“Five Minutes”

Attitudes, Empathy and Self-Esteem levels of People who park Illegally in Disabled Spaces

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1 Introduction</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Rationale</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Attitudes</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Self Esteem</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Empathy</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Social, Cognitive, &amp; Behavioural</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Main Research Hypotheses</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2 Methodology</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Participants</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Design</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Materials</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Procedure</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3 Results</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Results Overview</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Quantitative Results</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Qualitative results</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Post Hoc Analysis of Cognitive Dissonance</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 Discussion</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Discussion</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Conclusion</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1 Front Cover of Survey</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2 Questionnaires</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate if the variables of; attitudes to disabled persons or designated parking spaces, correlated with the variables of self esteem or empathy. Additionally, participants who parked in designated spaces without a permit were invited to state why. Specifically the construct of convenience was examined in relation to parking behaviour. A mixed method quantitative and qualitative survey design was undertaken. Participants (N=113) were invited to complete self reporting questionnaires online or in hard copy format. No significant correlations were demonstrated between the main variables. However analysis did demonstrate that convenience was a significant reason for misusing designated spaces. The element of cognitive dissonance was demonstrated quantitatively through a Cramers V analysis and also qualitatively. Overall 89.3% of participants agreed it is unethical to misuse designated parking, 73.9% of those who did misuse spaces believed it was unethical to do so.
1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organisation, it is estimated that over one billion people worldwide live with some form of disability; this corresponds to 15% of the world's population (World Health Organisation, 2015). The attitudes prevalent, coupled with understandings in society of disabilities, should be considered critical in order that the barriers, both social and physical which can obstruct access to valued social roles and lives within the community at large are to be removed (Sims & Whisker, 2015). As far back as the nineteenth century it was understood that an individual's life was made possible only by due performance of their functions in the place within which they existed. (Spencer, 1872)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities describes disability in terms of the functional status of an individual, arising as the outcome of their interaction between both society and the environment. This can be manifested as a physical, sensory, mental or intellectual impairment limiting their capacity for social participation which can be aggravated by the economic and social environment (United Nations, 2015). Moreover, they describe discrimination as a restriction based on a disability having the effect of impairing the rights and dignity of the individual. Irish statuette law describes disability in relation to the person as:

a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in the social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment. (Disability Act, 2005)
1.1 Rationale

The right to freedom of movement is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and outlines the right of everyone to freedom of movement within the state which they legally reside (United Nations, 1945). Movement in modern day Ireland, particularly in rural areas involves the use of a motor vehicle. For persons with disabilities the use of a car to exercise this basic human right can be considered more of a necessity than a choice. When travelling by car to and from urban areas, the parking space availability could arguably be considered as necessary for the success of the journey as the fuel required to run the vehicle, in instances where the driver / passenger is physically disabled. National governments throughout the developed world recognise that financial concessions should be made for the purchase of vehicles by persons with disabilities, in recognition of the importance of the ability to travel as a facet to quality of life (Gov.UK, 2015; United States Federal Government, 2009) In Ireland persons who fulfil specific medical criteria and hold a primary medical certificate are entitled to relief in respect of vehicle registration tax, and value added tax when purchasing a new vehicle (Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland, 2015). Adherence to the laws regarding designated spaces, it is argued should be considered equally as important as financial subsidies, if persons with disabilities are to be allowed to live their lives in a way described in the articles above. This present study looks at levels of adherence and reasons for non-adherence.
Irish building regulations require that parking spaces reserved for disabled permit holders described as *designated parking bays* should have a 1200mm wide access zone on either side and to their rear, with a 2600mm vertical clearance in order to allow for the access of high top conversion vehicles, where height restrictions prevent this, sufficient signage warning of restrictions as well as directions to alternate suitable spaces should be provided. Designated parking bays should be easily located and it is recommended that each reserved parking space displays a vertically mounted or suspended sign showing the accessibility logo (Government Publications, 2010) in practice however this does not always occur.

While local authorities are not legally obliged to provide designated parking bays on public roads, a certain number of spaces are made available by local authorities to on street parking, as well as local authority car parks and public buildings. Commercial buildings such as offices and supermarkets, while legally obliged to provide accessibility to the approaches of buildings, such as ramps, as well as internal facilities to assist persons with disabilities, are also under no legal obligation to provide parking spaces reserved for disability permit holders (Citizens Information Board, 2015). It is however recommended that at least 5% of parking spaces, with a minimum of one space, in commercial settings are reserved for disabled permit holders (Environment Heritage and Local Government, 2010).

Parking fines of €80 can be imposed on drivers parking illegally in designated bays under local authority control, rising to €120 if not paid within 28 days, and clamping is also in operation for offenders in the Dublin, Cork and Galway regions (Road Traffic Act, 2002). However no penalties can be imposed by Garda or traffic wardens for
parking illegally in commercial car-parks, and while private contractors can clamp vehicles parked illegally in these designated spaces, anecdotally this is rarely if ever done. Scottish Government Social Research (2007) has shown abuse of disabled parking bays is more likely to occur in supermarkets/commercial settings than on the public highway due to a belief that prosecution if apprehended is highly unlikely, and a perception that there is an over capacity of disabled parking spaces. The perception of over capacity has been reiterated within popular newsprint media (Martin, 2010). Popular media has also highlighted abuse of designated parking spaces, but generally this occurs when there is an additional newsworthy component such as a “celebrity” element (Rabbitts, 2015). One U.S study noted illegal parking rates in supermarket car-park spaces reserved for permit holders at between 44% and 76% (Taylor, 1998). This present study through its qualitative element allows for individuals who have misused disabled parking spaces generally, to describe the situation within which this occurred as well as their reasons for doing so.

Over 1800 drivers on average per year between the years of 2010 and 2014 were penalised for parking illegally in spaces reserved for disabled parking permit holders in the greater Dublin area covered by the regions of South Dublin Co. Council (C. Nolan, personal communication October 1st 2015), Dunlaoghaire Rathdown (T. Byrne personal communication October 2nd 2015) and Fingal (K.Walsh personal communication October 5th 2015). No figures are currently available for illegal parking in designated spaces at facilities run by commercial organisations.
Types of parking abuse can vary beyond simply parking in a space reserved for those holding a valid disabled parking permit; counterfeit permits, borrowing a genuine permit, stolen permits, out of date permits, as well as the use of deceased relative’s permits have all been uncovered when investigating this phenomenon in the United States (Essex, 2015) Similar findings were uncovered in Scotland where use of stolen, borrowed and fraudulent permits were noted (Scottish Government Social Research, 2007)

While no known academic studies have been conducted in Ireland as to the reasons why people park illegally in this way, studies internationally have shown that “convenience” features prominently as a reason given for doing so (Tierney, 2002; Fletcher, 2001; Scottish Government Social Research, 2007). The difficulties that this causes those legitimately holding a disabled parking permit are thought not to be fully understood by perpetrators. Recent studies have focused on the attitudes of those who misuse designated spaces, concentrating on amongst others, the cognitive, behavioural and affective components of this attitude. (Yahaya & Zain, 2014; Tierney, 2002)

The present study looks to gain an understanding into the reasons behind the attitudes of individuals who illegally use parking spaces reserved for disabled drivers. Any relationships that may exist between attitudes held, self esteem levels, empathy levels and this behaviour are investigated. An examination of the role convenience may have in this behaviour is also examined.
1.2 Attitudes

Historically there has been much debate and many evolving opinions into both the importance of attitudes and their function within society at large. From LaPiere’s seminal article in the 1930s, questions have been asked as to the validity of a measurement of attitudes as a predictor of behaviour (LaPiere, 1934). Daniel Katz has described the attitudes of individuals as the raw material from which public opinion emerges, acknowledging amongst many influences, the role of mass media in their formation (Katz, 1960). In 1954 Gordon Allport emphasised the importance of attitudes, describing them as indispensible, and the most distinctive concept in the field of American social psychology (Allport, as cited in Kalampalakis, Delouvee, & Petard, 2006) Six years later while discussing the nature of prejudice, Allport acknowledged the relevance of managed social settings in the formation of attitudes, (Allport, 1962). It is argued in the present study that all designated parking spaces should be seen as existing within social settings.

Icek Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behaviour, (Azjen, 1991) demonstrates the importance of Attitude, which along with Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC), combines with intention to predict behavioural outcomes. More recent investigations of Fishbein and Azjek’s work describe PBC as “the ease or difficulty in enacting a behaviour” while reiterating its importance through a combination with attitude to allow for behavioural predictability (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2014). The element of convenience described above, it is argued, can be seen as somewhat synonymous with the “ease or difficulty of enacting a behaviour” described by Michaelidou & Hassan.
Through the use of social learning principles Yahaya & Zain (2014) developed persuasive multimedia technology through a utilisation of the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning and it’s rationale that learning occurs more deeply through the coupling of words with pictures, than through words alone (Mayer, 2005). By measuring attitudes under the component headings of affective, cognitive and behavioural utilising an adapted version of the Multi-Dimensional Attitudes Scale toward Persons with Disabilities (MAS) (Findler, Vilchinsky, & Werner, 2007) Yahaya and Zain demonstrated a capacity to change attitudes towards persons with disabilities in a positive manner, particularly amongst the male participants of the experiment under the cognitive heading. A further connection between cognisance and attitudes was first demonstrated by Robert Festinger, through his introduction of the concept of Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger, 1957), whereby a contradiction occurs between an attitude and subsequent behaviour resulting in a feeling of cognitive unease. Simon, Greenberg, & Brehm (1995) describe the trivialisation which can occur in an attempt to alleviate cognitive dissonance. The present study examines any apparent contradictions which may occur whereby a participant expresses an attitude that the misuse of designated parking is unethical, and subsequently states that they have misused a designated space.

While contextuality has been examined in a number of studies, (Scottish Government Social Research, 2007; Taylor, 1998; Cope & Allred, 1990) generally the context referred to is that of the environment within which a behaviour occurs.

The present study explores context by comparing answers to the question “do you know someone with a disabled parking permit? “ with answers relating to specific incidents of designated parking abuse, to ascertain whether there is a greater or lesser
likelihood of designated parking abuse where a participant is familiar with someone holding a disabled permit. Langer, Bashner, & Chanowitz, (1985) outline the difference between appropriate and inappropriate discrimination towards persons with disabilities describing how familiarity with individual with a disability can lead to a more positive attitude towards persons with disabilities in general.

1.3 Self-Esteem

The predictive validity of self-esteem has been reiterated and defended by Swann, Chang-Schneider, & Larsen-McClarty, (2007) and Yelsma & Yelsma (1998) who describe how the self-esteem level measurement of an individual may predict their attitudes towards others. More recent work in this area has been carried out to examine self-esteem levels in relation to the Big Five personality factors, addressing specifically the perspectives of cultural norm-fulfilment, interpersonal belonging, and getting ahead as potential drivers for the ability to get along with others within society. (Gebauer, et al., 2015). The construct of self-esteem and its relationship to attitudes towards persons with physical disabilities has been explored by Findler et al. as part of their development of the MAS (2007) as described above. High self-esteem levels were found to correlate with a positive attitude towards persons with disabilities, confirming previous findings.

The Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg M., 1965) has in the past been criticised for its transparency, leading to the accusation that all ten questions correlate to the statement “I have high self-esteem” (Robins, Hendin & Trzesniewski, as cited in Baron & Branscombe, 2006) However its validity has been demonstrated through item analysis which supports its unidimensionality to produce a global self-esteem score
(McKay, Boduszek, & Harvey, 2014). Discussions on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale continue, specifically as to whether it measures, global or specific self-esteem.

Rosenberg et al., (1995) have addressed the cognitive and affective elements of attitude and in doing so confirmed that self-esteem is in itself an attitude, albeit to oneself. Additionally they emphasise the difference between global self-esteem, described as “the individuals positive or negative attitude toward the self as a totality” and specific self-esteem as relating to specific facets to which the individual places specific importance. While Rosenberg et al. describe how behaviour can be predicted through both constructs, they describe the behavioural predictability of specific self-esteem is greater than that of global self-esteem. The present study looks to examine the attitude of participants to designated parking, and also their attitude to persons with disabilities in general, it is suggested that the former may be inferred as relating to specific, and the latter to global self-esteem.

1.4 Empathy

(Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972) describe empathy measurement methods as having evolved under two distinct headings, firstly that of cognitive-role taking whereby an individual, in a neutral and detached manner can imagine and predict the feelings thoughts and actions of another. Secondly through a vicarious emotional response whereby an individual will not only cognitively attempt to predict the feelings of another but will also at a certain level share those feelings albeit at “gross affect (pleasant-unpleasant) level”. Spreng, McKinnon, Mar, & Levine, (2009) reference more recent studies into the cognitive versus emotional empathy perspectives, citing amongst others the Preston & de Waal, (2002) study where empathy was shown to exist amongst
conspecific animals which appeared to lack any cognitive basis, also describing empathy which could be termed as emotional rather than cognitive among human infants up to fourteen months old, arguably pointing to the innate existence of empathy across species. Further studies carried out by Hong, Kwon, & Jeon (2014) suggest empathy levels evident in preschool children aged four to five are very prevalent in relation to their disabled peers, somewhat in contrast to earlier studies. Additionally Hong et al., (2014) suggest that understandings gained by children about disabilities will coincide with positive feelings they experience toward persons with disabilities. Equally, the more positively they feel towards persons with disabilities the more their understanding of disabilities will increase. Spreng et al., (2009) describe the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) which is used in this present study as representing empathy as “primarily an emotional process”. It is therefore hoped that through this study any empathy levels noted correlating to attitudes towards persons with disabilities and/or designated parking spaces will be considered under the emotional empathy heading.

An Olkin & Pledger (2003) study discusses the role of psychology within the field of disability studies and emphasises the importance of the aspiration of full social as well as educational, economic and political inclusion, of persons with disabilities as central to the field. They further describe how psychology should look to move beyond its role as an adjunct to rehabilitation in this area. It is hoped that in a small way this study may utilise elements of social, behavioural and cognitive psychology in order to contribute to more effective approaches which may then be utilised to assist in delivering on some of the aspirations described above.
1.5 Social, Behavioural & Cognitive

The social psychology perspective has previously been adopted in relation to studies regarding persons with disabilities. Christina Taylor conducted a study on altruism in relation to the persons with disabilities, finding that persons displaying a physical disability were treated more favourably than those who did not. In addition she noted that the presence of nearby confederates in wheelchairs significantly reduced the number of disabled parking space violations occurring (Taylor, 1998). From a behavioural perspective the use of the confederate could be seen as the utilisation of a contextual control which subsequently caused a change of choice (of behaviour) within a repertoire.

A Cope & Allred, (1990) study into disabled parking space abuse outlined difficulties with the behavioural approach finding that in many instances where observational methods of data collection were used, the presence of the visible observer was seen as having a confounding effect on results. A separate exercise where interviews were carried out randomly in shopping malls found that the number of respondents stating they would never misuse a disabled parking space, was found not to correspond to what was observed, suggesting the presence of the interviewer led to response bias (Cope & Allred, 1990). It is hoped that the anonymity guaranteed in the present study will in some way control for this by negating the social desirability present within this confounding variable.

The American Psychological Association has reiterated the pivotal role psychological research can play in understanding the social and emotional aspects of human behaviour in relation to persons with disabilities. (American Psychological Association, 2012) The role of cognitive psychology in relation to disabled studies has
in many instances been addressed directly to persons with disabilities in order to assist in improving life quality (Archer, et al., 2013). The psychological link between cognition and attitudes in general has been accepted and continues to be explored (van Giesen, Fischer, van Dijk, & van Trip, 2015). The relevance of examining cognition and it’s relationship to attitudes towards persons with physical disabilities continues to be demonstrated (Krahe & Altwasser, 2006; Park, Faulkner, & Schaller, 2003). It is hoped that this present study can in a small way contribute to gaining a further understanding into the role of cognitive processes in attitude formation in relation to persons with physical disabilities.

1.6 **The main research hypotheses for this study are:**

1. There will be a significant relationship between self-esteem level scores and attitudes towards persons with physical disabilities.

2. There will be a significant relationship between self-esteem level scores and attitudes towards parking spaces designated for disabled permit holders.

3. There will be a significant relationship between empathy level scores and attitudes towards designated parking spaces.

4. There will be a significant relationship between empathy level scores and attitudes to persons with physical disabilities.
5. There will be a significant difference in the parking behaviour of participants who know someone with a disabled parking permit and those who don’t.

6. There will be significant differences in relation to attitudes towards convenience as a legitimate reason for parking in a designated space without a valid permit, between participants who have done so and those who have not.

7. A further aim is to interpret in as far as possible from any qualitative data collected, any differences in propensity to park illegally in designated spaces on public roads or in private commercial settings, and to further explore to what extent if any the role convenience plays in this behaviour.
2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

One hundred and thirteen participants (N=113, M=27, F=86) were selected through non-probability sampling, using a mix of convenience, snowball and self selection methods. Convenience and snowball through face-book and blind copy emails, from which participants completed an on-line series of questionnaires. Self selection was undertaken by recruiting participants through obtaining permission from a DBS lecturer to hand out hard copy questionnaires during class.

Age categories were divided into five ranges; 17-21, (N=3), 22-30 (N=13), 31-45 (N=59), 46-60 (N=61), 61+ (N=7). Specific ages were not asked for in an effort to further reassure participants that their anonymity would not be compromised. Seven participants (N=7) stated that they used a disabled parking permit, after much consideration it was decided not to exclude the data generated from these participants as this study was aimed at understanding the attitudes of all participants without any discrimination on the basis of disability.

2.2 Design

A mixed method quantitative and qualitative survey design was undertaken. Participants were required to answer all questions in the survey excluding the qualitative question, which was optional. The quantitative element was both correlational and cross-sectional. The correlational element involved categorising self esteem and empathy levels as predictor variables. Attitudes to persons with disabilities and to designated parking spaces were categorised as criterion variables. Cross
sectional analysis was made between the nominal variables of knowing a disability permit holder and parking in a designated space or not using a Chi square test of independence. Significant differences between the dependent (scale) variable of convenience and the independent (nominal) variable of parking in a designated space or not, were investigated using an independent samples T-test. The qualitative element involved comments on the statement, *If you do not have a disabled parking permit but park in spaces reserved for those who do, please explain why* and were analysed under the themes of convenience, cognitive dissonance and the associated dissonance alleviation mode of trivialisation as well as from a general information perspective.

2.3 Materials

The first questionnaire entitled Disabled Parking Questionnaire was adapted from a questionnaire originally entitled Handicapped Parking Questionnaire which was designed by an American researcher to be used as part of her research paper submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for a master of science degree (Tierney, 2002). This questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part one consisted of demographic questions (age, gender) and questions relating to the participant’s familiarity with disabled parking permits, and those who may use them. Part 2 consisted of ten questions, nine of which were answered on a likert scale, no internal reliability or validity measures are available for this test (this is further detailed in the discussion section). The questionnaire explores attitudes to parking spaces designated for holders of disability permits (questions; 1, 2, 5 and 9); attitudes to persons with disabilities (questions 3 & 4), and attitudes to convenience as a legitimate reason for
parking in designated spaces (questions 6, 7 & 8). Scores for each question are totalled, higher means denote positive attitudes. The final question was qualitative, to be answered only by participants without a valid disabled parking permit who park in designated spaces, and asked specifically for reasons as to why they had done so. The second questionnaire was the Rosenberg self esteem questionnaire (Rosenberg, 1965), a 10 item 4 point likert scale questionnaire designed to measure levels of self esteem, with points ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. Questions 2,5,6,8 & 9 are reverse scored to ensure internal reliability consistency. Cronbachs alpha for this test has been described as within a range of .77 to .88 (University of Maryland, n.d). The third questionnaire was the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Spreng, McKinnon, Mar, & Levine, 2009) which consists of sixteen questions to be answered on a 5 point likert scale ranging from ‘never to ‘always, designed to measure the empathy levels of participants. Questions 2,4,10,11 & 12 are reverse scored to ensure internal reliability consistency. Spreng et al., (2009) note a Cronbachs alpha of .85

The SPSS (Version 22) statistical package was used to analyze all data collected, on a Toshiba laptop.

2.4 Procedure

On the 8th of January 2016 a survey consisting of the three questionnaires described above was posted online using google docs. to create a shortened url website address which could be accessed anonymously. A cover sheet describing the purpose of the study as investigating attitudes to persons with physical disabilities and their designated parking spaces appeared before the questionnaires. Also included on the cover sheet was information on help lines available should participants find any issues
described upsetting, and a statement assuring anonymity and advising that information once given could not be deleted. Copies of the url address with a request to complete the survey and pass to other potential participants were sent out via face-book. Access to the website was closed on the 13th of February 2016. Ten hard copy versions of the questionnaires were distributed to DBS students unknown to the researcher on the 12th of February 2016, and completed copies were placed in envelope, details of these and the online replies were first transferred to an Excel spreadsheet and then coded to SPSS for analysis.
3. Results

3.1 Results Overview

Table 1 describes statistically the predictor and criterion variables, and the construct of convenience, enabling simple comparisons between each and all of the variables to be made. No significant correlations were demonstrated between any of the predictor and criterion variables, exact correlation figures are described in table 2. Qualitative analysis using thematic methodology recommended by (Braun & Clark, 2006) was undertaken in relationship to the answers given to question 7, full details are described under the qualitative results section. Cronbachs alpha for Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale =.79, for TEQ = .85. Attitudes to Designated Parking subscale .11, Attitudes to Persons with Disabilities = .43 and to Convenience = .74

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Attitudes to Designated Parking</th>
<th>Attitudes to Convenience</th>
<th>Self Esteem</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
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<td>14.12</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>19.80</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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\(N = 113\)
Table 2: Correlation Table

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<td>Attitudes to Designated Spaces</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
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<td>0.10</td>
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3.2 Quantitative Results

1. A Pearson's correlation coefficient found no significant relationship between attitudes to persons with disabilities (M=3.61, SD = 1.18) and self esteem levels (M=19.80, SD = 3.75) (r(108), = -0.15, p = 0.119). Therefore the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

2. A Pearson's correlation coefficient found no significant relationship between attitudes to towards parking spaces designated for disabled permit holders (M=14.12, SD = 1.94) and self esteem levels (M=19.80, SD = 3.75) (r(108), = 0.001, p = 0.991). Therefore the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

3. A Pearson's correlation coefficient found no significant relationship between attitudes to disabled parking spaces (M= 14.12, SD = 1.94) and empathy levels (M=46.50, SD=6.55) (r(107), = 0.104, p = 0.292). Therefore the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

4. A Pearson's correlation coefficient found no significant relationship between attitudes to persons with disabilities (M=3.61, SD=1.18) and empathy levels (M=46.50, SD=6.55) (r(107), = -0.081, p = 0.40).
5. A Fishers exact test of independence was conducted to investigate if there was a significant difference in parking practices between participants who knew a disabled permit holder and those who did not. No significant difference was found between in parking practices between participants who knew a disabled permit holder (N=68) 20.6% of whom had parked in a designated space, and participants who did not know a disabled permit holder (N=44) 20.5% of whom had parked illegally. 

(Fishers exact test = 1, df = 2, p = .986) Therefore the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

6. An independent samples T test found significant differences between participants who parked in a designated space (M=5.78, SD=1.83) and those who did not (M=4.24, SD=1.60) in relation to convenience as a legitimate reason for parking in a designated space without a valid permit. \( t(110) = 3.97, p < .001 \) Therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected.

### 3.3 Qualitative Results

7. There were fifteen (N=15) answers to the qualitative question: *If you do not have a disabled permit but park in spaces reserved for those who do please explain why.*

Thematic analysis began by coding for themes evident within the fifteen answers given. Due to the open ended nature of the qualitative question, a number of themes often overlapped within single statements recorded. Three themes emerged, and are
described as; Parking in private / commercial settings, Convenience, Cognitive dissonance and trivialisation.

_Parking in a Private / Commercial Setting._ Specific convergence was noted in eight answers which make a reference to private / commercial parking spaces; while it is understood that technically these participants could in some instances have parked on a public road, specific references included, _shop, premises, Tesco, car park, from the store and work place_, this could be considered as lending support to the evidence put forward by Scottish Government Social Research (2007) and Taylor (1998) that drivers are more likely to park in this manner in private / commercial settings. Of the remaining seven statements, no specific reference to a commercial/private or public highway setting was made, making it more difficult to draw specific conclusions under this theme, however it is also possible that some or all of the remaining statements could relate to parking in commercial / private locations.

_Convenience._ Replies categorized under this theme include descriptions such as:

….._running to shop in front of disabled space while no other space was available._

Mention is made to the fact that it was _only for a very quick call_,

One participant described having _small kids in the car and nipping into shop_

Other statements under the heading of convenience included:

….._having to carry heavy items from the store and parking in one as it was near the door_,

….._running late_

and “_waiting for someone_”
Cognitive dissonance and associated trivialisation; Statements categorized under this theme included statements where one participant described themselves as selfish and lazy.

Another described knowing it was wrong.

Further replies which converged under this theme included the following:

*The premises that the parking space belonged to was closed that day.*

*In my workplace there are disabled spaces but no disabled people.*

...*there are a lot of disabled spaces because the car-park is very big ...I would never park in a disabled space closest to the shop entrance.*

*I largely agree that it's wrong to park in a disabled spot... think it might be an idea to have some flexibility in public parking.*

...*there were at least another 20 disabled parking spaces empty and available*

*Almost empty car-park.*

...*need to park close to the delivery address for security reasons.*

*There were quite a lot of disabled parking spaces available at the time (about 30) ...if there had been only one or two disabled spaces I wouldn’t have done it.*

3.4 Post Hoc Analysis of Cognitive Dissonance

In a further attempt to explore the construct of cognitive dissonance, a Cramers V test of independence was conducted and demonstrated that, of the 23 participants who described having parked in a designated space without a valid permit almost 74%
stated that they agree (N=11, 47.8%) or strongly agree (N=6, 26.1%) with the statement
*I believe it’s unethical to park in a disabled parking space.* Of those who replied that they
had never misused a designated space the figure was 93.3% (N= 32, 36% agree & N =
51, 57.3% strongly agree). The difference between the two groups also proved to be
statistically significant.

(Cramers V( 4) .36, p = .006)
4. Discussion

4.1 Discussion

The aim of this research was to determine any correlations between attitudes of participants to persons with disabilities and their designated parking spaces to levels of self esteem, and empathy, using the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, (Rosenberg, 1965) and the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Spreng et al., 2009) respectively.

A further aim of this research was to determine any relationship between the attitudes held by participants towards persons with physical disabilities and towards the provision of designated parking spaces, with subsequent related behaviour. In relation to parking behaviour, the issue of convenience and whether there was a greater propensity for misusing designated spaces in commercial / private settings was investigated. In addition, this present study investigated if there were any statistically significant differences in parking practices, between participants who knew a disabled parking permit holder, and those who did not. Furthermore qualitative answers were specifically sought from participants who had misused designated spaces, in order to potentially gain a further insight and explore potentially common themes apparent in this practice. Themes such as cognitive dissonance, and trivialisation, and a re-examination of the element of convenience (in support of its quantitative analysis) were examined.

The rationale behind this study was to draw attention to both the recommendations of the Irish Government with regard to rights of persons with disabilities, and to the real life attitudes and behaviour of individuals within society in relation to these rights. Ultimately it is hoped that by gaining a greater understanding of the reasons behind certain attitudes, through the utilisation of the psychological
perspective, a modification of behaviours towards greater respect and inclusivity of persons with disabilities may be achieved.

The analysis of data collected did not demonstrate any statistically significant correlations between self esteem levels or empathy levels and attitudes to either persons with disabilities, or to the provision of designated parking spaces. The element of convenience as a reason for parking in designated spaces without a valid permit, was apparent in quantitative analysis where a statistically significant difference between attitudes towards convenience was noted between those who misused designated spaces and those who did not. The element of convenience also became apparent when a thematic analysis of replies to the qualitative question was carried out. The concept of cognitive dissonance as a factor within the behaviour of participants who misused designated spaces was demonstrated quantitatively through use of an examination of answers given by those participants in relation to the ethical nature of such behaviour through a Cramers V test of independence. Further demonstrations of cognitive dissonance and associated trivialisation were also prominent in the qualitative section.

Previous studies have demonstrated a correlation between self esteem and respect towards peers in educational settings (Yelsma & Yelsma, 1998). The relevance of self esteem to attitudes towards persons with disabilities has been demonstrated by Findler et al., (2007) through the development of the MAS where correlation levels of -.39, -.30, & -.20 under the factors of affects, behaviours and cognitions (respectively) were evident. The importance of Empathy as a factor in measuring social functioning in relation to persons with disabilities has been validated in previous research (Davis, 1983). The influence of familiarity with a physically disabled person, on general attitudes towards physically disabled people continues to be explored, and a large
amount of evidence suggests that familiarity leads to a more positive attitude (de Laat, Freriksen, & Vervleod, 2013; Langer, Bashner, & Chanowitz, 1985)

The correlations described by Findler et al. (2007) came about as a result of a thorough reliability and factor analysis carried out in relation to data analysed from all the questionnaires used in the formation of MAS. This present study used a researcher developed questionnaire (Tierney, 2002) specifically designed to investigate reasons and related attitudes behind illegal parking in “handicapped zones” rather than one measuring attitudes towards persons with disabilities per se, such as the MAS. The questions in the Tierney study were categorized under the headings of; convenience, attitudes to handicapped parking and attitudes towards persons with disabilities. It was the questions covering attitudes towards persons with disabilities (and to designated spaces) in the Tierney survey to which levels of self esteem and empathy were correlated in this present study, their internal validity compared with those in the Findler et al., (2007) study was not as robust. Further issues describing possible weaknesses of this particular instrument are detailed below.

The evidence found which demonstrated the proclivity of convenience as a reason/ justification for parking in designated spaces in this present study supports similar evidence found in the Tierney (2002) study and other previous and subsequent studies (Fletcher, 2001; Scottish Government Social Research, 2007; Cope & Allred, 1990). The construct of convenience also appears prominent in the qualitative answers given by participants who misused designated parking spaces and chose to describe why, and under what circumstances this behaviour had occurred. A number of the answers make reference to the closeness of the designated space to a shop entrance or ATM (N=5) and also to the lack of other available spaces (N=3) thus implying that it
would have been inconvenient to look elsewhere for appropriate space. Interestingly a number of participants (N=6) make reference to that fact that there were a number of other unoccupied designated spaces nearby or not appearing to be in use, as a reason for misusing a designated space. Answers which relate the apparently large number of other available or “unused” spaces could be seen as indicative of the trivialisation described by Joule & Martinie (2008) used as a means to diffuse the cognitive dissonance experienced by the individual. Cognitive dissonance is also demonstrated more specifically in answers where participants describe knowing it was unacceptable to have parked in this manner. “mortified, never did it again” “lazy and selfish” “it was a once off”. The issue of convenience as a justifiable reason for parking in this manner could also possibly be considered as a method of resolving any cognitive dissonance experienced. Furthermore it could be argued that the elements of convenience and trivialisation appear to overlap in terms of their usage as methods of alleviation of cognitive dissonance.

Joule & Martinie (2008) examined the relationship between trivialization and attitude change, noting both are cognitive dissonance reduction modes. They noted that when participants trivialised their attitude did not change. This present study noted a figure of almost 3 in every 4 (73.9%) of participants who misused a parking space appearing to hold an attitude that it was unethical to do so, additionally all fifteen qualitative answers could be described as containing either or both elements of Convenience and Trivialisation, thus implying their attitude in relation to the unacceptability of this behaviour remained the same.

With all research of this nature, which is in effect asking participants if they have behaved in a way that is largely considered socially unacceptable, and in many instances
illegal, the problem of social desirability bias (SDB) arises. While it is hoped that the anonymity guaranteed to participants will reduce SDB, studies have described that SDB can be prevalent at both conscious and unconscious levels (Fisher & Katz, 2000).

Completion of the survey was entirely voluntary and it is understandable that participants may not voluntarily wish to admit to behaving in an unacceptable or illegal manner, albeit anonymously to a researcher, or indeed to themselves. Tierney (2002) attempted to overcome this problem by posting 250 questionnaires assuring anonymity, with stamped addressed reply envelopes to households chosen randomly from a telephone directory. However there were only 109 replies, of which 5.5% reported “violating handicapped parking”. Regardless of assurances of anonymity, the fact that a survey is posted to a physical address may make potential participants feel uncertain their anonymity is guaranteed. An additional disadvantage to this method is the requirement for participants to physically post their completed surveys. One of the strengths of this present study was its use of an online anonymous questionnaire in addition to hard copy questionnaires completed anonymously, so no potentially identifying information such as home addresses was required. Additionally ease of replying was assured through pressing a send button or placing the questionnaire into an envelope containing other questionnaires held by the researcher.

The percentage of participants that admitted to misusing a designated space in the present study was 20.35%. While this figure is substantially higher (by 14.35%) than that reported in the Tierney study, it is still substantially below figures in studies where designated space abuse was observed; 76% (Taylor, 1998). However making comparisons of this nature is somewhat erroneous, as observed figures give only a “snap-shot” of the amount of vehicles that misused particular spaces at specific times.
Cope and Allred (1990) who noted overall rates of illegal parking at 62% describe the inherent difficulties in obtaining accurate figures in this area due to methodological inconsistencies. Figures given in answer to questionnaires demonstrate only the number of people who state that they have misused a designated space. Arguably it is more significant (both statistically, and in terms of relevance to the hypotheses) to focus on the numbers of participants who agree such behaviour is unethical but nonetheless subsequently engage in this unethical behaviour.

As previously noted The “Disabled Parking Questionnaire” was central to the questionnaires used in this survey. This questionnaire was adapted (by changing some terminology) from The Handicapped Parking Questionnaire (Tierney, 2002). This is a ‘researcher based’ questionnaire and while specifically addressing the topics of interest, is described by its author, Anna Tierney as having no “internal validity or reliability”. Reliability tests (Cronbachs alpha) carried out by this researcher on the subscales of this questionnaire demonstrated issues, particularly around the subscale of attitudes to designated parking where 3 out of 4 items had negative scores pointing to a negative average covariance among items, thus violating reliability model assumptions, this and the weak rating in relation to attitudes to persons with disabilities (.43) remain central to the weaknesses of the present study.

All non-probability sampling methods of data collection, run a greater risk of sampling bias, compared to probability sampling, making true estimates of variability or identifications of specific biases impossible (Statistics Canada, 2013). The present study’s utilisation of non-probability sampling was undertaken to allow for ease of access and for its overall convenience, the inherent potential for sampling bias within this methodology must therefore also be considered as a weakness within this research.
The role of gender was not considered as relevant to this study. However the obvious imbalance of females (N=86) to males (N=27) could be considered as a weakness which may have had a confounding effect on results. Closer attention to gender balance would be beneficial in any subsequent studies undertaken.

One of the strengths of this present study is that through examining the answers to question 9; *I believe it is unethical to park in a disabled parking space*, given by participants who answered yes to having parked in a designated space it is possible to gauge the level of contradictory behaviour. Further examination of methods used to alleviate the cognitive dissonance apparent subsequent to this behaviour is also arguably useful in terms of any future programmes to encourage a greater adherence to designated spaces and the associated respect for persons with disabilities. Rather than emphasising the fact that parking in a designated space is unethical, which would already appear to be the agreed general consensus, (88.5% in this present study), it may be more beneficial to address the apparent dichotomy between attitudes and actions in this area. An emphasis on the importance of behaving in a manner consistent with your attitude/general belief system may be more appropriate.

Future research in this area, it is suggested could begin by addressing the issues described surrounding the overall construct validity of the Disabled parking questionnaire. Elements found to be sufficiently robust, after test-retest and internal reliability checks, in addition to a thorough item analysis, could be used in conjunction with valid attitudes to disability tests used internationally such as MAS (Findler et al., 2007) and nationally such as the Attitudes to disability survey (University College Dublin, 2011) to create a valid instrument for research in this field specifically. It is also argued that a recognition of the specialised nature of researching attitudes to
disabilities as opposed to general attitudinal research would be advantageous (Finkelstein, 1980).

4.2 Conclusion

The findings of this survey can demonstrate no statistically significant relationships between attitudes to designated parking and persons with disabilities and the constructs of empathy and self esteem. However the element of convenience as a reason for the misuse of designated parking spaces has, in common with previous studies, been shown to be prominent. This has been demonstrated through both quantitative ($p < .001$) and qualitative analysis. The element of cognitive dissonance has also been shown to be inherent in a significant ($p = .006$) number of cases where participants misused designated spaces. Further evidence of cognitive dissonance is demonstrated through replies to the qualitative question.

From the perspective of attempting to achieve a greater adherence to the rules surrounding parking spaces reserved for disabled permit holders, and associated consideration for persons with disabilities, the element of cognitive dissonance it is argued could be viewed in a positive light. Encouragingly, almost nine out of every ten participants (89.3%) agree that it is unethical to park in a designated space. It is suggested that future policy looking to communicate that it is unethical to behave in this way may be somewhat unnecessary, instead the trivialisation of parking in this manner for reasons of convenience could be addressed.
References


http://people.umass.edu/aizen/index.html


Appendices

Appendix 1: Front cover of survey

My name is Conor O’Driscoll, I am a mature student at Dublin Business School. As part of my final year thesis I am investigating parking practices in relation to permit designated spaces and general attitudes towards persons with physical disabilities. Part of this project involves the collection and analysis of data from the following questionnaires which are fully accredited and have been used in previous psychological research internationally. In the event that you find any of the following questions upsetting and wish to speak with someone confidentially, the Samaritans may be contacted 24/7 on ph 116 123 which is a free to call number. Participation is entirely voluntary and all replies to questions are completely anonymous meaning it will not be possible for I or anyone else to attribute answers to any particular individual, as such it is not possible therefore to withdraw answers once questionnaires have been completed. Information resulting from the analysis of data collected through the questionnaires will be used as part of an undergraduate research project which may be archived at the Dublin Business School library as a soft copy and in an electronic format. Raw data collected will be electronically stored under a secure password protected format and will be destroyed one year after the research project has been submitted. Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me at . My supervisor is Dr. John Hyland ( ) who may also be contacted. Completion of this survey should take approximately five minutes. I am extremely grateful for your participation in this project, if you would like a copy of my final thesis I would be happy to forward one to you through my email address above.
Appendix 2: Questionnaires

1) By returning this survey I am volunteering to participate in this research study. Following the completion and return of this survey I will have completed my participation and will not be asked for any further assistance. I understand that the purpose of this study is for the completion of a graduate level thesis designed to explore parking behaviour and attitudes to persons with disabilities. I understand that my responses are confidential and that no one including the researcher will be able to identify me or my individual survey responses and that only group data will be reported. I further understand that there are no risks or benefits to me for participating, but that my responses may increase understanding of parking practices in relation to disabled parking spaces and attitudes in general to persons with disabilities.

Disabled Parking Questionnaire (part 1)

Gender

___ Male
___ Female
___ N/A

Age:

___ 17-21
___ 22-30
___ 31-45
___ 46-60
___ 61 years or older
Do you have a disability that requires the use of a disabled parking permit?

___ Yes
___ No

Do you know anyone who holds a disabled parking permit?

___ Yes
___ No

Do you use a disabled parking permit?

___ Yes
___ No

Have you ever parked in a parking space reserved for holders of a disabled parking permit other than when you or a person you were travelling with had a disabled parking permit?

___ Yes
___ No
Disabled Parking Questionnaire (Part 2)

Please answer the following questions by circling the number that corresponds with the response that best describes the degree to which you agree with the following statements. circle (5) if you Strongly Agree, circle (4) if you Agree, circle (3) if you are Undecided, circle (2) if you Disagree, and circle (1) if you Strongly Disagree.

SA A U D SD

Question 1)

5 4 3 2 1 I feel disabled parking spaces are abused by the non-disabled.

Question 2)

5 4 3 2 1 I feel there are too many parking spaces reserved for the disabled.

Question 3)

5 4 3 2 1 I feel people with disabilities receive too many special privileges.

Question 4)

5 4 3 2 1 I feel many people who have disabled parking permits do not really need them.

Question 5)

5 4 3 2 1 It angers me when I see non-disabled people park in disabled parking spaces.

Question 6)

5 4 3 2 1 I feel it is okay to park in a disabled parking space if I’m only running into the shop for a minute
Question 7)  
5 4 3 2 1  I feel it is okay to park in a disabled parking space if there isn’t any place nearby to park.

Question 8)  
5 4 3 2 1  I feel it is okay to borrow a friend or family member’s parking permit.

Question 9)  
5 4 3 2 1  I feel it is unethical to park in a disabled parking space.

Question 10)  
If you do not have a valid disabled parking permit but park in spaces reserved for those who do, please explain why.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself.

If you **strongly agree** with the statement circle **SA**.
If you **agree** with the statement circle **A**.
If you **disagree** with the statement circle **D**.
If you **strongly disagree** with the statement circle **SD**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>At times, I think I am no good at all.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>I feel that I have a number of good qualities.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>I am able to do things as well as most other people.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>I feel I do not have much to be proud of.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>I certainly feel useless at times.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>I wish I could have more respect for myself.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>I take a positive attitude toward myself.</td>
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</table>
Below is a list of statements. Please read each statement carefully and rate how frequently you feel or act in the manner described. Circle your answer on the response form. There are no right or wrong answers or trick questions. Please answer each question as honestly as you can.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Other people’s misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>I remain unaffected when someone close to me is happy</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>I enjoy making other people feel better</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>I have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>When a friend starts to talk about his\her problems, I try to steer the conversation towards something else</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>I can tell when others are sad even when they do not say anything</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>I find that I am &quot;in tune&quot; with other people’s moods</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>I do not feel sympathy for people who cause their own serious illnesses</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>I become irritated when someone cries</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>I am not really interested in how other people feel</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>I get a strong urge to help when I see someone who is upset</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>When I see someone being treated unfairly, I do not feel very much pity for them</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>I find it silly for people to cry out of happiness</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards him\her</td>
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**THANK YOU!**