

Shoplifters who benefit from corporate losses face consequences for their crimes

Five-finger discount shoppers discover there may be more benefits to buying a product once they learn about the penalties of shoplifting.

BY JEANNE FLOCH
Photographer

Shopping at the mall on a Saturday afternoon sounds innocent enough; that is until you enter your favorite store and fall in love with a pair of gold hoop earrings. They cost 20 dollars, but you only have 20 dollars in your pocket.

Attempting to remain inconspicuous, you glance the area for security cameras. Discreetly, you put the earrings in your bag and head toward the exit. During those few steps, adrenaline enters through your bloodstream, and you feel like the most vulnerable person on the planet until you leave the store.

"I did it for the rush. Also, it was so easy that it didn't make sense to pay for it," said an anonymous male sophomore.

Once outside the store, another feeling takes over—the thrill of getting away with a crime. However, penalties for stealing a simple pair of earrings can be very harsh. In 2000, laws regarding shoplifting were updated to include many consequences.

Several scenarios can then occur. Police officers can arrest the

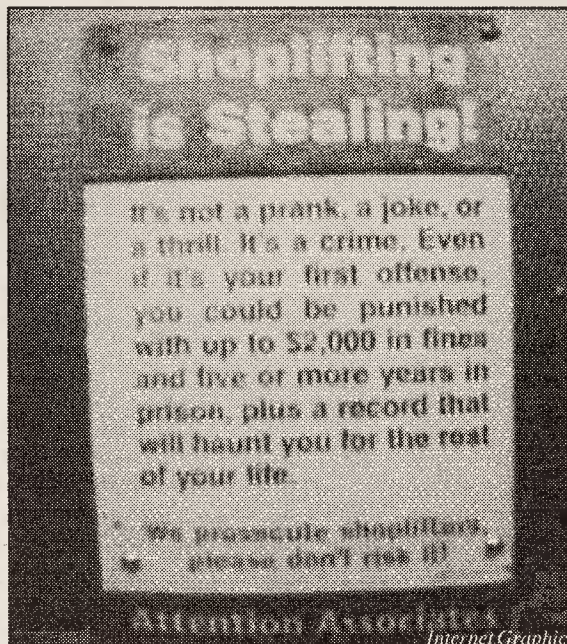
culprit and parade him or her through a store in handcuffs; the guilty party can face charges of theft and pay damages; and the culprit can be banned from a certain store or an entire shopping establishment. A teen facing a repeat arrest must live with a criminal record, making it difficult to find a job, to gain acceptance into college, or even to acquire credit or financing.

Shoplifting is an addiction. This particular addiction, however, costs retailers more than ten billion dollars' worth of merchandise in the United States every year, according to the National Retail Security Survey. Extreme losses force stores to go out of business.

Shoplifting is blind to gender, age, race, and social background. In fact, statistics show that 24 percent of shoplifters are teenagers between the ages of thirteen and seventeen. Such data is alarming, considering that only ten percent of the entire U.S. population is comprised of teens.

"I can't stand it when I go into a store and clerks assume I am going to steal simply because I'm a teenager. As soon as I see a salesperson following me, I leave the store, because it's not fair to judge a population based on a small group of offenders," said an anonymous female junior.

One can classify shoplifters into two categories: professional shoplifters who steal expensive items, such as jewelry or designer clothing, in order to



This shop sign warns shoppers of consequences if they are caught stealing an item from their store.

resell them, and amateurs, or casual shoplifters, who do not enter a store with the intention of stealing. Seventy percent of the time, these young people simply see an opportunity "to lift" something, and ironically enough, teen shoplifters steal items they do not really want or need.

They often take what they cannot afford, such as CDs and cosmetics, or items they are unable to purchase legally like cigarettes. Even though shoplifters frequently cannot explain why they steal, experts at the National Association for Shoplifting Prevention have determined many causes why teens shoplift, the foremost reason being they think the stores can afford the losses.

"I don't see anything wrong [with stealing] because I steal from corporations that oppress their own workers," said a former Grimsley student.

clothes they see other teens wearing or just to prove they can fit in with friends who also shoplift in order to draw attention to themselves.

"I got caught shoplifting once, so I quit for a while, but after meeting a new friend who pressured me to steal, I began again because of the peer pressure. It was like a game to us," said a Grimsley parent.

Kleptomania is another cause of stealing; a person cannot resist the impulse to steal. It is a psychological and serious disorder very rare among teen shoplifters; therefore, professional help is often advised.

Approximately 23 million shoplifters practice their craft in our nation today, which amounts to one in 11 people, according to Shoplifters Alternative. Fifty-five percent of adult shoplifters claim they started stealing when they were younger, and it devel-

oped into a habit. To break the habit is easier said than done, as studies show that one third of teens caught shoplifting say it is very difficult to quit.

Teens who shoplift need serious attention because the money they gain from selling their items can be a sign of a deeper problem like alcohol or drug dependency.

Police will eventually apprehend most young offenders, so the next time you think about stealing a pair of earrings or a CD, ask yourself if it is worth the trouble of being escorted home in handcuffs to your parents.

"The officer did not tell me what he was going to do. He put me in handcuffs and took me to my house. I was afraid he was going to tell my parents that he was taking me to jail," said a Grimsley parent of shoplifting as a youth. "I felt bad for disappointing my dad."

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