectives defined as the official ones for that time and place" (Goffman 1971:131; see also Goffman 1969). Participant 23 summed up the shoplifters' goal: "You come in, you want to be as non-apparent as possible, just like, 'Hey, I'm just minding my own business. Hey, nothing to see here.'" Various techniques of orientation gloss were used to achieve this objective. Recall that orientation gloss entails acting in a manner that provides evidence of proper commitment to the situation at hand.

Upon entrance, some shoplifters took a prop—namely a shopping cart—into their possession. They did so to look normal in that moment and in the future. Participant 35 explained, "I . . . [take a cart] . . . just as a distraction. [It helps] to get other items into my thing so I didn't look as suspicious." And Participant 30 told us, "[If I get] the big shopping cart, they're gonna expect me to have a lot of [big] items in [it]. [But] I'm not looking for the big items. I'm looking for small items [so I got a small handheld basket] . . . I think that would be the most logical thing."

The next step was to choose a normal-appearing route through the store. Participant 3 said, "I don't go down that first aisle 'cause when you go in down that first aisle real quick I feel like it looks sketchy. So I go a couple aisles over, kinda shopping around a bit, just looking around like [I] don't really have any kind of particular intention. I'm just kind of walking around looking at stuff like I was just browsing, shopping." As recounted by Participant 7, "I figured they [the employees] woulda expected me just to walk straight, so I went to the back of the store, a different aisle . . . so it kinda takes the pressure off me a bit."

Shoplifters extend their quest to appear normal while searching for a potential target's location. They "scan" as if they are looking for merchandise to purchase. Narrating his journey through the store, Participant 25 said, "Right now I'm just kinda like looking around, looking like I'm browsing, just kinda check this out." Scanning also serves the useful function of spotting hazards and items to pinch. As Participant 23 put it, "You always want to be scanning, just like your regular customer. . . . Something might catch your eye. 'Oh, what's this?' See the cameras back there." Similarly, Participant 38 noted, "I'm not moving too fast 'cause I want to look normal. I'm just shopping, just looking at different items. I see everything like locked down, completely locked down in electronics, so that aisle [is not a good place to shoplift]."

Scanning of merchandise is often followed by the detailed inspection of a product. To convey a legitimate identity, shoplifters inspected items other than those they intended to steal. Participant 35 explained the common rationale for this behavior: "[I looked at price tags on these items] just to look normal. . . . That's the first thing you do when you're shopping; you're looking at the prices of what the item costs." Likewise, Participant 34 told us, "I never intend on stealing it [the item inspected] . . . I'm supposed to be a shopper."

During their searches, some shoplifters asked employees for help in locating a product. Participant 23 explained this action: "[It] alleviates a lot of suspicion when you ask for help and they go get it [the item] for you. . . . [T]hey'll let you have it, and you go on about your business." Participant 6 made a similar comment: "[I asked an employee to show me to the item I intended to steal] just to make conversation, I guess. . . . Yeah, I'd prefer him to show me. . . . Just to knock out suspicion." Drawing on his own experience as a retail-store employee, Participant 4 detailed the importance of conversing with workers in order to appear as a normal shopper:

> **Participant 4:** I already knew that the electric tape was in the corner, but I just, when I saw it right there, I just needed something to ask her [an employee] about, just to give her something to do because I figured that she was trying to keep a close eye on me. . . . I worked at [a sporting goods store], so . . . you know how you're supposed to act when people come around. You just want to keep constant communication with the employees so then they won't think you're trying to do something mysterious.

The shoplifting techniques described above are orientation gloss for the very reason they are universally recognized shopping techniques. Shoppers take possession of a cart upon entering a store; choose a circuitous route through the store; scan for items; inspect them; and ask employees

for help. Recognizing all this, shoplifters carry out these activities to convey a shopper identity and commitment to that role.

Stage II: Take Possession and Conceal Target

Once a shoplifter has located an attractive target, the second stage is taking possession of the product and concealing it. At this point in the shoplifting journey, participants principally relied on circumspection gloss to ensure that their façades of normalcy were maintained in spite of their thievery. Recall that this type of gloss is defined by the provision of "gestural evidence . . . that intentions are honorable" (Goffman 1971:132). For the sake of clarity, note that a gesture is a small movement of the body (head, limbs, etc.) that expresses an emotion, idea, or another internal state.

As discussed in the previous section, shoplifters inspect items that they have no intention of stealing while on the road to the target products. Shoplifters also concerned themselves with displaying socially ascribed facial expressions while inspecting to-be-stolen items; this is circumspection gloss because the action is entirely gestural and intended as a way to dispel a *specific* threat—in this case the theft of a specific product. Participants saw the manipulation of facial expressions as particularly useful because doing so conveyed honorable intentions while simultaneously diverting attention away from their hands to their faces; as one person remarked:

> **Participant 24:** I think that I play it off [like I'm a shopper]. When you watch those hidden videos on shows of people stealing and stuff like that, they look so sketchy on camera; they're looking like this [nervous] and slipping stuff in their pocket. Just the way that my facial reactions [are] . . . like I'm reading the back [of the product label as if] I don't know if this is good. . . . Then I'll put it in [my pocket] like that; make it kinda so the box wouldn't stick out. Then I kinda look [at the product on the shelves], I look again; then I just kinda shake my head like nothing here is good.

Similar to the participant quoted above, the following shoplifter combined self-enactment and entering others' points of view in order to determine what facial expressions to mimic:

> **Participant 25:** I just looked at some other things. Then what started going through my head was that when I've seen people—me and my friends that have actually went and paid for condoms—it's always like a really awkward situation, so I was starting to think, "Alright, whoever is watching isn't gonna think anything is weird when I'm being real hesitant to pick up the condoms. They probably think I'm just self-conscious." So I just make it look like I was just uncomfortable with the whole situation.

Orientation gloss was relevant to the concealment process in one specific way. After shoplifters had picked up and, in some cases, inspected the item to steal, the following step was walking away from where the product was shelved. Participant 38 described this process: "I pick it up, [I'm] looking at it, acting like I might pay for it for my girlfriend or something. . . . I pick it up and walk off with it, get away from the area. . . . [Then] I ain't see nobody really watching me so it's easy to stuff in your pants." Participant 3 did something similar: "You pick something up, you walk around with it, you keep shopping as if you would normally do. . . . [T]hen slip it in your pocket when you have cover from a shelf away from a camera or something like that, or not by a camera." As suggested by that participant, it is normal for shoppers to pick up an item and then

continue shopping for other items by moving on; thus, when shoplifters pick up merchandise and walk elsewhere, they are employing orientation gloss.

When shoplifters do conceal items while potentially being watched in-person or remotely (e.g., on Closed Circuit Television [CCTV]), the method of concealment often involves applying body gloss. One widespread practice among participants was to use their phones as decoys while concealing merchandise. The gestural nature of this technique makes it circumspection gloss, as does its use to dispel a very specific threat: concealing a product. The shoplifter's intent with the phone is to deflect attention through appearing to be engaged in an activity unrelated to shopping but publicly acceptable in a normal shopping journey.

Holding or using a cell phone also offers an explanation for any movement of the shoplifter's hands in the vicinity of a purse or a pocket, as explained by Participant 30: "[I]f there's any movement from my hands to my pocket, most people I'm assuming are just gonna think . . . I'm picking up my money or I'm picking up my phone or my keys. So in the routine of it all, I don't think that our [most people] first thought process is that you're stealing; . . . your mind's gonna say she just picked up her cell phone." Participant 2 mentioned that this technique is able to outwit security personnel watching on cameras: "I had my cell phone on me. I put on my cell phone acting like I was texting somebody and put [the product] under the cell phone and then put both items—once I had my back to the camera, my back to the little mirror ball—I just put it in my pocket so it looks like to the camera I just put my cell phone back in my pocket."

Phones are not the only decoys employed in sleight-of-hand maneuvers. Some shoplifters direct their facial attention at specific, undesired products during the concealment process. These shoplifters assume that their facial expressions will distract observers' attention away from the concealment of a product. Participant 4 detailed how he enacted this technique of circumspection gloss: "[I] saw the Kool Aid in the corner but I didn't want to be too aggressive and go at it, so I just act as if I was browsing for something else. . . . I was doing that to look as though [I was shopping], 'cause when I picked up the electrical tape I wanted to pick something else to look as though I was looking for some type of home supplies to do some type of work with." This shoplifter pocketed his desired target (Kool Aid) while holding and appearing to inspect another product (electrical tape); he then decided to steal the electrical tape, as well, and repeated the concealment process by pocketing the tape while appearing to inspect a pair of clippers.

To summarize, our participants' techniques of possessing and concealing targets involve the use of circumspection gloss and, in one way, orientation gloss. The use of facial expressions while inspecting a product and reliance on sleight-of-hand (e.g., use of cell phones and other merchandise) to conceal the target involve circumspection gloss because they are defined by the use of gestures to dispel a specific threat. Orientation gloss was seen when shoplifters picked up a product and walked away from where it was shelved, as this is "recognizable activity patently occasioned by objectives defined as the official ones for" shopping (Goffman 1971:131). Such an action is useful for deflecting attention and, in some instances, bringing shoplifters to a spot where no one was watching.

Stage III: Exit with Target(s)

Shoplifters can move back and forth between Stage I and Stage II by searching for a target, concealing it, and then searching for another target. But once the shoplifter decides he or she

is finished, the final stage of the shoplifting journey unfolds: leaving the store. This portion of the journey was considered the most taxing by some shoplifters, especially for those who believed that store employees are powerless to apprehend them until they have left the store with concealed merchandise. At this final stage, shoplifters used orientation gloss and, in one circumstance, circumspection gloss to appear as a normal shopper. The participants' aims were to act out what they believed to be the customary actions of exiting shoppers.

The first decision involved in transitioning from concealment to walking out the door is what route to take. Shoplifters often chose circuitous routes to the store's exit, working under the belief that this made them appear to be browsing as opposed to leaving. In this way, a shoplifter could approach the exit without signaling such. For example, Participant 25 explained how he exited: "[I left the store] in a meandering way. Just kinda act like I was looking for things but wasn't a hundred percent sure on what I wanted, making it look like they didn't really have exactly what I was interested in. . . . I'm kinda just walking, kinda looking around the store, making it look like I just, not really sure what I want to buy, if I want to buy anything."

Circuitous exit routes are chosen so shoplifters can repeat the scanning and product inspection of their initial searches. Participant 18 recounted, "I decide to walk back through the store a little bit, make it look like I'm still shopping, still looking around for stuff. . . . I'm just looking around right now to make it look natural like I didn't really take anything. Just kinda doing my thing, shopping." Participant 29 described her actions following concealment: "There [I put the item in my purse]. Now I'm shopping so I . . . picked up a [greeting] card to make myself not look suspicious. . . . So, I'm stopping, I'm looking like I'm shopping, looking at the greeting card and then I go on and get [buy] the greeting card." And Participant 4 decided to inspect items that other people, he thought, would expect according to his demographic characteristics: "It's common for like a college student to look for like cereal and stuff like that, so that's why I spent a little of my time in this area because it seemed obvious, 'Oh, he's just getting something to take back to his dorm or to his apartment.' I was just acting as if I was reading the labels, looking for a specific style of Pop-Tarts."

Exiting a store necessarily involves choosing whether to make a purchase of an item. About a third of our participants chose to buy something. Most explained doing so in order to maintain the appearance of shopping. As Participant 16 told us, "[I purchased an item] because if you come to a store and they see you leave with nothing I think that they'd be more suspicious than if you come in and actually buy something. 'Cause usually, I'd say 90% of the time, if you go into a store you're gonna buy something there." Similarly, Participant 33 said, "[If] you come into a store and you walk out with nothing, it's like, 'What the fuck did she just steal? What did she just take?' But when you buy something, they're not gonna be as suspicious." Participant 18 echoed that idea: "If the employee thinks you're stealing something and you buy something in front of them I guess it kinda makes it look like you're not stealing anything. It kinda gives you that trust factor."

Not all participants felt that making a purchase was worth it and, therefore, most left the store without making one. These shoplifters recognized that normal shoppers frequently enter, browse, and leave stores without purchasing anything; as explained by Participant 34, "[I didn't purchase anything] because people come in the stores every day and not make purchases and walk out. A lot of times you don't find what you're looking for and you just walk back on out."

Shoplifters who opted not to make a purchase often switched from orientation gloss to circumspection gloss to deflect suspicion as to why no purchase was being made. A commonly mentioned way of doing so was to dial and talk to an individual on one's cell phone—or to fake

these acts. Participant 7 preferred making an actual phone call, as during his exit he had "my phone out talking to someone, like actually calling someone on the phone." Participant 24 got on his phone when exiting "to keep people thinking I'm more interested in my phone than anything else." A benefit of a phone call, real or fake, is it can be used to broadcast a legitimate reason to leave the store. Participant 24 engaged in a fictional conversation to explain his apparently empty-handed exit: "I pretend like I use the phone walking out. [I] tell him [the imaginary person] I'm gonna meet him out in the front. . . . Right before this I pull out my phone and I started saying, 'Yeah, I'll meet you out front 'cause I can't find what you're looking for.' . . . I even passed this employee right here on my right and I made sure when I walked past him I made sure I said [that]."

As demonstrated in the above quotes, shoplifters ventured out of the store while using orientation gloss and, if they chose not to pay for any products, circumspection gloss. They chose to take a particular route, browse, inspect items, and purchase merchandise because they reasoned this is done by normal shoppers. Other participants passed on the opportunity to make a purchase due to thinking that is not required of all shoppers. Yet these individuals typically replaced orientation gloss with circumspection gloss by displaying gestures that signaled the importance of their phone call to others.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A number of scholars have noted that criminals, including shoplifters, attempt to appear normal while offending (see, e.g., Caputo 2008; Cherbonneau and Copes 2006; Copes, Hochstetler, and Cherbonneau 2012; Jacobs 1999, 2000, 2012; Katz 1988; Wright and Decker 1994, 1997). However, no prior published study has sought to categorize those actions in a theoretically informed way. To fill that void and take a step toward a complete theory of normalcy-portrayals by offenders, this article has drawn on Goffman's (1971) typology and notion of body gloss— gestural evidence that an individual's actions are normal and in line with what others expect according to the situation at hand.

We found that shoplifters seek to avoid detection and punishment as thieves by using two of the three types of body gloss specified by Goffman. Specifically, they use orientation gloss and circumspection gloss, but not overplay gloss. The timing of orientation and circumspection gloss largely depended on the stage of the shoplifting journey. Figure 1 is a graphic summary of shoplifters' typical use of body gloss at each stage of the shoplifting journey.

Orientation gloss was mostly used during the first and final stages of the shoplifting journey: entering and searching for targets, and exiting the store. Participants adopted a range of behaviors stereotypically associated with shopping to allay the suspicion of others, such as getting a shopping cart, taking circuitous routes through the store, scanning for items, inspecting them, asking questions of employees, and paying for merchandise (other than what they stole).

Circumspection gloss was most relevant when taking possession of and concealing to-be-pilfered merchandise. Shoplifters sought to dissipate onlookers' doubts about whether a specific item was about to be stolen. This was accomplished through detailed gestures, including inquisitive or strained facial expressions and sleight-of-hand tricks involving decoys (e.g., cell phones and other products). Also, shoplifters who chose not to pay for any merchandise—and thus did not employ that specific technique of orientation gloss—compensated by using their cell phones to gesture (i.e., circumspection gloss) that there was more important business to attend to than shopping or that the store did not have the fictionally desired merchandise.
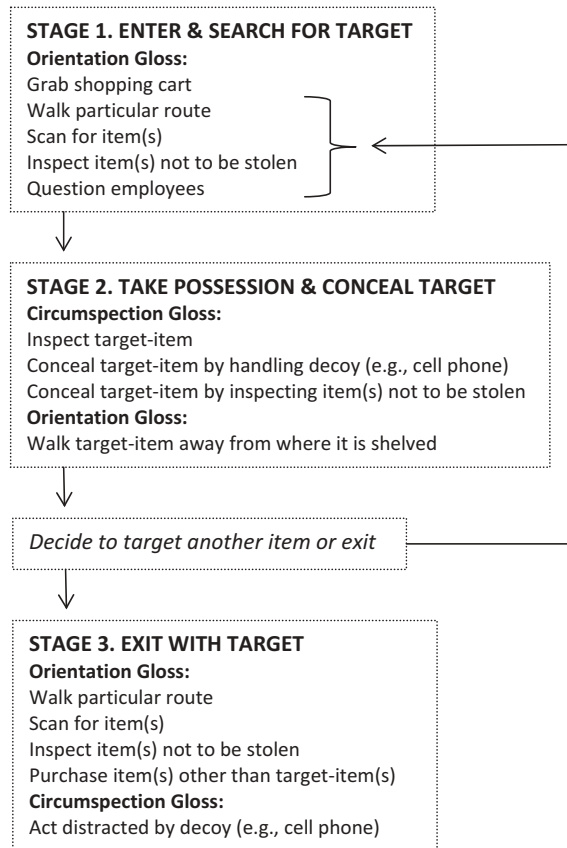
STAGE 1. ENTER & SEARCH FOR TARGET
Orientation Gloss:
Grab shopping cart
Walk particular route
Scan for item(s)
Inspect item(s) not to be stolen
Question employees

STAGE 2. TAKE POSSESSION & CONCEAL TARGET
Circumspection Gloss:
Inspect target-item
Conceal target-item by handling decoy (e.g., cell phone)
Conceal target-item by inspecting item(s) not to be stolen
Orientation Gloss:
Walk target-item away from where it is shelved

Decide to target another item or exit

STAGE 3. EXIT WITH TARGET
Orientation Gloss:
Walk particular route
Scan for item(s)
Inspect item(s) not to be stolen
Purchase item(s) other than target-item(s)
Circumspection Gloss:
Act distracted by decoy (e.g., cell phone)

FIGURE 1 Shoplifters' typical body gloss techniques throughout shoplifting journey.

In hindsight, it makes sense—theoretically speaking—that orientation gloss and circumspection gloss usually occurred when they did. Circumspection gloss is by definition the use of gestural evidence to dispel specific threats; during the shoplifting journey, the only time a specific threat is visible to onlookers is when the thief takes a to-be-stolen item into possession and conceals it. At other times, a shoplifter is either searching, browsing, or on the way out; while the motive behind those actions is deviant, the actions are not deviant in of themselves. As such, shoplifters are engaging in orientation gloss, as by definition it involves doing whatever activity is normal for that situation.

Our research raises the question of why shoplifters did not use overplay gloss. One possibility is that for overplay gloss to be enacted, the seriousness of the infraction must be relatively minor and thus possible to joke about. This relates to the nature of overplay gloss, as it involves bringing playful attention to the transgression, rather than covering it up. To bring attention to a crime-in-progress may not be a good idea. In theory, for instance, our participants could have made funny faces while scanning for and inspecting items; doing so, however, would have drawn attention

to a deviant act—shoplifting—that would be too serious for store employees to forgive, even if committed in a hilarious manner.

A second conjecture is that overplay gloss may only be used when the negative consequence of a deviant act is perceived as very unlikely. An anecdotal example—from one author's past—comes to mind. A member of his high school clique worked the register at an ice cream and cake store. On a few occasions, when nobody else was at the store, he allowed his friends to take a cake without paying. With each new theft, the shoplifting friends became increasingly comfortable with this thievery due to gaining certainty that no punishment would result. A consequence of this safe feeling was they began to flaunt their crimes, such as the time one thief did a Deion Sanders-esque "high step" out the door while holding a boxed cake like a football, as if he was about to score a touchdown. Although criminal, this joking behavior mirrors the examples of overplay gloss provided by Goffman (1971), such as while "[r]unning across part of a hotel lobby so as not to miss friends who are leaving, an individual 'overruns,' mockingly throwing himself into a gestured race that would carry him considerably faster were it part of actual running" (p. 135). Taken together, the above ideas suggest that for a person to feel "safe" enough to perform deviance in a playful manner (i.e., use overplay gloss), they must first perceive the severity and odds of punishment as practically nil.

Looking forward, criminology would benefit from more a more conceptual, albeit theoretically oriented, focus on normalcy in various types of crimes. How and why might other types of offenders—such as robbers, burglars, and auto thieves—rely on each type of body gloss during various stages of offenses? This question could be addressed, in part, by using cases found in the literature as secondary data. Consider two examples reviewed in this article's introduction: an auto thief who follows the rules of the road is engaged in orientation gloss because that behavior is normal for that situation; and, when confronted, a burglar who responds by saying "I lookin' for so and so" is using circumspection gloss, as this phrase is meant to dispel a specific threat.

After categorizing such cases, researchers should seek to uncover the circumstances that lead offenders to use particular body glass techniques or turn to another prevention strategy (see Jacques and Reynald 2012). Based on our findings, we tentatively conjecture that offenders will largely rely on orientation gloss when they are doing something that is technically not criminal (i.e., immediately before or after an offense), will employ circumspection gloss when they have begun an offense (e.g., by trespassing on to-be-burgled property), and refrain from overplay gloss unless their crime is minor or all but certain to go unpunished. Again, these are tentative propositions. Future work should aim to determine when, why, and how different offender types cover themselves in different types of gloss.

A limitation of our study is it does not explore which factors affect variation between shoplifters and stores in the use of body gloss, as we have sought to paint a general picture. Thus, the next logical step in the area of shoplifting research is to investigate whether displays of normalcy are affected by an offender's traits (e.g., race, age, gender, expertise, and emotions), the objects being shoplifted (e.g., size and value), or a store's characteristics (e.g., level of security). For example, circumspection gloss may take on greater importance in stores with more security cameras because they are focused on capturing specific threats. Also, which type of body gloss technique is employed may be affected by expertise and emotions. It is easy to imagine that shoplifters who are nervous and novices will not want to engage in conversation with someone who could apprehend them. By examining such relationships, researchers will better understand

how offenders create and subsequently negotiate the scripts they use for their offenses (Cornish 1994; see, e.g., Copes et al., 2012).

This article closes with an irony: trying to act normal can be cast as deviant. Individuals engaging in high-stakes deceit give off non-verbal cues that bring attention to their malicious intentions (Katz 1988; Vrij 2008). Such giveaways occur more often as a person becomes more motivated—and thus nervous—to avoid being discredited. Accordingly, the harder one tries to control every behavioral facet, the likelier is overacting and thus the worse a performance becomes (Baumeister 1982). That appears to be true whether one is shoplifting or hiding another kind of stigma (Goffman 1963). Clearly, then, it may be beneficial for shoplifting prevention personnel to receive training in general deceit techniques. Store employees have been, and probably always will be, the front line in apprehending shoplifters and, better yet, deterring thievery before it occurs (Shteir 2011). Doing so requires that employees play a sort of game with offenders (Goffman 1969). Just as shoplifters try to figure out how to construct an illusion of normal shopping, so too must employees attempt to discern what *trying to construct that illusion* looks like. That is a subtle distinction, but the same can often be said about the difference between what is perceived to be normal or deviant.

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