SHOPLIFTING: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT. Shoplifting, one of the most prevalent crimes in our society, and on the increase in recent years, has received relatively little attention in research literature. This paper discusses the various classifications of shoplifters, particularly delineating several types of shoplifters. The personality characteristics and motivation of these types were studied in an attempt to develop our knowledge of shoplifting in general. The relationship between shoplifting and substance abuse, eating disorders, social class, race and ethnicity, gender, and age were also researched. The effects of apprehension, models of intervention and recidivism rates were also investigated. The authors' study of 457 youths arrested for shoplifting and referred to diversion services was described. Special attention was given to the Youth Emotional Shoplifting Program (YES), of Shoplifters Anonymous (SA) in which 364 of the 457 subjects participated. Other intervention programs, as well as combinations of intervention programs, were also examined. © 1998 Elsevier Science Ltd

INTRODUCTION

SHOPLIFTING, DEFINED AS "theft from the selling floor while a store is open for business" (Francis, 1979, p. 10), is one of the most prevalent crimes in our society. It has been estimated that 1 in every 12 shoppers shoplift (Ray, 1987), and that as many as 60% of consumers have shoplifted at some point in their lives (Klemke, 1982, 1992; Kraut, 1976). Among adolescents, 30 to 40% commit this crime repeatedly (Cox, Cox, & Moschis, 1990; Klemke, 1982). Estimates of dollars lost annually from shoplifting have ranged in the billions (French, Crask, & Mader, 1984; Griffin, 1984). Klemke (1992) notes that in the past 20 years, there has been a 300% increase in reported incidents of shoplifting. Furthermore, only a small percentage of shoplifters are caught; for example, Griffin (1984) estimates that 1 in every 20 to 40 shoplifters are apprehended. It is evident that shoplifting is not only a serious problem to the business community and legal system, but also to the general population—the consumers who ultimately must pay higher prices to cover the cost of stolen goods.

Despite the seriousness of this common and frequently undetected crime, shoplifting has received little attention by the research community. The work that has been conducted in this area has primarily focused on examining the characteristics and motivations of shoplift-
ers, with the aim of developing meaningful classifications. Relatively few studies have examined the effects of interventions used with the shoplifting offender. Studies specifically concerned with the adolescent shoplifter are even more sparse. Nonetheless, what has begun to emerge is a convergence of evidence about who shoplifts and why, and how this problem can be addressed.

CLASSIFICATIONS OF SHOPLIFTERS

Cameron's "Booster" and "Snitch"

The first comprehensive study of the shoplifter is considered to have been by Cameron (1964). This became a benchmark study serving as both stimulus and point of comparison for subsequent research (Klemke, 1992). Cameron analyzed data from a large sample of individuals apprehended in a major Chicago department store, and through this delineated two groups of shoplifters: commercial shoplifters, "booster," and pilferers, referred to as "snitches."

Boosters, comprising about 10% of her sample of shoplifters, were considered to differ little from other professional thieves. They steal to sell. They have well-defined contacts with criminal subcultures, and they shift from one form of illegal vocation to another. This grouping, in essence, is descriptive of the professional shoplifter/criminal.

Snitches, the remaining 90% of Cameron's sample, were considered to be quite different from boosters. Although snitches are chronic shoplifters, they are otherwise "respectable" citizens and have little or no contact with criminal groups. They do not resell the items they steal, nor do they share in the values of the professional shoplifter. However, they are also not desperately poor people stealing out of necessity, nor were they observed to have compulsive, neurotic personalities (Cameron, 1964).

There were noted limitations in Cameron's study. She relied on department store and city arrest records for her investigation, yet made generalizations about shoplifters as a whole beyond which there was empirical basis. For example, based on the fact that a small percentage of those apprehended for shoplifting at the targeted department store chain had a previous or subsequent arrest record, she surmised that the vast majority of shoplifters were not involved in other criminal activity, nor would they continue shoplifting following apprehension. Yet not being caught or arrested for shoplifting in a specific area is quite different than not shoplifting anymore. Similarly, her conclusions on the personality and motivations of shoplifters were not based on the use of any assessment measure, but rather personal observation. Nonetheless, Cameron's study was the first extensive attempt to understand and classify the shoplifter, and her findings and generalizations were influential in subsequent research.

Moore's Shoplifting Types

Moore (1984) extended Cameron's typology, utilizing five dimensions to determine patterns of shoplifting: (a) frequency; (b) primary precipitating factor(s); (c) attitude toward shoplifting as a crime; (d) use of stolen goods; and (e) reaction to detection, prosecution, and conviction. In this study, 300 convicted shoplifters completed a questionnaire concerning shoplifting, underwent a psychological evaluation (which included a battery of tests to determine intellectual and personality functioning), and received a diagnostic interview. Information about the performance of those offenders placed on probation was also obtained via reports of probation counselors. Moore delineated five types of shoplifters through the analysis of this material.

The first type described by Moore (1984) was the "impulse shoplifter," comprising 15.4%
of his sample. These individuals had limited shoplifting activity, often only once or twice. Their shoplifting had not been planned, and they typically took one inexpensive, yet tempting, item. When stopped by security personnel, their reaction was one of surprise, confusion, or shock. An intense emotional reaction of embarrassment, guilt, and shame followed. Feelings of guilt continued for several weeks after their apprehension as well. For this group of people, detection was found to be such a traumatic event that they were unlikely to shoplift again.

The second grouping was that of the “occasional shoplifter,” comprising 15% of his sample. They reported having taken items 3 to 10 times during the previous year. Economic motives were secondary to that of carrying out a challenging act or complying with peer pressures. When apprehended, they readily admitted to stealing, and tended to react either in an aloof fashion or with mild embarrassment. Although acknowledging that shoplifting was illegal and morally wrong, occasional shoplifters minimized the seriousness of the offense. The prospect of prosecution and sentencing produced an intense emotional reaction in this group, however, especially in relation to the embarrassment caused to the family. Moore concluded that most shoplifters in this category are so shocked by this experience that they are not likely to shoplift again.

The third type was that of the “episodic shoplifter,” comprising 1.7% of Moore’s sample. These individuals engaged in periodic episodes of shoplifting, at which time they stole specific goods as part of a bizarre personal ritual, the nature of which was to satisfy intense needs for self-punishment. Severe emotional and psychological problems were present in these individuals. More specifically, they experienced strong feelings of depression and guilt, and had the tendency to express aggressive impulses intrapunitively. Shoplifting occurred irregularly, and was usually triggered by psychosocial stressors. They were usually compliant when apprehended, and expressed an awareness that shoplifting was wrong. For these individuals, participation in psychotherapy was found to be a successful means of preventing further shoplifting.

The fourth and largest category, comprising 56.4% of the sample, was defined as “amateur shoplifters.” These individuals had developed a regular, often weekly, pattern of shoplifting, and found it profitable. They made conscious decisions to steal and were aware of its illegality. They tended to steal small items that were easy to conceal; shoplifting techniques were simple and carried out regularly based on realistic assessments of relative risks and benefits. When apprehended, they usually claimed only minimal involvement in prior shoplifting activity and would engage in various manipulative strategies to avoid punishment. Moore believed that various business and public awareness strategies could successfully deter shoplifting among this group, but that the majority would continue to steal goods until caught.

The remaining 11.7% of the subjects were identified as “semi-professional shoplifters.” Shoplifting had become a part of their life-style, and they engaged in this activity at least weekly. They employed more skilled techniques in their shoplifting. They were also the only group to engage in some reselling of merchandise. Financial benefit and compensation were considered the primary motivational factors for shoplifting in this group. It enabled them not only to obtain some personal luxuries, but also to save money for some other purpose. Further, they tended to perceive themselves as being treated unfairly by society, and as deserv ing more than they received. Consequently, shoplifting is experienced as a way to compensate for this personal injustice. Also, shoplifting appeared to serve as an emotional outlet in dealing with frustrations encountered in daily living. Many of these individuals did not perceive shoplifting to be legally or morally wrong, and they maintained beliefs that minimized the seriousness of this crime, they did not exhibit guilt about their behavior. When apprehended, they were likely to offer a prepared story in an effort to “talk their way out” of legal consequences. If this did not work, they would often become very angry and claim they were
being treated unfairly. Among this group, many continued to shoplift after being prosecuted and fined. Moore suggested that the most successful deferent for semi-professional shoplifters was the real possibility of serving jail time.

Based on his findings, Moore (1984) concluded that most acts of shoplifting were committed by those having traits associated with antisocial personality type disorders. "Amateurs" were found to exhibit delinquent or rebellious behaviors, and to steal for financial gain or profit. Shoplifting for "occasional" and "semi-professional" offenders was considered to be chronic behavior that appeared to provide an emotional outlet for daily frustration or boredom. Shoplifting in the "impulse" and "episodic" groups was regarded as primarily influenced by prevailing psychosocial stressors. Moore also noted that although the presence of a mental or emotional problem was equally distributed among men and women shoplifters (17.7% total), nearly twice as many women as men were experiencing psychosocial stressors at the time of the shoplifting incident.

As with Cameron's (1964) study, it is important to note that the generalizations Moore made about shoplifters as a whole, based on his relatively small sample, should be considered with caution. For example, since Moore's classification system was based on information provided by convicted shoplifters, it seems likely that the large percentage (69.8%) identified as frequent shoplifters (episodic, amateur, or semi-professionals), and as having distinct antisocial personality traits, may be much larger than would be the case for a random sample of shoplifters. This is because stores are more likely to prosecute shoplifters who seem to be serious offenders (Klemke, 1992). Nonetheless, Moore's typology of shoplifters provided the groundwork by which to explore characterological distinctions among shoplifters, and how this area relates to coping strategies and attitudes of the social world.

"Rational" Versus "Nonsensical" Shoplifting

Another classification system by which to group shoplifters has been that of "rational," "nonrational," or "mixed" (Schlueter, O'Neal, Hickey, & Sellers, 1989), with rational shoplifters being those who shoplift with a particular goal in mind. Nonrational shoplifting is that which does not appear to be motivated by need or desire. Several researchers (e.g., Arboleda-Florez, Durie, & Costello, 1977; Cupchic & Atcheson, 1983; Yates, 1986) have found that a sizable proportion of subjects in their study shoplifted for "nonrational reasons." As Yates (1986) sums up this issue: "The most striking distinction, and the one most relevant to clinicians, is the distinction between shoplifting for profit or gain, and what might be best described as "nonsensical shoplifting" (pp. 204–205).

Arboleda-Florez and colleagues (1977), in a study of 32 shoplifters referred for psychiatric assessment, delineated three categories of shoplifters. The first and largest group (50%) fit Cameron's (1964) description of the "snitch." The second group, comprising 40% of the sample, was labeled as "unusual." Their behavior was found not to be motivated by need or desire, but rather as a means to strike out in hostility, in response to emotionally charged interpersonal problems. The remaining 10% were classified as "psychotic" and were experiencing delusions at the time of shoplifting. The fact that these subjects were, in fact, specifically referred for a psychiatric assessment most likely accounts for 50% of the cases having a strong psychological influence.

Cupchic and Atcheson (1983), also working with shoplifting offenders whose behavior seemed out of character and who were referred for psychological assistance, found that in a significant number of cases, the shoplifting incident was apparently precipitated by a personal loss—either internal or external—or an anticipation of such a loss. The losses ranged from death of an intimate other, loss of a relationship, to loss of health or valued aspects of one's life.
Yates (1986), in a study of 101 shoplifters referred for psychological assessment by a probation office, found that 49% had some psychiatric history, 45% were experiencing marital or family conflict; and 44% were foreign-born. Furthermore, the majority were also classified as having low self-esteem and being underassertive. Of the portion of the sample whose shoplifting was considered to be nonsensical (not motivated by gain), 70% were diagnosed as depressed and 54% as socially isolated.

It appears that among those shoplifters who could be classified as impulsive, unusual, episodic, psychotic, nonrational, or nonsensical—and this is generally considered to be the minority of the general shoplifting population—indicators of psychological maladjustment are present.

There is evidence to suggest that the remaining snitches (i.e., those shoplifters not making a career out of shoplifting and possibly other crimes) are also engaging in this deviant behavior as a result of psychosocial influences. Yet, in these cases, the adaptation is more of a reflection of an ingrained pattern of relating, rather than a seemingly isolated episode of acting out.

**The Kleptomaniac**

Notably missing from contemporary research regarding the shoplifter is the use of the term *kleptomania*, defined as "a persistent neurotic impulse to steal, especially without motive" (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 1994, p. 645). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edition (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) classifies kleptomania as a impulse control disorder. Symptoms may begin in childhood and can continue intermittently throughout adulthood. For a person to be diagnosed as having kleptomania, all of the following symptoms must be present (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, pp. 612–613):

1. Recurrent failure to resist impulses to steal objects not needed for personal use or for their monetary value.
2. Increasing sense of tension immediately before committing the theft.
3. Pleasure or relief at the time of committing the theft.
4. The stealing is not committed to express anger or vengeance and is not in response to a delusion or a hallucination.
5. The stealing is not due to Conduct Disorder, a Manic episode, or Antisocial Personality Disorder.

This disorder is considered to be quite rare, with fewer than 5% of arrested shoplifters reported to provide a history consistent with those symptoms. Furthermore, it is also suspected that in some of those cases, the history may be fabricated to conform to the stereotype of the disorder, to avoid criminal prosecution.

Nonetheless, the diagnosis of kleptomania originally surfaced and became popular in reference to the "nonsensical" shoplifter, most usually a woman, during the middle 19th century (Abelson, 1989; Goldman, 1991). It appears that part of its essential extinction from modern research relates to the view of it being used as a political weapon against the female gender (Abelson, 1989). Also, what other researchers have referred to as "nonsensical" stealing does not necessarily match this clinical definition of kleptomania (Goldman, 1991).

Goldman (1991), in a review of the literature concerned with kleptomania, noted that the majority of work on the subject matter has addressed issues of etiology, for which there are a vast number of theories, notably psychoanalytic. Unfortunately, little integration between these schools of thought has occurred. Interestingly, however, the most common thread found
in these studies is that such individuals frequently experienced tumultuous and unusually stressful childhoods, and symptoms of depression and/or anxiety, marital turmoil, social isolation, and lack of self-esteem were common in adulthood. This finding corresponds with that underpinning, the more recent classifications of the "nonrational" shoplifter, and points to the importance of personality factors in the understanding and treatment of individuals engaged in this behavior.

**Personality Classifications of Shoplifting**

Beck and McIntyre (1977), in comparing Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) profiles of shoplifters and nonshoplifters in a college population, found significant differences between groups. Based on self-report data, a total of 60 subjects was categorized into one of three groups: shoplifted once, chronic shoplifter, or never shoplifted. They were also grouped by sex. The analysis revealed that all of the means of the shoplifting groups were significantly higher on the Psychopathic Deviancy scale. Shoplifters also had more standard scores two deviations above the mean than did nonshoplifters.

The chronic shoplifters exhibited elevations on the Psychopathic Deviancy and Mania scales; and both males and females exhibited a masculine orientation. The collective profile for this group was considered to be reflective of the psychopath.

Females who shoplifted only once scored high on Hypochondriasis, Depression, Psychopathic Deviancy, and Sex-Role Interests. The interpretation provided was that while these females were similar to chronic shoplifters regarding anti-establishment attitudes and masculine orientation, their somatic anxieties and present depression categorized them as individuals who turn their feelings inward upon themselves rather than against others. Hence, they were much less likely to act out their hostile feelings.

Males who shoplifted only once scored high on Hypochondriasis, Psychopathic Deviancy, Sex-role Interest, and Paranoia. This was interpreted to mean that these individuals were passive, immature, hostile individuals, with somatic and interpersonal sensitivities and feminine interests. They were considered to have strong anti-establishment attitudes, yet, due to their passivity, they would not repeat shoplifting behavior because of the anxiety it aroused.

Moore (1983) disputed the findings of Beck and McIntyre (1977). He administered the California Psychological Inventory to 78 full-time college students convicted of shoplifting. There were no significant personality differences between them and a sample of 30 undergraduates who denied ever shoplifting. However, for 30% of the shoplifters, their criminal action was considered to be attributed to mental/emotional problems (as determined by self-reports, agency records, clinical interview).

The second largest attributed motivation was that of a deviance-prone personality (22%). These individuals were somewhat rebellious and nonconforming toward community norms and social expectations, expressed no guilt for having committed the shoplifting offense, and were typically angry when they got caught.

Ray, Solomon, Doncaster, and Mellina (1983), completed a battery of psychological tests on 94 adult first offender shoplifters. The collective MMPI profile that emerged with their sample was of a subclinical 8-4 (Schizophrenia-Psychopathic Deviance) high-point pair, with depression, anxiety, and possibly moderate confusion as likely symptoms.

Ray (1987), based on subjects submitting an anonymous questionnaire, found that 1 out of 12 shoppers reported to have recently shoplifted. The shoplifters were more likely to be experiencing economic stresses, social stresses, and depression. Shoplifters were also more likely to place a high value on material possessions and to hold negative attitudes toward the system. Ray notes that this combination of several motivational factors creates a more complete picture of shoplifting behavior.
The complexity of the factors involved in the motivations and characteristics of shoplifters appears to be increasingly appreciated among those researching the matter (Klemke, 1992; McShane & Noonan, 1993; Ray, 1987). Poor coping strategies in the face of psychosocial stressors have been shown to play a dominant role among a significant proportion of shoplifters. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those shoplifters best classified as antisocial—they have little regard for the law and little remorse for having committed a societal wrong. Most shoplifters could perhaps best be “classified” as somewhere in between these two means of explanation.

OTHER FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SHOPLIFTING

Substance Abuse

One identified subculture of shoplifters that reflects well the intermingling of poor coping abilities with tendencies toward antisocial behavior is that of individuals involved in the street-level drug scene. A strong positive relationship between drug use and other criminal activity has been demonstrated (National Institute of Justice, 1991; Van Kammen & Loeber, 1994). Typically, these individuals have been identified as experiencing multiple difficulties. They tend to come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and have more psychosocial problems than nonusers (Dembo, Williams, Fagan, & Schmeidler, 1994; Van Kammen & Loeber, 1994). Various ethnographic and interview studies have described the shoplifting and hustling careers of many addicts in low-income neighborhoods (e.g., Johnson, Sommer, & Martino, 1985; Kowalski & Faupel, 1990; Sutter, 1969).

An example of this subculture’s involvement in Southern Florida is provided by Inciardi (1980). He conducted interviews with 149 heroin addicts in Miami, Florida. They revealed extensive involvement in the street culture of drugs-prostitution-shoplifting and other types of crime. When asked to self-report their criminal activity for the last year, the 149 respondents admitted to involvement in a total of 58,708 offenses, of which 8,713 were shoplifting.

Inciardi (1980) also noted that there was more evidence that criminal activity preceded involvement in drugs than that drugs preceded crime. This point has been supported strongly in relation to conduct problems and minor offenses (Huizinga, Menard, & Elliott, 1989), rather than more serious criminal behavior. More recent studies have demonstrated that delinquent and criminal behavior increases following involvement in illicit drug use, and that arrests for drug and property offenses decline with decreasing frequency of drug use (see Dembo et al., 1994). The type of substance abuse engaged in appears to also play a significant role. Increases in property offenses and violent crimes has been associated with the use of hard drugs and multiple drug use (Kandel, Simcha-Fagan, & Davies, 1986; Van Kammen & Loeber, 1994). Inciardi (1980) noted in his study of heroin addicts a propensity to gravitate toward less confrontational crimes, like shoplifting, and away from higher-risk crimes, like robbery, over time. This was thought to be due to the addict’s decreased ability to attend to complex matters with increased and chronic drug use.

Eating Disorders

Shoplifting has also been associated with another obsessive compulsive group: individuals having an eating disorder. A small number of studies (e.g., Crisp, Hsu, & Harding, 1980; Fairburn & Cooper, 1984, Mitchell, Fletcher, Gibeau, Pyle, & Eckert, 1992; Pyle, Mitchell, & Eckert, 1981) have shown that a significant proportion of women with anorexia or bulimia also engaged in stealing or shoplifting. Items stolen often appear to be directly related to
these shoplifters’ eating disorder, such as food, laxatives, diet pills, or money to purchase such goods.

Among this group, shoplifting appears to be a secondary function to the eating disorder, and a primary motive for shoplifting may be to obtain a purging item when it cannot be afforded, or to avoid embarrassment caused by purchasing such an item (Mitchell et al., 1992). However, it is noteworthy that among Moore’s (1984) “episodic” shoplifting group, two of the four examples given reflected a bulimic behavior pattern. The underlying personality dynamics of these episodic shoplifters reflected intense feelings of depression, guilt, and intrapunitive aggression—dynamics not unlike individuals with eating disorders. As is evident, there is much common ground between these compulsive disorders, as with substance abuse.

**Social Class**

There are actually few studies that have assessed socioeconomic status in relation to shoplifting behavior. Among those existing on apprehended shoplifters, reviewers have pointed out that the individuals who get caught may not be representative of all shoplifters (Klemke, 1992; Ray & Briar, 1988).

Cameron (1964) noted a high unemployment rate (41%) among male shoplifters in her sample. She speculated that males were reluctant to reveal details about their employment to store personnel out of fear of jeopardizing their jobs. She found, however, a slight inverse relationship between social class and shoplifting; this relationship would have been much stronger had the self-report data concerning joblessness been confirmed.

Gold (1970), in a study of juvenile shoplifters in Flint, Michigan, found that lower-class White boys and girls reported 10 to 20% more shoplifting than upper-class Whites. Klemke’s (1982) study of high school youth revealed a slight to moderate inverse relationship between social class and recent shoplifting activity. This relationship became much stronger for females and weaker for males when sex was controlled. The finding that lower-class teenagers report somewhat more shoplifting than affluent youth is consistently found in self-report delinquency research (Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis, 1981).

Moore (1984) cited low income as a contributing factor for 72% of the chronic shoplifters of his study. Yates (1986) found that 63% of her sample of apprehended shoplifters were economically disadvantaged. Ray’s (1987) survey indicated that three times as many adult shoplifters had low incomes (under $5,000) compared to the nonshoppers. The motivation of economic gain has consistently been cited as a main reason individuals shoplift (Kraut, 1976; McShane & Noonan, 1993; Ray & Briar, 1988; Schlueter et al., 1989). However, the presence of significant other psychosocial stressors and/or deviancy-prone personality traits also prevailed among these groups. It appears evident that economic disadvantage serves as a motivational factor for shoplifting in many cases. As a major psychosocial stressor, it also enhances one’s vulnerability to engage in such behavior, perhaps particularly if one has acquired the experience of being unfairly treated and deprived by others, yet lacks available channels by which to express or relieve this pain and frustration.

**Race and Ethnicity**

It has been noted that individuals who are racially or culturally distinct may be more prone to exhibit deviant behavior because of different lifestyles or because of prejudice or discrimination (Klemke, 1992). Cameron (1964) found that Blacks were underrepresented in store apprehension statistics when compared to the proportion of the city’s population. However, while 58% of the Blacks that were apprehended were formally charged, only 10.9% of the
Whites were so charged. This pattern, plus the fact that Blacks were apprehended for stealing less expensive items, led her to conclude that a significant racial bias was operating. On a similar note, Robin (1963) found that Black shoplifters were more likely to be prosecuted than were White shoplifters. Other studies have found, however, no racial bias concerning apprehension and arrest (Cohen & Stark, 1974; Hindelang, 1974).

Ray et al. (1983) found a high proportion of their sample to be Hispanic women. However, they provided no information as to how this compared to the general population of their area. Yates (1986) reported that individuals engaging in "nonsensical" shoplifting were more likely to be foreign-born females, not engaged in other criminal activity. Self-report studies have shown no significant racial differences in shoplifting activity once socioeconomic status was taken into account (Flanagan & Maguire, 1990; Gold, 1970; Hindelang et al., 1981). Thus, no conclusive evidence regarding the role of race or cultural background in shoplifting activity has emerged as of yet. Similarly, the extent to which this factor influences the likelihood of a shoplifter being apprehended, arrested, and convicted, cannot be determined; although it appears evident that the same prejudices existing within society as a whole are also present within this area.

**Gender**

A popular stereotype about shoplifting is that females are more involved in this activity than males (Abelson, 1989; Klemke, 1992; Ray & Briar, 1988). Klemke (1992) points out that historical sources and early-era store apprehension studies have shown a higher proportion of female shoplifters, yet there was also a higher proportion of female shoppers that was not taken into account. Furthermore, almost all of the post-1970 studies of official data and all the self-report data have shown that males were equally or more involved in shoplifting (Cox et al., 1990; Flanagan & Maguire, 1990; Gold, 1970; Hindelang, 1981; Klemke, 1982; Kraut, 1976; Moschis, 1987).

Research that has shown a higher rate of female shoplifters includes those subjects who have been referred for psychological assessment or treatment (Arboleda-Florez et al., 1977; Cupchic & Atcheson, 1983; Ray et al., 1983; Yates, 1986). Thus, it may be that a greater proportion of the female shoplifters were motivated to engage in this activity due to the influence of psychological factors. Societal views of seeing women committing deviant acts as "sick," and men committing similar acts as "bad" or "wild" may also play a role in these findings.

**Age**

There is a high degree of consensus within the shoplifting research that individuals under 20 are most likely to be apprehended for shoplifting, as 40% of those apprehended are adolescents (Baumer & Rosenbaum, 1984; Klemke, 1978, 1982, 1992; Kraut, 1976; Osgood, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 1989). Self-report data have indicated that approximately 30 to 40% of adolescents engage in shoplifting activity repeatedly (Cox et al., 1990; Klemke, 1982; Osgood et al., 1989).

An interesting finding within this literature is the noted decrease that occurs as adolescents mature. In Klemke's (1978) study of teenage shoplifters, for example, younger high school students reported more involvement in recent shoplifting than did the older students: 38.8% of the freshmen reported shoplifting during the last school year, compared to 25% of the sophomores, 19% of the juniors, and 17.7% of the seniors. In addition, 73.8% of the high school shoplifters began shoplifting before the age of 10.

This similar pattern of decreased involvement in shoplifting with age was also reported
by Osgood et al. (1989), in their Monitoring the Future study. This national survey of high school seniors tracked samples of the original respondents through the age of 23. They found that shoplifting declined, both in the number of offenses and in the number of those engaging in this behavior, as the respondents matured. Investigations based on apprehension data have also reached this conclusion, in relation to adults as well as adolescents (Brady & Mitchell, 1971; Cameron, 1964; Klemke, 1992).

THE ADOLESCENT SHOPLIFTER

Research specifically concerned with the adolescent shoplifter is scarce. The major studies that have focused on shoplifting behavior among teenagers have been the self-report surveys previously described (Cox et al., 1990; Klemke, 1978, 1982, 1992; Osgood et al., 1989), with the noted observation that shoplifting behavior “peaks” during middle adolescence.

There was only one study found that attempted to address the particular motivations of adolescent shoplifters and formulate a classification system upon this (Cox et al., 1990). Based on 1,692 completed questionnaires by teenagers, these researchers developed a listing of adolescents’ perceived reasons for shoplifting. Through factor analysis, four categories of motivation emerged.

The first factor was that of an attraction to novelty or risk in the experience of shoplifting. This was referred to as the “experiential” factor. The second factor contained reasons pertaining to friends/peer pressure, referred to as the “social” factor.

The third and fourth factors reflected a desire for the product itself, yet each of a different nature. The third factor concerned a desire to have items that were essentially forbidden (e.g., cigarettes, sex books). This was referred to as the “contraband” factor. The fourth factor was for purely “economic” reasons (wanting an item, but not wanting to pay for it).

These investigators (Cox et al., 1990) went on to examine how perceptions of shoplifting differed among different categories of adolescent shoplifters. They discovered some distinct patterns. For example, adolescent shoplifters who emphasized the experiential reasons for this behavior (factor 1) tended to show a general tendency toward misbehavior. The shoplifters most likely to emphasize the social reasons for shoplifting were female and early adolescents. Reasons of contraband was most likely to be emphasized by younger shoplifters, with the authors noting this may be due to the longer list of products forbidden to them. Finally, shoplifters of lower social class were slightly more likely to see the reasons for shoplifting as economic.

Cox et al. (1990) contrasted adolescent shoplifters with nonshoplifters on several demographic and behavioral variables. The slight majority of those engaging in shoplifting behavior were male (64%), a finding consistent with previous self-reports from adolescents (Klemke, 1982) and college students (Kraut, 1976). No relationship was found between family occupational status and shoplifting behavior. Adolescent shoplifters did report engaging in significantly more rule-breaking behavior in general than nonshoplifters, and this was found to be the most useful variable in predicting which adolescents engaged in shoplifting.

TREATMENT

There is little existing research that directly addresses the treatment of shoplifters. Part of this may be due to the impression that shoplifting is not a serious crime. As Klemke (1992) points out, shoplifting has rarely caught on among researchers as a worthy social problem. Similarly, where citizens were asked to rate the seriousness of various crimes, shoplifting was consistently rated very low (Warr, 1989). There has also been the issue raised of whether
treatment or any form of intervention is effective in curtailing further involvement in shoplifting or other criminal activity, particularly for the juvenile delinquent (Klemke, 1978, 1992; Winfree et al., 1989).

**Effects of Apprehension**

Cameron (1964) concluded from her research that very few of the nonprofessional shoplifters (2% of the females, 6% of the males) continue to commit this crime following their apprehension. She reasoned that since this group is not integrated into supportive criminal subcultures, and do not think of themselves as thieves prior to their apprehension, the shock and shame of the experience of being caught in such an act is frequently enough to deter such future behavior.

Cohen and Stark (1973) reached the same conclusion when they found only 3 repeat offenders among 371 apprehended shoplifters in the files of a major private security company. A host of other investigators in the field have also been supportive of this view (Arboleda-Florez et al., 1977; Kallis & Dinoo, 1985; Kraut, 1976).

Based on self-report data from 1,189 youth, Klemke (1978) found that 40% of those apprehended by store personnel and 54% of those apprehended by parents continued to shoplift. Among those youth who experienced police intervention, 48% continued to shoplift. Klemke suggests that the much higher rate of continued shoplifting, in comparison to the 6% or lower rates cited by other researchers (Cameron, 1964; Cohen & Stark, 1974) is due to the use of the self-report method. This means of study potentially identifies all repeat offenders, and not just those who get caught again. Gold (1969) had similar findings with this method of investigation, and, in fact, both studies revealed higher rates of subsequent delinquency for apprehended youth when compared with a matched sample of unapprehended delinquents.

Klemke (1978, 1992) also notes that apprehended youth were more likely to identify themselves with the delinquent persona. However, this may be more reflective of a preexisting identification, supporting rather than being a result of, apprehension and continued criminal involvement. Moreover, these self-report studies revealed that simply getting caught (and not necessarily arrested) was an effective means of stopping roughly half of the teenage shoplifters from repeating this activity (Gold, 1969; Klemke, 1978).

It should also be noted that a large proportion of apprehended shoplifters are never formally charged (Lundman, 1978; Murphy, 1986). Adams and Cutshall (1984) specifically examined how shoplifters were dealt with following their arrest. Their analysis of 745 cases from the District of Columbia revealed that arrested shoplifters were most likely to have their cases dismissed when they had no, or only one, prior arrest. Somewhat less predictive factors were that of gender and race: females and Whites were more likely to have their cases dismissed. Davis, Lundman, and Martinez (1991), in examining the way a large mall store handled apprehended shoplifters, found interesting differences between how these individuals were either put into a civil recovery process or immediately referred to the police. The analysis revealed that shoplifters were more likely to be arrested when: they had taken expensive items, resisted being apprehended, had no local address, and lived in less affluent neighborhoods. These researchers concluded that the more affluent shoplifters were sent through the civil recovery process because they would be more likely to pay the civil penalty, while the less affluent were sent into the criminal justice system.

Sherman and Gartin (1986), in cooperation with the Detroit police department and nine branches of a department store, examined the recidivism rates of 1,595 apprehended shoplifters randomly, either arrested or released. They found that 5.7% of the arrested shoplifters were rearrested for shoplifting and 5.9% of the released shoplifters were rearrested, in the
6-month period after their apprehension. These researchers concluded that being arrested did not add any significant deterrent effect to the apprehension experience.

Overall, existing research has shown that within a generally short time frame (6 months to 1 year), 1 to 6% of apprehended shoplifters, whether simply caught or also arrested, will be apprehended for this crime again. The rate for those who continue to engage in this behavior but are not apprehended is considered to be much higher.

It appears likely that there is much variability between stores and judicial districts as to who is apprehended, arrested, and convicted for shoplifting. Legalistic factors, such as prior arrests and the seriousness of the offense, are considered to have the greatest weight in this arena (Adams & Cutshall, 1984; Cohen & Stark, 1974; Klemke, 1992). This variability is also found in the treatment of the convicted shoplifter.

Models of Intervention

Interventions utilized with the shoplifting offender can basically be placed in one of three categories: (a) punitive/restitution-oriented; (b) global psychosocial assistance or rehabilitation; and (c) treatment specifically designed for shoplifters.

The first two of these categories are reflective of the various methods of deference and rehabilitation typically used by the justice system with criminal offenders. Often, a combination of these two approaches is utilized in treating an individual arrested for shoplifting. Examples of interventions employed, in combination with restitution for goods stolen and a concomitant period of probation, include: community service, participation in a victim reconciliation program, required completion of vocational training or financial planning classes, or mandated psychological counseling (Klemke, 1992; Royse & Buck, 1991; Schwartz & Wood, 1991). Often, first-time shoplifting offenders, with no previous court record, are given the opportunity to have their records expunged if they complete all conditions and have no subsequent arrests during their probation period (Edwards & Roundtree, 1981; Schwartz & Wood, 1991; Winfree et al., 1989). One such condition may be participation in a program particularly designed for shoplifters, such as that offered by Shoplifters Anonymous, Inc. (SA) (Bacon & Stricker, 1992; Conner, 1980).

The Shoplifters Anonymous Program

The most thorough and shoplifting-specific treatment program reported is that offered by Shoplifters Anonymous Inc., a nonprofit organization originally created by Lawrence Conner in 1977 (Conner, 1980). Thus far, thousands of shoplifters from across the nation have participated in this program.

The SA program is educational and supportive in nature, and involves shoplifters working through a set of lessons at home and/or in a classroom setting. Each treatment modality takes approximately 6 hours to complete. The lessons are designed to undermine rationalizations for shoplifting, sensitize shoplifters to the costs and stigma resulting from shoplifting, and help each shoplifter develop a personal plan to stop shoplifting. A specific treatment program for the juvenile shoplifter was implemented by SA several years ago (Bacon & Stricker, 1992). This program has the same educational-supportive focus and is also offered in both homestudy and classroom modalities. The classroom section is offered as a supplement to the material covered in the homestudy tapes and workbook, and provides each participant the opportunity to benefit from a supportive group atmosphere.

A clinical tool to determine the extent to which each shoplifter is considered to be at risk for further shoplifting has also been developed by this organization. A profile is provided through a self-report, multiple-choice inventory each SA participant voluntarily completes.
as part of the home-study program. Through this questionnaire, a recidivism risk level (low, moderate, high) is determined. For individuals assessed to be at low risk, the SA evaluation indicates that the homestudy program is sufficient enough intervention to prevent further shoplifting. Individuals assessed to be at moderate risk for repeat offending are recommended to receive additional support or counseling. For individuals assessed to be highly likely to shoplift again, a psychological evaluation or close supervision is indicated.

A recent evaluation of the success rate of this program with 457 juveniles (Krasnovsky, 1995) revealed that 4.6% of this particular youth sample were subsequently rearrested for shoplifting during the following year (versus a 9.2% recidivism rate for those participating in other diversion strategies). However, the total re-arrest rate (shoplifting and all other crimes) for the SA participants during this period was 19.5% (versus 22.2% for those receiving other interventions). Thus, there were no significant differences found between treatment groups. However, this level of treatment success is comparable to other outcome findings concerned with the treatment of the juvenile shoplifter.

This evaluation of the SA Youth Educational Shoplifting program (Krasnovsky, 1995) indicated that the SA Risk Assessment Profile was a useful tool in predicting subsequent recidivism with juvenile shoplifters. The higher the assessed risk level, the more likely a youth was to recidivate. Item analysis revealed that for 11 of the 28 self-report questions, there was a significant correspondence between high-risk endorsement and re-arrest rate. The majority of these items concerned the perceptions and feelings of the shoplifter, and were reflective of an antisocial personality style.

**Other Shoplifting Treatment Programs**

Other treatment programs specifically designed for the shoplifter have emerged in recent years, and the development and initial evaluation of these programs have been the subject of the existing treatment literature.

The earliest study evaluating a treatment program for shoplifters was that of Casey and Shuman (1979), who developed a 90-minute educational program for first-time juvenile offenders and their parents. This intervention was conducted by the police department, and juvenile shoplifters had the option of either participating in this program or be processed through the formal juvenile justice system. It was necessary for at least one parent to also amend the program. The format of the session was the viewing of a film, followed by a discussion between the participants and criminal justice professionals. Emphasis was placed on parental and child responsibility, to themselves and the community. A 1-year follow-up revealed a recidivism rate of 5% for the 105 participants. The re-arrest rate for theft-related offenses in a control group of 45, who were processed through the juvenile justice system, was 11%. Casey and Shuman (1979) also noted that the use of their educational program saved the police and juvenile probation departments a significant amount of time and money (a cost reduction of 57% had been calculated).

Edwards and Roundtree (1984) developed a more clinically oriented program, in which 60 adjudicated first-offender shoplifters were assigned to therapy groups in lieu of or as an adjunct to other prescribed penalties, and another 60 were assigned to a control group, receiving no treatment. Six 90-minute group sessions were conducted by trained psychotherapists. The content of these sessions was described as including: information on personality and communication skills from reality therapy, transactional analysis, parent effectiveness training, Gestalt behavior modification, and assertiveness training. No description of how these eclectic methods were tailored for the shoplifting offender was provided. No significant pre-post test differences in measures of ego strength were found between the two groups following treatment, and during the 90-day follow-up period, no one from either of the groups had
been re-arrested. Treatment was found to make no significant difference. However, this study had significant flaws. Specifically, treatment was not adequately specified, the subject population was small and poorly described, inadequate assessment measures were utilized, and the follow-up period was brief (90 days).

Solomon and Ray (1984) developed and evaluated a more structured treatment program for the shoplifting offender. Principles of rational-emotive therapy (RET) (Ellis, 1962; Ellis & Grieger, 1977) served as the conceptual foundation of this 8-hour psychoeducational group counseling program, implemented with first offender adult shoplifters. Groups focused on teaching the A-B-Cs of RET, with attention remaining primarily focused on irrational beliefs associated with shoplifting, then gradually generalizing these principles to other areas of living. The 1-year follow-up revealed a 1% recidivism rate for the 94 program participants.

Winfree et al. (1989) evaluated a treatment program for juvenile shoplifters. Treatment consisted of one 4-hour session, at which time the realities and possible consequences of shoplifting were explained. Participation in this session was optional. If one chose to attend, and had no subsequent arrests during the 6 months that followed, the shoplifting conviction would be expunged from his or her record. Only 100 out of 154 juveniles invited to participate in this program chose this option. The investigators found that the recidivism rate (with time ranging from 8 to 24 months) for shoplifting for both participants and those that refused to attend was less than 3%. However, nearly 26% of those participating in the program, and 35% of the nonparticipants, were re-arrested. They found that the most significant variable in predicting subsequent arrests was that of having a record of previous trouble with the law. Over one third of their subjects had prior arrests for acts of delinquency, including shoplifting, and at least 20% had at least one prior conviction. Whether or not the youth participated in the 4-hour shoplifting clinic was found to have no effect on whether they were subsequently arrested for other matters.

MacDevitt and Kedzierzawski (1990) developed a six-session psychoeducational group treatment for first-offense adult shoplifters. Treatment was based on the notion of precipitating stressors, and each participant was “walked” through the shoplifting incident leading to their arrest, including stressors, rationalizations, and consequences. Group dynamics were actively utilized by the counselors leading the groups, and each subject was also provided an individual session. Specific details about the nature of the treatment program are provided. The authors note that an estimated 5% of those who have participated in the program over the past 10 years (over 500 subjects) have been rearrested. However, no statistics concerning the participants have been maintained to empirically justify this claim.

Kolman and Wasserman (1991) evaluated a treatment program for women arrested for shoplifting with little or no criminal history. Treatment consists of seven 90-minute group sessions, in which goals were to: (a) have participants talk in-depth about their shoplifting offense, and explore law-abiding alternatives to their shoplifting behavior and other self-destructive behaviors exhibited; (b) prevent further involvement in the court system; (c) gain support from other members of the group, reduce feelings of shame; (d) improve problem-solving skills; (e) provide education and information about court system; and (f) increase awareness of community resources. The emphasis of the program appears to be placed on facilitating a supportive group experience. The investigators reported that from the sample of 164 women, 94% had no further criminal involvement 1 year following treatment. Of those women with sustained offenses, the majority were classified as misdemeanor, with only 1% arrested for a felony.

**SUMMARY**

To date, relatively little research has been conducted concerning the treatment of the shoplifter. Treatment program development itself appears to be generally in the nascent stage,
and, unfortunately, those programs that have been in existence the longest have produced little empirical evidence to support claims of success. A general consensus is that, following treatment, 95 to 99% of the participants will not be rearrested for shoplifting within the next 6 to 24 months. This is quite comparable to the statistics found for those adult individuals who receive no treatment following their apprehension for shoplifting. Juvenile shoplifting offenders, however, had a higher re-arrest rate relative to that of adults (Casey & Shuman, 1979; Krasnovsky, 1995; Winfree et al., 1989), particularly when crimes other than shoplifting were taken into consideration.

Extant research suggests a few reasons why significant differences in rates of recidivism between shoplifters who receive treatment and those who do not have not emerged: (a) subject populations are small; (b) time between treatment and recidivism follow-up has often been relatively short; (c) subjects participating in programs are usually first-time offenders, and, therefore, considered to be at low-risk to recidivate; and (d) a reliance on arrest records—versus self-report material—to determine posttreatment shoplifting activity.

Further, there has been a lack of substantial research concerning the comparison of various intervention strategies utilized by the justice system with the shoplifting offender. It appears evident that evaluative studies, with large subject populations, defined treatment groups (further broken down into type of shoplifter), and significant time lapses between treatment and review of criminal records, is necessary. Additional research concerning the juvenile shoplifter is particularly important, since a large portion of shoplifters are adolescents. Similarly, the self-report and treatment research that has been carried out on the juvenile shoplifter indicate that a higher risk of recidivism exists for this population, and that shoplifting may serve as a behavior indicator for youth at risk to engage in other crimes (the relationship between shoplifting and other crimes should be investigated). Therefore, effective intervention with the juvenile shoplifting offender could serve to curtail an emerging pattern of delinquency.

Whether seen as simply a crime or a multifaceted disorder, shoplifting is an increasingly frequent problem in our society. For many offenders, it seems that shoplifting is just one among a group of antisocial activities engaged in, due to anger, excitement, or profit. It appears that for a smaller group of shoplifters, this activity has a particular value in and of itself, the motives for which there are specific psychological roots. There is by no means a clear distinction between these shoplifting types, however. Further research concerning the motivations and characteristics of shoplifters, and the means by which to successfully stop these individuals from shoplifting, is called for.

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