Pilferers not professionals: The shoplifting experiences of fourteen Canadian women.

Gina Sampson Ryan

University of Windsor

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Pilferers

Not

Professionals:

The Shoplifting Experiences of Fourteen Canadian Women

by

Gina Sampson Ryan

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research through the Department of Sociology in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1995

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ISBN    0-612-10960-7
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ABSTRACT

Shoplifters and shoplifting is the focus of this thesis. Fourteen adult, female shoplifters in Windsor, Ontario and Cape Breton, Nova Scotia were interviewed over a period of three months in 1993. The motivations of these Canadian women were explored in an attempt to answer the questions of who, what, where, when, how and why. Previous research on shoplifters and shoplifting is limited and Canadian research especially, has consisted of few studies and government documents. It is argued that shoplifting is not only a crime of poverty, but one of control as well. Women shoplift for a variety of reasons, but they are generally pilferers, not professionals. That is, they do not sell the goods they steal and they usually shoplift alone. The criminal justice system's response to their crime is less than adequate. It does not deal with the offence in an effective manner. Thus, female criminality may be seen as a microcosm of the marginalization that women face within the larger society. A complete analysis of shoplifting is one which includes the general position of women within this social context, grounded in their experiences, not only of shoplifting, but of the criminal justice system as well.
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, Nellie MacMullin, of Sydney Mines, Cape Breton who passed away during the production of this work and in whose home I was able to complete it. Thank you.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Although both men and women commit crime, the difference in the amount of crime between the sexes is significant. The total number of offences (federal and provincial statutes) committed in Canada in 1990 was 3,178,292. Of the total number of adults charged, 628,548 were men and 113,113 were women. A total of 966,606 were cleared (Statistics Canada 1990). It has long been known that "within the population of known offenders, female offenders constitute a statistically much smaller proportion than male offenders" (Smart 1976, p. 89).

Accordingly, the criminological literature of the past has virtually ignored female criminality. In the last twenty years, however, the literature has grown, but still is lacking in comparison to the volume devoted to male criminality. Canadian literature especially, has consisted of few studies and government documents. Organizations such as the Elizabeth Fry Society have contributed to Canadian content, although significant gaps remain.

One of the reasons for the incomplete literature, as stated above, includes the small proportion of women involved in crime as compared to men. Additionally, women generally constitute a much smaller threat to society and the crimes they most often commit are property offences, such as shoplifting and fraud (Morris 1991). Furthermore, the discipline of criminology has been concerned with men rather
than women because of the attention of its 'founding fathers', such as Lombroso and Ferrero in 1895 (cited in Morris 1991). For these reasons, the majority of the criminological literature has focused on the criminality of males.

Throughout my research on female criminality, the gaps that appear in this area suggest that the research is neither recent nor Canadian. Additionally, research pertaining to specific crimes is almost non-existent. According to Statistics Canada (1989/90), women are charged with less violent and less serious offences than men, particularly with property offences. According to Campbell (1990), in Canada, "In 1989/90, almost forty percent of all charges laid against women were for shoplifting" (Campbell 1990, p. 8).

For a crime that is so frequently committed by women, it is surprising that more research has not been initiated. In fact, shoplifting has traditionally been considered a 'female' crime, although whether or not more women than men shoplift is not clear in the literature (Simon 1975; Morris 1991). However, according to Smart (1976):

...the fact that the numbers of women officially recorded as involved in shoplifting far exceed the numbers of women involved in any other type of crime... makes shoplifting quite unique in terms of female offences (Smart 1976, p. 8).

The purpose of the present research is to give voice to the experiences of adult, female shoplifters. Why? It is time that the experiences of female offenders be included within the criminological literature. It is only through
their voices that one may begin to understand the dynamics of the shoplifting experience. I hope to contribute to an understanding of female criminality in general and shoplifting in particular.¹

Through this understanding, female shoplifters may be better served by the criminal justice system. For, as Denzin (1989a) states:

...often, the understandings that these [social] programs are based upon bear little relationship to the meanings, interpretations, and experience of the persons they are intended to serve (Denzin 1989a, p. 11).

¹ It is recognized that employee theft comprises a substantial amount of the shrinkage figure of businesses. However, for the purpose of my discussion, theft by customers, not employees, is the focus of this thesis. See Fruitman (1992) for further information.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

Shoplifting is not a new phenomenon. The term 'shoplifting' was first used in England in 1673. England's preamble to the Act of Parliament in 1698 states: "The crime of stealing goods privately out of shops is commonly called shoplifting" (Farrell and Ferrara 1985, p. 1). In Canada, shoplifting has been recognized as an offence and punishable under the law since the 1600's. Until 1820, it was punishable by death. Currently, the Criminal Code of Canada (1991) does not define shoplifting, but recognizes it as theft under and over one thousand dollars and as an offence punishable on both indictable and summary conviction under section 334.²

In her classic study, Cameron (1964) defined shoplifting as "theft of merchandise from display by a person posing as a legitimate customer of the store" (Cameron 1964, p. 9).³ She found that sixty percent of Chicago's Lakeside Company department store's apprehensions were females and eighty-three

²For the purpose of this thesis, shoplifting will be defined as theft under one thousand dollars and punishable on both indictable and summary conviction under section 334b of the Criminal Code of Canada.

³Throughout this thesis, I am focusing on adult, female shoplifters. My discussion of kleptomania is limited, defined as "a compulsive, neurotic desire to steal, especially when not motivated by any desire or need for economic gain" (Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary 1988, p. 543).
percent of the apprehended adults were females. She described shoplifters as commercial shoplifters and pilferers. Commercial shoplifters, known as 'boosters', steal goods to sell. They are looking for a profit. As a result, they may be in possession of a large sum of merchandise. Pilferers are 'snitches' who steal goods to use. They are not looking to make a profit, but are interested in using what they steal (Cameron 1964).

Through her research in Chicago, Cameron found that most shoplifters are pilferers and "the mean and median values of merchandise stolen by men are larger than the values of merchandise stolen by women" (Cameron 1964, p. 84). Fifty-two percent of the 873 women charged for shoplifting stole merchandise worth less than $14.95 and fifteen percent stole less than $5.00 worth of merchandise. The median value of merchandise shoplifted by adult women was $6.74 and $8.30 for adult men (Cameron 1964). These results are similar to those found by Hiew (1981).

Thus, according to Cameron, men shoplift items of a higher dollar value than women, a consideration in the decision to prosecute. Indeed, she found that there exists "a general tendency on the part of store officials to prosecute women who have stolen suits, coats, dresses, and purses (i.e., the most salable items)" (Cameron 1964, p. 87). Furthermore, she states:
In combination with the Store data which showed that men took merchandise of greater median and mean value than women, the data on prior arrest records suggests that men shoplifters are more often 'boosters' than women (Cameron 1964, p. 115).

Items that were most frequently shoplifted by men, women, and children included jewellery, dress accessories, billfolds and other small leather goods, and women’s clothing (excluding dresses, coats, and suits). The next most frequently shoplifted items included women’s dresses, coats, and suits, household supplies, notions, and food. The items most frequently shoplifted by adult women included dress accessories, jewellery, women’s clothing (excluding dresses, coats, and suits), billfolds, and purses (Cameron 1964).

As a consumer, one is constantly bombarded with lavish displays of merchandise of every shape, size, and color. Often, the temptation of the goods is overwhelming:

...enjoy yourself, let us entertain you. See all the beautiful and lovely items of merchandise we have for you, touch them, feel them, pick them up, try them on, want them, need them, buy them with or without cash, pay now or later - they are all yours (Farrell and Ferrara 1985, p. 2).

Although the displays and advertisements may be good for business, these ads attract shoplifters as well. According to Fruitman (1992):

There is... a perceived increase in thefts... The term 'shoplifting' has to be replaced by a stronger name. It is 'stealing' plain and simple (Fruitman 1992, p. 5).
Although Fruitman (1992) reports that theft by customers increased over the last three years, he does not report on this increase in terms of the sex of the shoplifter. I believe that although shoplifting may be increasing, shoplifting by women has not increased in proportion to the crimes they commit. Thus, using opportunity as the single explanation for why women shoplift is unsatisfactory. In accordance with their traditional role as consumers, one may suggest that businesses appeal more, through their displays and advertisements, to women rather than men.

Everyone has the opportunity to shoplift. Why do some people engage in this activity, while others refrain? More specifically, why do women engage in shoplifting more than any other type of crime? How does shoplifting influence a woman's life? Or, how does a woman's life influence her shoplifting experience?

Two theories that I believe may contribute to an understanding of adult, female shoplifting are differential opportunity and social control theories. Through an examination of both theories, plus the criminal justice system's response to shoplifting, the groundwork will be laid for a discussion of my theoretical perspective of this phenomenon.

DIFFERENTIAL OPPORTUNITY THEORY

A modification of Merton's anomie theory has been offered by Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1960) in their
differential opportunity theory. Whereas Merton emphasizes one opportunity structure, Cloward and Ohlin emphasize the existence of a second. Not only are there legitimate means of achieving cultural goals, but illegitimate means as well. They argue that this illegitimate opportunity structure is similar to the legitimate structure. Both are well established and access is limited. Thus, "position in society dictate[s] the ability to participate in both conventional and criminal avenues of success" (Williams and McShane 1988, p. 75).

Since women do experience unequal opportunities, Cloward and Ohlin's theory appears as a plausible explanation for female criminality. Following this perspective, perhaps women experience more limited illegitimate opportunities as well. Perhaps women engage in shoplifting more so than violent or white-collar crime due to the differential opportunity to do so; their 'low-status' position within society and their social roles as wife, mother, and primary care-givers.  

The argument that because women shop, they shoplift, is insufficient, although it certainly opens the door to opportunity. However, all women shop, but not all shoplift. As stated above, every one of us has the opportunity to

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4See Freda Adler (1977) and Rita Simon (1975) for a discussion of the Women's Movement as a factor in women's crime. See also Weis (1976) and Steffensmeier (1981) for a challenge to the link between women's liberation and crime.

5See Carol Smart (1976) for a more in-depth analysis of social roles.
shoplift, thus a simple link with women’s role is insufficient.

Indeed, the economic opportunities open to men and women are different, be they legitimate or illegitimate. Shoplifting, through its accessibility, may serve as an attractive offence through both providing supplements to one’s lifestyle and providing a sense of control within that lifestyle. If a woman is able to supplement her income through shoplifting, certainly she may feel a sense of control over her financial stress, essentially independence rather than dependence. One could suggest that shoplifting serves as an attractive means of gaining, or perhaps retaining, control over one’s particular type of stressful situation.

Carlen (1988), in her analysis of the oral histories of thirty-nine women involved in crime, speaks of the ‘sod it syndrome’:

...when women on the margins saw crime as the best method of both solving their financial problems and getting some control over their lives (Carlen 1988, p. 32).

She continues by discussing this ‘syndrome’ as a reaction to a long period of remaining ‘straight’ or non-criminal. After many months of coping with their particular situation, some women reacted by returning to an addiction or a shoplifting spree, for example. Property crime was chosen by the women in Carlen’s study because it, along with fraud, was viewed as ‘easy’. Certainly, shoplifting is a risk-taking
activity with minimal risk. Kraut (1976) discusses the perception of the low risk of apprehension as an important element in shoplifting. Indeed, not all shoplifters are apprehended and not all those who are apprehended are prosecuted. Perhaps the 'thrill' of shoplifting comes from the accomplishment of the crime.

SOCIAL CONTROL THEORY

Carlen's analysis adopts a social control perspective to the study of women, crime, and poverty. Similar to differential opportunity theory, social control theory is a positivist theory that assumes a consensus of values within society. It places its emphasis on the process by which the social bond is weakened, whereas differential opportunity emphasizes both structure and process (Williams and McShane 1988).

With social control theory, conformity is the main focus rather than the committing of crimes. In 1969, it was Travis Hirschi (cited in Morris 1991) who asked the question 'why do people conform?' He believes that varying degrees of morality exist within society and everyone is capable of committing crime. It is the social controls that keep people from breaking the law. These 'social bonds' prevent crime. If one

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6See Jack Katz' (1988) discussion of the thrill of shoplifting in his book Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions in Doing Evil. It must be noted that Katz bases his argument on research conducted primarily with female university students, a sample that is not representative of the entire population.
is bonded to society's norms and values, she/he will remain as a conforming individual.

The four main elements of the social bond include attachment (the ties one has to parents, friends, school, for example), commitment (the investment one has in society, such as education and reputation), belief (for example, in the law and society's rules), and involvement (time and energy available for conventional and unconventional activity). Hirschi believes that these four elements influence the bond one has with society. As the bonds weaken, deviance/crime results (Williams and McShane 1988).

As with most criminological theories, the premises of the above theories were derived from and evaluated by men. However, through a re-examination, their potential for understanding female criminality may come to light.

As stated above, Carlen (1988) utilized control theory for her analysis. Rather than using the theory to explain why women conform, she used it to explain why the women in her study commit crime. As she states:

Marginalized by a combination of class position... gender, in some cases racism, and in all cases overcriminalization, the women frequently implied that at certain times in their lives they had had neither material nor ideological incentive to be law-abiding (Carlen 1988, p. 11).

In Carlen's argument, the locus of social control for 'working class' women is contained within the workplace and family, of which she refers to as the 'class deal' and 'gender
deal’ respectively. A capitalist mode of production consists of class relationships, while the patriarchal system of social reproduction consists of gender relationships. These two dominant relationships structure the conditions of women’s lives. Both the class and gender deals are viewed as exploitative in nature, although this is obscured by ideologies of familiness and consumerism which serve to engender commitment and belief in "respectable working-class womanhood" (Carlen 1988, p. 13).

She argues that while most women accept the class and gender deals, some women do not engender the commitment and belief. Instead, due to the same ideologies above, these women engender the following:

...a strong commitment to obtaining a decent standard of living and to defending their domestic and personal space by any means within their power (Carlen 1988, p. 14).

Such a perspective may be applied to shoplifting. For example, if a women shoplifts out of financial necessity, it can be said that she is refusing to accept the class deal. Thus, according to control theory, she may possibly be lacking the social bonds of commitment and belief. Her 'bonds' may be a commitment and belief to obtaining a decent standard of living as stated above. Similarly, if a woman shoplifts due to another form of stress such as physical and/or emotional abuse, it can be said that she is refusing to accept the gender deal. Thus, she may be lacking the social bond of attachment, according to control theory. It is recognized
that although social control theory may contribute to an understanding of female criminality, it is generally a macrostructural theory.

Studies focusing on the importance of control theory in terms of shoplifting have outlined the importance of the family.\textsuperscript{7} These studies, both qualitative and quantitative, concentrate on children and youth and their results are unclear.

It appears that social control theory may be a useful addition to understanding adult, female shoplifting. Drawing from Carlen's (1988) analysis, one may say that women who shoplift may very well be attempting to gain or retain some control over their lives, whether this control be in terms of their financial, family, or personal situation.

Similarly, with differential opportunity, women do experience unequal opportunities, as evident from the above discussion. Furthermore, how can a woman be bonded to society's norms and values when they may not be her own? The inequality of the class and gender deals make it difficult for a woman to escape her marginalization.

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM'S RESPONSE: LESS THAN ADEQUATE

In the words of Adelberg and Currie (1991):

Youth or adult, Native or white, first offender or seasoned inmate, women caught up in the system are treated in ways that

\textsuperscript{7}See the various studies cited by Klemke (1992), pp. 93-97.
only reduce their status further... From collecting data, to researching the causes of women’s crimes, to locking women up, historically all have been done in a sexist and intransigent way (Adelberg and Currie 1991, p. 18).

Interest in the apprehension and prosecution of shoplifters began in the 1970’s. During this period, researchers focused on the impact of store practices and decisions to prosecute. According to Cameron (1964):

In the step which occurs between store arrest, once made, and court procedure, selective screening is deliberately and consciously introduced (Cameron 1964, p. 32).

Unfortunately, research on the apprehension of shoplifters is limited to few studies. Cameron (1964) provides some insight into the discretionary practices of store security, stating that they are free to locate themselves wherever they feel they will be most effective. As a result, certain areas of a department store may be monitored more than others. For example, the costume jewellery and cosmetic departments are frequently observed more than the hardware or furniture departments. An obvious consequence of this practice is that more women than men are likely to be apprehended.\(^8\)

A study by Fedler and Pryor (cited in Klemke 1992) included the variable of size in their research. They found that the ‘larger’ shoplifter was less likely to be reported by

\(^8\)See studies quoted by Klemke (1992).
the customer, perhaps due to the fear of retaliation. However, they do not report on the sex of the 'larger' shoplifter.

Although there exists a paucity of research on this issue, one may say that the apprehension of shoplifters involves a selective and discretionary process. Who is apprehended and why becomes a function of the practices and decision-making processes of the individual security person. As Klemke (1992) states:

...security personnel may be affected by self-fulfilling prophecies. Therefore, the shoplifting statistics 'created' by security personnel may not accurately reflect shoplifting reality (Klemke 1992, p. 120).

Thus, one may ask the question, "Who becomes an official statistic and why?"

Once a shoplifter is apprehended, the decision whether or not to prosecute must be made. As with the decision to apprehend a shoplifter, the decision to prosecute rests upon discretion as well. The value of the merchandise stolen seems to be a strong predictor in the decision to prosecute shoplifters. However, other researchers have found that age, sex, social class, employment status, race, and appearance of the shoplifter influence the decision to prosecute.9

From the above discussion, it appears that the decision

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to punish/prosecute shoplifters is selective and involves a degree of discretion among the private security in retail stores. Both the characteristics of the offense and the offender influence the decision to punish shoplifters. One must ask the question, "What happens to a woman when she is prosecuted for shoplifting?"

There exists a substantial body of literature that explores the differential sentencing of women and men. The conclusions about gender differences in sentencing are contradictory. But what about sentences for shoplifting in particular?

According to Walsh (1978), "Most shoplifters when caught are fined, some are put on probation, and a tiny number are still sent to prison" (Walsh 1978, p. 52). Additionally, not all department stores utilize the same apprehension/prosecution policy. As a result, prosecution not only depends on the particular policy, but on the selective decision-making of the store security, as discussed above.

A Provincial Court judge whom I interviewed in 1992 estimated:

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...one-third to one-half of those [women] charged are put on probation... first offenders are rarely incarcerated. Most people are placed on probation, although some are dealt with by way of fines that are usually under one hundred dollars (Sampson 1992, p. 29).

Thus, one may conclude that repeat offenders are those who are usually incarcerated. Additionally, Adelberg and Currie (1991) state that many women are jailed due to the inability to pay a fine. According to a report of the Canadian Sentencing Commission, by Verdun-Jones and Mitchell-Banks (1988):

Throughout the history of the criminal justice system, the fine has always been a commonly used sanction... the offence within this category [property offences] for which the fine was most prevalently imposed was that of theft (Verdun-Jones and Mitchell-Banks 1988, p. 11).

It is my contention that the imposition of a fine reduces shoplifting to another monetary issue without effectively dealing with the underlying motivation to commit the offence. There exists no association between the crime and the punishment. If a woman shoplifts out of economic necessity, the imposition of a fine is inconsistent with the motivation and imposes further control over her life by others. As stated, if she is unable to pay the fine, a jail sentence may be imposed. According to Lipinski (1991):

In 1989-90, there were a total of 31,456 admissions of male and female offenders to jurisdictional institutions for fine default... Of the total female admissions in Canada, 29.9% were for fine default (Lipinski 1991, p. 6).
Similarly, placing a woman on probation for shoplifting furthers the system's control over her (see Appendix: Chart 1). Her attempt to gain or retain control over her situation may very well result in further control.\textsuperscript{11} Attempting to reject the class and gender deals, in Carlen's (1988) terms, may result in control by a probation officer who is in a position of power over the woman and who often is male.

Furthermore, the issue of the 'treatment' of female offenders is raised when women are required to attend shoplifting programs as a condition of their probation order. According to Smart (1976), female criminality is often seen as "a product of pathology located within the individual rather than an exemplification of meaningful action" (Smart 1976, p. 92). As a result, many women are compelled to attend these 'treatment' programs. One may ask whether or not men are compelled to attend such programs at all or as frequently as women.

The criminal justice system's response to adult, female shoplifters is less than adequate. Female shoplifters, like many Canadian women, "need greater opportunities for advancement, job re-training, and economic independence" (Adelberg and Currie 1991, p. 43). The sentences imposed on female shoplifters do not precipitate this result. Instead,

they serve to further restrict women's options in life. Having a criminal record for shoplifting an item(s) which is usually of a small dollar value as compared to men restricts a woman's employment options and "usually guarantees immobility on the social status ladder and reduced opportunities for success" (Adelberg and Currie 1991, p. 43).

Thus, a woman's shoplifting behavior may be viewed as a cycle of social control and differential opportunities. Beginning at this point, a woman shoplifts in an attempt to improve her life situation, only to end up where she started.
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE:
TOWARD A THEORY OF FEMALE SHOPLIFTING

A FEMINIST CRIMINOLOGY?

I question the use of the words 'feminist criminology' or 'feminist theory' because I believe that, like any other social phenomenon, one cannot propose a single theory as an explanation for female criminality. One may draw from many theories when formulating an explanation for behavior. Thus, I am not proposing a feminist theory, but rather a feminist perspective that is grounded in the experiences of adult, female shoplifters.

According to Smart (1976), more research on women and crime is needed before an actual theoretical approach can be achieved. She suggests developing a feminist perspective that takes into account the experiences of women that have been neglected by the 'old' and 'new' criminologies. To do this, Smart states that one must focus on "the wider moral, political, economic, and sexual spheres which influence women's status and position in society" (Smart 1976, p. 185).

Adelberg and Currie (1991) echo Smart's statement:

The understanding of women and crime must be broadened to include the general position of women within a given social context. This concern is not abstract or simply of academic interest. Criminology developed as a policy-oriented discipline and criminological theories find their way very directly into correctional practices (Adelberg and Currie 1991, p. 59).
THE POVERTY LINK


We must recognize the significance of the fact that the majority of women who commit crimes are those in our society who have the fewest advantages (Task Force Report 1990, p. 25).

Looking at the Canadian statistics, one is able to see a link between the position of women within society and the crimes that they commit. In 1985, the proportion of women charged with property offences as compared to men was double (see Appendix: Chart 2). According to Adelberg and Currie (1991):

Women's participation in property offences is consistent with their traditional roles as consumers and, increasingly, as low income, semi-skilled, sole support providers for their families. In keeping with the rapid increase in female-headed households and the stresses associated with poverty, greater numbers of women are being charged with shoplifting, cheque forging and welfare fraud (Adelberg and Currie 1991, p. 26).

According to McKenzie (1992), overall poverty in Canada has been decreasing while it has been increasing among the young and single-parent families headed by women, with 57 percent of these families living below the poverty line.

Poverty lines are based on gross rather than net (after-tax) income and there is no single poverty line for all of
Canada. Statistics Canada defines a low-income family, living below the poverty line, as one which spends "more than 58.5 percent of its income on food, shelter, and clothing" (McKenzie 1992, p. 1). Women constitute the greatest risk of poverty; in 1989, 35.5 percent of all single-parent families headed by women were poor compared to 8.1 percent of all single-parent families headed by men. This 'feminization of poverty' appears due to low wages and unstable employment, child care responsibilities, divorce, and widowhood (National Council on Welfare 1990; McKenzie 1992).

According to Connelly and MacDonald (1990):

In 1985, full-year, full-time female workers earned on average 65.5% of what men earned... the occupations with the largest increase in the number of women are those where the employment earnings are low. The concentration of women in the traditionally 'female' jobs of clerical, sales and service occupations, where pay is low and opportunities are few, has increased over the last 15 years. In 1986, the top occupations for women were still those of secretaries, bookkeepers and salespersons (Connelly and MacDonald 1990, p. 33).

Even when age and education were controlled, women with university degrees still earned between 70 and 80 percent of men's earnings. It is clear that women are concentrated in low-paying, low-status jobs and continue to bear the brunt of child care.

According to a study conducted by Skibbens (1991), most offences committed by women are crimes of poverty and only a small proportion of their crimes involve violence. He found that nearly half the number of charges laid against women
between 1984 and 1988 in the Halifax, Nova Scotia region were for shoplifting. Women tend to steal items such as clothing and Christmas presents, the report states.

Additionally, in Skibben’s study, forty-nine percent of the women who appeared before the Halifax courts used provincially financed Legal Aid lawyers, an indication of the number of women’s incomes below the province’s poverty line. Skibbens called for more research into the link between poverty and crime and for "alternatives for women who are charged with crimes of poverty" (Skibbens 1991, p. 68). His study, however, did not compare percentages for both women and men.

Similarly, a study quoted in the RCMP Gazette reported:

> Shoplifters measure their financial need against business profits, consider rising consumer prices in the face of their income, and feel the need to rival peers who have impressive clothes, possessions, and lifestyles (Saunders 1981, p. 21).

This finding is similar to the results of my research conducted in 1992. Interviews with twenty female shoplifters in Sydney, Nova Scotia revealed that the items most commonly shoplifted were clothing and household items. Questions pertaining to the motivations of these women revealed a high level of stress in their lives, due to financial and relational difficulties (Sampson 1992).\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{12}\)See the following studies for further information on the stress experienced by female shoplifters: Cupchik and Atcheson 1983; Bradford and Balmaceda 1983; Sydney University 1983; Byers 1986; Yates 1986.
According to Yates (1986), economic motivations for shoplifting are apparent. Additionally, many other studies speak of the importance of economic motivations (Angement 1981; Campbell 1981; Moore 1984; Ray 1987; Ray and Briar 1988; Klemke 1992). In her 1964 study, Cameron cites economic reasons for shoplifting (pilfering) as well:

Adult women pilferers, generally belonging to families of rather modest income, enter department stores with a strong sense of the limitations of their household budgets (Cameron 1964, p. 159).

It appears that for women in particular, financial stress is an important motivation to shoplift. There exists a definite relationship between women, poverty, and crime.

Thus, it is my position that shoplifting by women is not only a crime of poverty, but one of control as well. Women shoplift not only because they are economically marginalized, but to gain or retain a sense of control over their lives. The criminal justice system’s response to their crime is less than adequate. It not only frequently places women in situations where they have even less control of their lives, but does not deal with the offence in an effective manner. Although economic motivations are contributing factors, one

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13 See also:

Globe and Mail
Montreal Gazette

Toronto Star

Winnipeg Free Press
must focus on female criminality as a microcosm of the marginalization that women face within the larger society.

My position throughout this thesis is similar to the economic marginalization thesis offered in opposition to the liberation thesis of female criminality. The main points of the economic marginalization perspective include the following:

Greater participation in the labor force does not necessarily mean either more equality between the sexes or an improved economic situation for women.

The bulk of female offenders, if employed at all, are concentrated in a pink-collar ghetto, and their positions are characterized by poor pay and unrewarding, insecure work.

Female crime, the bulk of which is petty property crime, constitutes a rational response to poverty and economic insecurity. (Simon and Landis 1991, p. 10).

To these points, I would add that female crime is also a rational response to the stress of a woman’s particular life situation, not solely economic stress. This point is examined further throughout the results of this research.
Chapter III: Methodology

The qualitative research approach used is derived from Norman Denzin’s Interpretive Interactionism (1989a) and The Research Act (1989b). The unstructured, schedule interview will be employed as the method of obtaining the required information. This method is valuable because it does not redefine the questions to be asked nor their order. This type of interview allows both the interviewer and the respondent the freedom to question and answer without a predefined order. Thus, each interview is unique to each individual.

According to Denzin (1989a), "interpretive interactionism attempts to make the world of lived experience directly accessible to the reader" (Denzin 1989a, p. 14). To make the world of shoplifters and shoplifting accessible to the reader with the hope of increased understanding, is the goal of this research.

This qualitative research approach is grounded in the voices, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and actions of the individuals who participate. Its emphasis is on the epiphany, an experience that transforms an individual’s life; a type of turning point in one’s life (Denzin 1989a). Its purpose is to "examine how the private troubles of individuals, which occur within the immediate world of experience, are connected to
public issues and to public responses to these troubles" (Denzin 1989, p. 7). Accordingly, with a better understanding of shoplifters and shoplifting, better responses to this issue may be developed.

The task of the researcher is to interpret these epiphanies into a meaningful understanding of the phenomenon under study. According to Denzin (1989a), the task of interpretation involves six steps. First, the research question is framed from the personal life experience(s) of the respondents. Through the present research, the who, what, where, when, how and why of shoplifting is answered. Why do adult women shoplift? Why do they shoplift as opposed to another type of crime? What are the characteristics of these women? Where do they shoplift and what do they take? How and when do they shoplift? These questions are explored utilizing Denzin's approach through the candid interviews with fourteen Canadian women convicted of shoplifting.

Second, the phenomenon must be deconstructed through an analysis and review of the existing literature in order to locate the present research within this literature. It has already been noted that research on female criminality, especially shoplifters and shoplifting is neither recent nor Canadian. Thus, the goal of this research is to contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon by contributing to the existing literature.

Third, the topic under study must be captured; it must be
located within reality and multiple instances of it must be found. Capturing the topic is discussed below in the Sample and Procedures.

Fourth, the phenomenon is bracketed; taken apart and analyzed in terms of key phrases and statements. The process of reviewing the interviews for the Results exemplifies bracketing. Key phrases and themes running throughout the interviews were highlighted and discussed.

The fifth step involves construction which means putting the essential elements back together in a coherent whole. Construction of the information gathered throughout the interviews comprised some of the Results section, but mainly the Discussion and Implications for Theory. Here, the essential elements and common themes were examined more closely to piece together a picture of adult, female shoplifters and shoplifting.

The final step is contextualization which attempts to give meaning to the phenomenon by locating it back into the social world it came from (Denzin 1989a, pp. 48-60). Again, with contextualization, the picture of shoplifters and shoplifting became more complete. This picture was being created throughout the Discussion and Implications for Theory and in the Conclusion. The final result is a good understanding of the phenomenon under study.
Limitations of Interviews

Although a qualitative research method rich in description and valuable information, the interview is not without its limitations. The first and most obvious drawback of interviews is the reliance of the researcher on the information provided by the respondent. The respondent must be able to recall the information and recall it with accuracy. Thus, the researcher is in the position of assuming the truth of the respondent's information.

According to Klemke (1992), this problem can be alleviated by conducting the research within a recent time period of the information required and assuring the interviewee of her/his confidentiality.

With the present research, women convicted of shoplifting in Windsor, Ontario were approached immediately after their court appearance. Women in Sydney, Nova Scotia were approached within one year of their conviction. All women were ensured of the confidentiality of the information they provided. This is further discussed below.

A second limitation of interviews is that individuals may not fully answer the questions posed by the interviewer, resulting in the absence of complete information. For example, a woman may not want to speak about her drug addiction or shoplifting activity. With the use of the unstructured, schedule interview, questions can be rephrased or asked at a later time in the interview. As a
conversational style of interviewing, obtaining information on sensitive topics is easier. As well, every woman in the present research voluntarily agreed to be interviewed and could stop the interview at any time.\footnote{See Denzin (1989), The Research Act for a further explanation.}

According to Denzin (1989b), another difficulty with interviews includes the understanding of a group's language, rules and symbol:. In this case, pilfering, boosting, floorwalkers, domes, booster boxes and kleptomania make up some of the language and symbols of shoplifters and shoplifting. Stealing from large department stores as opposed to an individual is a major rule of shoplifters and one which is discussed in further detail in the Results.

Being a volunteer and an employee within corrections and the Elizabeth Fry Society, I was accustomed to the above language, rules and symbols. Again, through the use of the unstructured, schedule interview, rich description and clarification of terms was realized.

A fourth problem with the use of interviews includes the ability to generalize results due to the small sample of subjects usually obtained. Fourteen interviews with adult, female shoplifters obtained for this research comprises a fairly large sample to alleviate this problem.

Finally, Klemke (1992) discusses the lack of interviews with adult women, especially pertaining to shoplifting. He
states:

Even though there are quite a few interview and self-report studies, they are primarily focused on youth (often in small communities and of students) and/or heroin street addicts. Very few exist on adults (particularly female adults) or middle-class shoplifters (Klemke 1992, p. 36).

As stated, the goal of this research is to enrich our understanding of adult, female shoplifters and shoplifting.

The Interview Guide

The interviews were approached as interactive conversations rather than official data gathering to allow for increased sharing of information between myself and the woman. According to Kirby and McKenna (1989), "For quality interviewing, there must exist a sense of equality between the person gathering the information and the person whose knowledge is sought" (Kirby and McKenna 1989, p. 67). Denzin (1989a) concurs with this statement, saying that the interview should be transformed into a "sharing, conversational interaction" (Denzin 1989a, p. 43).

With these ideas in mind, the interview guide was designed with eleven broad categories covering the information sought about the topic. Each category was further broken down into smaller categories. The information sought pertained to the women's personal background, life experiences, motivation(s) to shoplift, criminal history, involvement with the criminal justice system and present life situation (See Appendix: Interview Guide).
With no predefined order, questions were asked in a free-flowing style of conversation. Sometimes, a woman provided information during the first question that wasn’t needed until later in the interview. The women seemed to feel comfortable answering questions during a conversation as opposed to a purely data gathering exercise.

As well, I believe that some level of equality was achieved with these interviews as they took place wherever the woman felt comfortable, such as across a picnic table on a sunny day or in their homes. Sharing some of my own personal experiences and stories seemed to help maintain a comfortable, non-threatening atmosphere. Additionally, as stated above, women voluntarily agreed to be interviewed and could stop the interview at any time.

With each interview, I became more at ease with the interview guide. As well, the guide itself allowed each interview to be unique because of its open-ended style. Due to the atmosphere created, the freedom of questioning and the ability to move around in the guide, a less stressful interview was obtained.

Confidentiality

As stated above, assuring the interviewee of her/his confidentiality is important when seeking the truth of the respondent’s information. At the beginning of every interview, a confidentiality agreement was signed and given to
the women, ensuring my promise of anonymity and confidentiality (See Appendix: Confidentiality Agreement).

As well, I obtained the support and permission of Windsor Probation and Parole (Ministry of Correctional Services) and the Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton previous to the actual interviews.

Participation in the interviews was completely voluntary and no identifying information was used. Pseudonyms were used in place of real names and I was the only individual privy to their real identity and transcription of research.

Tape recording was selected for accuracy, ease of transcription, and to allow for increased eye contact and interaction with respondents to obtain maximum information. All tapes are to be destroyed by the University of Windsor upon completion of the research.

The Sample

Capturing the phenomenon under study by obtaining a sample of shoplifters was a difficult undertaking. Contact with Windsor Probation and Parole (Ministry of Correctional Services) and the Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton enabled me to obtain a sample of adult, female shoplifters. Six interviews were conducted with women appearing before the provincial court in Windsor, Ontario and eight interviews were conducted with women appearing before the provincial court in Sydney, Nova Scotia.
Although seventeen interviews were conducted in total, three were not useable as one woman was a young offender, another committed theft which was not shoplifting and another was found not guilty in court. Thus, a total of fourteen interviews became my sample (See Appendix: Record of Interviews).

A possible problem with my sample from Cape Breton arises simply from the Elizabeth Fry Society itself. The Society had control over the selection of the sample. A representative of the Society made the initial contact with the women, perhaps choosing those women who seemed most likely to participate. This is a speculation, but a legitimate concern for this research. I was provided with a list of potential interviewees after this initial contact was made and the women agreed to the interview.

The Procedure

Knowing there was no Elizabeth Fry Society in Windsor, I began contacting other community agencies in my quest for a sample of shoplifters. Contact was made with the John Howard Society of Windsor, Elizabeth Fry's counterpart for men. I was informed that the Society provides programs mainly to the youth of the community, so they would be unable to assist me with the contacts I needed for my research.

John Howard referred me to a contact person with Probation and Parole, Ministry of Correctional Services. Upon
contacting their office, I was informed that the Probation Department no longer conducted a formal program for shoplifters. They had disbanded the program "a long time ago" and probation officers "do it on a case by case basis". Although this avenue seemed to be a dead end, I persisted by arranging a meeting with one of their probation officers.

During this meeting, I was able to explain the nature and purpose of my research to the probation officer in hopes of obtaining support. I was asked to submit a copy of my interview guide along with written information regarding the nature and purpose of my research. I did so, but was unable to obtain their support at that time.

During this time, I also telephoned other community agencies in the Windsor area along with Elizabeth Fry Societies in the communities of Brampton, Peel Halton and Toronto. I focussed on Toronto as they were operating a program for adult, female shoplifters and I had transportation and accommodation in the area.

Numerous long-distance phone calls went unanswered as well as copies of my research proposal and interview guide. I offered to meet with their representatives in person to discuss the project in further detail. As I had previously worked for the Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton, a representative contacted Toronto on my behalf, but to no avail.

Throughout this entire process, it became increasingly
apparent that my efforts were in vain. Finally, I was informed that if I wanted to conduct any research, it would have to be done within their office, with their computer and remain there. As conducting my research in this manner was completely impossible, I began to pursue other avenues.

I contacted Windsor Legal Aid, Hiatus House, Sister Emelina Home, Windsor Jail, the police, crown attorney, a judge and two lawyers in an attempt to obtain suggestions, contacts or information for my sample. Both lawyers advertised their defence of shoplifting cases in the local newspaper, the Windsor Star. Legal Aid and Sister Emelina Home agreed to advertise my notice requesting respondents for my research (See Appendix: Women Accused/Convicted of Shoplifting).

Contact with the Crown Attorney's office led me to a meeting with the man in charge of the Adult Diversion Program. He provided me with some information, but most importantly, the name of the probation officer in charge of operating the program from the Windsor Courthouse.

After meeting with her, she agreed to inform her clients for the diversion program of a student conducting research on shoplifting. If they wished to be interviewed or find out more information, I was there to speak with them. I obtained some of my interviews in this manner.

An article on shoplifting in the Windsor Star prompted me to contact the reporter who wrote the article. With her
assistance, I was able to obtain an interview with the woman
whom she spoke about in her article. Ironically, she was
residing at Sister Emelina Home and arrangements were made for
me to interview her at this residence.

The Retail Council of Canada was also very helpful with
information on shoplifting as it affects Canadian retailers.
On May 26, 1993, I attended a workshop in Windsor sponsored by
the Retail Council's Profit Network where information was
provided on the effects of shoplifting to retailers, methods
of shoplifting and ways to combat the problem. It is
interesting to note that the Retail Council has been
advocating a change in the language of theft from shoplifting
to shop-theft and shoplifters to shop-thieves because
shoplifting is "one of the biggest crimes being perpetrated in
Canada" (Fruitman 1993, p. 2).

For my interviews in Cape Breton, I obtained the
cooperation and support of the local Elizabeth Fry Society.
As I had worked for the organization in the past, they were
familiar with my work and were aware of my intentions and
purpose of the research. Thus, the process in Cape Breton was
quite different and easier. They made the initial contact with
the women and I was provided with a list of potential
interviewees, whom I subsequently contacted.

The procedural issues faced in this research are not new.
With so many undergraduate and graduate students conducting
research, a healthy paranoia has gripped many agencies dealing
with potential subjects of study. However, this paranoia has sometimes served to cripple productive research in areas where it is lacking, as has been my experience. Attempting to obtain the support, permission and cooperation of various agencies was not an easy task, although preferred to conducting the research without them.

The Interviews

As stated, in Windsor I had limited assistance from the probation officer in charge of the Adult Diversion Program. I was able to obtain a couple of interviews through this process, until help surfaced from the local police department. Rookies of the department were stationed on court duty where they assisted individuals appearing before the courts by providing them with information, directing them to the duty counsel or to the probation officer. Discussion with the rookies allowed me access to the court dockets in search of potential interviewees. I obtained the majority of the interviews in this manner.

As with any research involving interviews and an individual's personal history, I was concerned with further victimization or embarrassment. Thus, all of the women were approached at the conclusion of their dealings with the court. All were given a confidentiality agreement, explained the purpose of the research and its voluntary nature and made aware that the results of the research would be available to
them through the University of Windsor. By addressing the women by their names, as obtained from the docket, and explaining my research, I was able to obtain the remainder of my interviews for Windsor.

Interviews were conducted both inside and outside of the courthouse, across picnic tables and even inside a woman's car. One interview was conducted at Sister Emelina Home and I obtained one interview as a result of a prior interview. Basically, the interviews were held in the place where the woman felt the most comfortable. There were twenty refusals for Windsor.

In Cape Breton, contact was made with the women after I obtained the list from the Elizabeth Fry Society. Arrangements were made for the time, date and place of the interview, again wherever the woman felt the most comfortable. Interviews were conducted at the office of the Elizabeth Fry Society, inside women's homes and in one woman's car. There were no refusals for Cape Breton (See Appendix: Record of Refusals).

Women who refused to be interviewed were given a sheet of information including my name, phone number, purpose of the research and assurance of confidentiality. No interviews were obtained in this manner (See Appendix: Female Volunteers Wanted).

In total, fourteen interviews were utilized to gain an understanding of adult, female shoplifters and shoplifting.
According to Denzin (1989a), understanding is the goal of interpretive interactionism. This understanding can only come from those individuals directly involved with the phenomenon under study.

Canadian research with shoplifters is lacking. I want to contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of this offence:

> If you can increase the understanding of an issue or a circumstance, illuminate one experience, portray one person's story in a new light, you will have helped others to understand the social world a little better. **This is what research is all about** (Kirby and McKenna 1989, p. 96).
Chapter IV: Results of Research

Part I

A: Who are the Shoplifters?

Perhaps the most commonly asked question about shoplifting is, "Who does it and why?" This chapter attempts to answer this question by dividing it into two parts. First, to answer the question of who shoplifts, emphasis is placed on the questions of who, what, where, when and how. Demographics of the women interviewed along with various themes from the research assist in formulating a picture of who shoplifts. The items shoplifted from the stores are discussed, along with the types of stores, when and how the items are taken. All of this information attempts to answer the first part of our question.

I felt it necessary to divide the question into two parts due to the volume of the information covered and the importance of answering the question of why adult females shoplift. Thus, Part II of the Results section focusses on the motivations of adult women shoplifters. By focussing on their reasons for shoplifting, another addition to a complete picture is made. The women not only discuss their reasons to shoplift, but their reasons for shoplifting, as opposed to another type of crime.
There were a total of seventeen women interviewed over a period of three months in 1993. Of those interviewed, fourteen became 'useable' interviews. Three were designated as 'non-useable' as they included a young offender, a woman found not guilty in court and an offence of theft under one-thousand dollars which was not shoplifting.

Demographics of the Women Interviewed: Age

The ages of the women interviewed ranged from thirty-one to fifty-six, with an average age of 38.6 years (See Appendix: Chart 3). If one looks at Cape Breton alone, the age range of the women was the same, however, the average age climbs to 41. For Windsor, the age range was from 32 to 48 with an average age of 35.3 years. Klemke (1992) reports that in Cameron's 1964 study, the number of adult women apprehended for shoplifting remained high until age 55 when the number of apprehensions decreased. From the above data, similar findings appear. The majority of adult, female shoplifters are in their thirties and the oldest female interviewed, Heather, was 56 years of age.

The results become quite interesting if one compares the age of the shoplifter with the value of the merchandise stolen. The value of the items ranged from $5.00 to $361.00, with an average value of $70.56. However, if one separates Cape Breton and Windsor, the results are quite different. For Cape Breton, the average value of merchandise stolen totalled
$12.48 whereas the average for Windsor totalled $148.00 (See Appendix: Chart 4). This difference becomes more meaningful when the age of the shoplifter is compared with the value of the merchandise stolen.

For Cape Breton, women in their thirties shoplifted items valued at $20.00 or less. As the age of the women increased, the value of the items decreased. However, for Windsor, most of the women in their thirties shoplifted the highest valued items of all the women interviewed. However, two women in their thirties stole items valued at $20.00 and $25.00 and one woman age 48 stole items valued at $56.00. Does this suggest regional differences in adult, female shoplifters? Further exploration is necessary.

There could be regional differences given the geographic location, population and economics of both areas. However, if one looks at the amount of items taken at any one time, the explanation becomes clearer. Most of the women interviewed shoplifted one to two items at any one time. However, the three women from Windsor who stole items worth the highest value, also stole the largest amount of items at any one time. Megan\textsuperscript{15} shoplifted 27 items at one time, Sharon 6 items and Jackie 5 items. This could account for the differences discussed above.

\textsuperscript{15}Names have been changed to respect the confidentiality of the women interviewed.
Marital Status

There does not appear to be any relationship between the marital status of the women in the study and their motivations for shoplifting (See Appendix: Chart 5). However, one woman from Windsor was the only woman interviewed who did not shoplift alone. Jackie always shoplifted with her husband. Every other woman stated that they were alone when they shoplifted. Additionally, Jackie appears to be the only one who may be a commercial shoplifter or 'booster'. This is further discussed below.

Number of Children

The number of children ranged from none to eight. The average number of children was 2.7 (See Appendix: Chart 6). Thus, there does not appear to be a relationship between the number of children a woman has and her shoplifting behavior. However, it does appear that children do play a role in some cases where the mother stated that she was shoplifting as a way to survive, to make ends meet because of her financial situation. This is discussed further in Part II of the Results in Chapter V.

Education

The education of the women in this research ranged from grade three to a Bachelor’s degree. There was no concentration in one area or grade level. Women possessed a
variety of educational backgrounds and the average level of education was grade ten (See Appendix: Chart 7). Again, there seems to be no relationship between grade level and shoplifting. However, one may say that adult, female shoplifters possess an average education of grade ten; a high school level of education.

Ethnicity

Not surprisingly, five out of eight women interviewed in Cape Breton described themselves as having a Scottish background, some with a combination of French as well. Two women reported a Dutch background and one woman said she was Norwegian. One woman had an Irish background as well. The women from Windsor described themselves as English, Italian and Ukrainian, of which there was one woman of each background. Others reported a combination of Lebanese and French, Scottish and Irish, English, Welsh and Irish (See Appendix: Chart 8).

This sample of women appears to be a typical selection of women from the two communities. I attempted to obtain as much of a representative sample as possible. All women appearing in court for shoplifting in Windsor were approached. Some refused to be interviewed while others accepted. In Cape Breton, the sample was drawn from cases of the Elizabeth Fry Society. There were no refusals from Cape Breton. This was previously discussed in the Methodology.
Financial Circumstances

The financial circumstances of the majority of the women involved in this study are those of poverty and restriction. A total of seven women or one-half of those interviewed were receiving Social Assistance, five from Cape Breton and two from Windsor. Two women were receiving a disability pension, two were unemployed and one woman was on sick leave from her place of employment. Only Megan and Victoria, both from Windsor, were employed at the time of the interview (See Appendix: Chart 9).

This is consistent with the previous research discussed above. Women who come in conflict with the law are frequently the victims of violence, poverty, gender inequality, and restricted options in life (Adelberg and Currie 1991). It is not necessary to review the literature again here. Further discussion follows in Chapters V and VI. The relationship between a woman’s financial circumstances and her shoplifting behavior is discussed as well.

Charges versus Actual Offences:

According to the fourteen women interviewed, the number of actual shoplifting offences committed is greater than the number of charges they have had for shoplifting. This is not surprising, since every crime that is committed is certainly not detected or reported. The number of charges for shoplifting ranged from one to six with one woman, Kathy,
having a total of 42 charges. The average number of charges per woman is 1.9. If Kathy’s 42 charges are included, the average increases to 4.8.

The number of actual shoplifting offences committed ranged from one to ten with Kathy having a total of 50 offences. Lorna was shoplifting for approximately 20 years. The average number of offences per woman is 3.6. If Kathy’s 50 offences are included, the average increases to 7.2. If the actual number of offences was known for Lorna, the average number would increase. If we remove the amount of charges she had from the calculations, the average number of charges remains basically unchanged at 1.6.

Thus, it appears that for every four (3.6 average) shoplifting offences, two (1.6 average) charges result, the outcome being a two to one ratio (See Appendix: Chart 10). Therefore, a woman can shoplift knowing that she will be caught 50 percent of the time. She has a 50 percent chance of getting away with the crime.

With these odds, it would appear that shoplifting is a relatively ‘low-risk’ crime. As such, one could expect that the women will continue to shoplift. When asked this question, most women stated that they had no plans to shoplift in the future. They did not want to shoplift and go through the experience again, such as the court system and the embarrassment. Some women did talk of the necessity to shoplift to make ends meet. Some of their responses include:
VICTORIA: I THINK A ONE-TIME THING... IT'S ENOUGH TO REALLY SHAKE ME BECAUSE THERE HASN'T BEEN A DAY THAT I HAVEN'T BEEN WORRIED SICK ABOUT IT OR I THOUGHT ABOUT IT, SO I REALLY BELIEVE ONE HUNDRED PERCENT I'M NEVER GOING TO DO IT AGAIN...

SHARON: I'LL TAKE IT ONE DAY AT A TIME... THIS IS IT. THIS IS A LESSON THAT I LEARNED... THIS MIGHT MAKE ME A BETTER PERSON FOR IT... YOU KNOW, SEEING THAT HEY, YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING YOU WANT... THAT THERE IS A JUSTICE THAT'S GONNA BE SERVED IF YOU DO SOMETHING WRONG... FOR ANYBODY, NOT JUST MYSELF.

JACKIE: MY MOTHER ALWAYS SAID TO ME, 'YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LAW' AND I TOLD HER... 'I WILL DO WHAT I HAVE TO DO TO SURVIVE AND TO MAKE SURE THAT MY KIDS WILL BE O.K.... THAT THERE'S A ROOF OVER THEIR HEAD, FOOD IN THEIR STOMACH, AND CLOTHES ON THEIR BACK. I WILL DO WHAT I HAVE TO DO AND DON'T JUDGE ME'. AND I DON'T JUDGE ANYBODY. IF YOU'RE DOING WHAT YOU GOT TO DO TO SURVIVE, THEN THAT'S O.K.... YOU DO WHAT YA GOT TO DO TO SURVIVE.

LORNA: YEAH, I STILL STEAL... WELL, BECAUSE I HAVE TO NOW. LIKE, I MEAN THAT... IF YOU'RE REALLY DESPERATE AND YOU NEED SOME MONEY, YOU KNOW. PROBABLY NOTHING [WOULD STOP HER FROM SHOPLIFTING]. PROBABLY GOING TO JAIL. IF I WAS EVER SENT TO JAIL, THEN I WOULD GIVE IT UP FOR GOOD. TILL THAT DAY COMES, I'M ALWAYS GONNA CONTINUE. I KNOW I WILL, UNLESS I WIN A LOT OF MONEY.

PATRICIA: NO, NO, NOT ME. MAYBE CAUSE I HAVE A FAMILY TO THINK ABOUT. I HAVE A LITTLE FELLA I GOTTA THINK ABOUT. I DON'T WANT HIM TO GROW UP AND THINK IT'S O.K. TO DO IT. IT'S NOT. I LOOK AT IT THAT WAY.

TERRI: NO [NOT TEMPTED NOW WHEN SHE GOES INTO A STORE]. I'LL NEVER GET BACK INTO THIS, ANY OF THIS SHADY DEALING AGAIN. I'LL JUST DO WITHOUT. I'LL LEARN TO LIVE WITHOUT IT. I WILL GET WORK SOMEWHERE, I DON'T KNOW WHERE, BUT I WILL. WHEN I GO INTO A STORE NOW I DON'T EVEN THINK OF TAKING ANYTHING. IT DOESN'T EVEN CROSS MY MIND.

To know the recidivism rate for these women is beyond the scope of this research. As discussed in the Methodology, one must rely on the information supplied by the women only. What we may suggest is that if a crime is low-risk, the level of recidivism may be higher and/or the number of people
committing the crime may be greater. A discussion of shoplifting as a low risk, easy crime occurs in Chapter V, Part II of the Results.

'I Shoplift Alone'

This theme resounded throughout the interviews. Most women reported shoplifting alone. When this finding is examined more closely, one discovers that a relationship may exist between this finding and others. When we look again at the value of the merchandise taken, the generally low value of the merchandise combined with the finding that most women shoplift alone leads one to suggest that these women are mainly pilferers or 'petty thieves'. As well, may one suggest that pilferers generally shoplift alone? Or, that women shoplifters who are alone are more likely to be pilferers as opposed to commercial thieves (boosters)?

It is necessary to focus our attention on the women who reported that they did not shoplift alone. As stated, Jackie reported shoplifting with her husband and the value of the merchandise was three hundred dollars, well above the average of $70.56. Could this woman be a commercial shoplifter or 'booster'? Jackie was from Windsor, Ontario and as discussed above, she was one of three women from Windsor who shoplifted items worth the highest value and the largest amount of items at any one time. This finding combined with shoplifting with another person, her husband, leads one to suggest that she
quite conceivably could be a commercial shoplifter.

But to be a commercial shoplifter, one has to sell the items stolen. As discussed previously, a non-commercial shoplifter or 'pilferer' usually uses the items stolen and the 'booster' or commercial shoplifter usually sells the items stolen. When questioned regarding the use she had for the items she stole, Jackie stated that her and her husband would steal the items and sell them to obtain money. She states:

WE'D SELL IT OR JUST BRING IT HOME... YOU SEEN SOMETHING YOU LIKED, YOU WENT AND GOT IT, YOU KNOW... I LIKED NICE CLOTHES, I LIKED NICE THINGS, SO DID MY HUSBAND. THAT'S HOW WE GOT IT. IF IT DIDN'T FIT OR WHEN YOU GOT IT HOME, YOU DIDN'T LIKE IT OR WHATEVER, THEN YOU CHOSE TO SELL IT, YOU GAVE IT AWAY OR WHATEVER... IT'S A THRILL, IT'S AN ADDICTION. BECAUSE IT'S LIKE A DRUG THAT, YOU DO IT, YOU GET THE RUSH, YOU COME DOWN, YOU DO IT AGAIN... I WAS USUALLY STRAIGHT WHEN I DID IT, BUT IT WAS TO SUPPORT A HABIT. I'VE BEEN CLEAN THREE YEARS THIS WEEKEND.

Contrary to her story, Kathy and Lorna who reported the sale of stolen items did not shoplift with another individual. They were alone and they did not shoplift items of a high value or a large amount of items at any one time. However, when questioned further, Kathy stated:

IT WAS A WAY TO GET PRESCRIPTIONS... I KNEW I COULD SHOPLIFT AN ITEM IN RETURN FOR A PRESCRIPTION.

She was shoplifting to support an addiction to prescription medication. It was a simple exchange of goods. She knew if she stole a particular item for a person that he or she would provide her with the prescription to which she was addicted.

Lorna, the other woman that reported she sold items, but
was alone when she shoplifted had the following comment:

I'LL GO OUT AND STEAL SOME THINGS... SELL THEM, THREE FOR THE PRICE OF ONE, SOMEWHERE, YEAH. WELL, ANYBODY WILL TAKE IT... EVEN HALF PRICE. YOU KNOW, IF YOU'RE REALLY DESPERATE AND YOU NEED SOME MONEY, YOU KNOW... IF I NEED MONEY FOR SOME MILK OR STUFF LIKE THAT, THEN I'LL STEAL FOR OTHER PEOPLE, BUT I USUALLY JUST STEAL FOR MYSELF.

Here, she clearly describes the circumstances when she steals to sell. Usually, she steals for herself, but when she finds herself in a desperate situation, she will steal items to sell to other people to pay for items needed by her and her family.

Thus, it appears that at least one woman, Jackie, was a commercial shoplifter who chose to sell the items. Additionally, the suggestion that most of the women interviewed were non-commercial shoplifters or 'pilferers' appears plausible.

I am Not a Thief

Five out of eight women stated that they did not consider themselves a shoplifter or thief. Some of their comments included:

TERRI: OH YES, I GUESS I DID. I DIDN'T FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF, I JUST THOUGHT THAT THAT WAS THE WAY TO SURVIVE. I GUESS I WAS A THIEF! I STOLE SOMETHING THAT DIDN'T BELONG TO ME.

LORNA: I DON'T CLASSIFY MYSELF AS ANYTHING. I'M JUST OUT STEALING. WELL, I AM A THIEF. I MUST BE A THIEF IF I'M OUT SHOPLIFTING OR STEALING... IT'S ALL THE SAME. HOW COULD YOU SAY YOU'RE NOT A THIEF IF YOU'RE OUT STEALING? HOW CAN THEY SAY THAT? [OTHER WOMEN INTERVIEWED] WHEN THEY ARE... THEY'RE DENYING... THAT'S ALL, JUST LIKE I'M DENYING I'M NOT HURTING ANYBODY OR... BY DOING THAT, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?
ANNE: NO, NO NOT REALLY. NO, I DIDN'T, I USED TO THINK THAT OH MY GOD, SEE WHAT'S HER NAME THERE IS A SHOPLIFTER. NOW THAT'S A BAD PERSON, BUT NOW THAT I'VE BEEN DOWN THAT ROAD, I KNOW IT'S NOT TRUE. NOT EVERYBODY... THERE IS PEOPLE THAT THEY JUST THRIVE ON THAT, YOU KNOW. THAT'S ALL THEY DO, THEY SEE WHAT THEY CAN GET OUT OF LIFE FREE AND EVERYTHING. AND, THEN THERE'S PEOPLE THAT HAVE A PROBLEM OR HAVE HAD A PROBLEM AND DID WHAT I DID. IN OTHER WORDS, THERE'S ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE, EVERYBODY'S DIFFERENT.

JACKIE: MY HUSBAND WOULD SAY I WAS, BUT I NEVER CONSIDERED MYSELF ONE... HE WAS ONE OF THE BEST, SO I NEVER USED TO SAY I WAS A THIEF... NOT COMPARED TO HIM... NOT COMPARED TO HIM. IT WAS JUST SOMETHING I DID... YOU LIKE IT, YOU DID IT.

BRENDA: DO I CONSIDER MYSELF ONE? NO, I DON'T CONSIDER MYSELF ONE. IT'S NOT LIKE I PLAN TO DO IT THE REST OF MY LIFE... JUST FOR THE PRESENT. I MEAN, IF I COULD GET WORK, BELIEVE ME, I WOULD.

Those women who did not consider themselves a shoplifter or thief seemed to feel that shoplifting was somewhat of a ‘necessary evil’ at the time. This means that they perceived shoplifting as a way to survive, to make ends meet for a limited period of time until their financial situation improved. Other women felt that due to the extreme stress in their life, shoplifting occurred, but would not occur again. They viewed it as a result of the problems they were experiencing.

The women who considered themselves thieves viewed shoplifting in clearly defined terms. They knew that if they stole something that was not their own, regardless of the reason, it was shoplifting. Lorna stated that the other women interviewed were simply denying what they were doing, as she was denying it was hurting anyone. She made this statement in
reference to her children. They are aware that she is shoplifting, but do not say anything to her. She realizes her shoplifting is hurting her children because she knows the people in her neighborhood talk about her.

At this time, it is not necessary to expand on the motivations for shoplifting. They are discussed further in Part II of the Results in Chapter V.

B: What is Shoplifted?

Previous discussion has focussed on the value and amount of merchandise stolen. It is only necessary to summarize it here and continue with a discussion of the type of merchandise stolen. As mentioned, the value of the items taken ranged from $5.00 to $361.00, with an average value of $70.56. For the Cape Breton women, four out of eight stole items valued under $10.00. The remaining four women stole items valued at $20.00 or less.

For the Windsor women, the value of the items was greater, with one woman, Sharon, stealing items valued at $361.00. Jackie stole high-priced items, valued at $300.00. The average value of merchandise stolen for the Cape Breton women totalled $12.48 whereas the average value for the Windsor women totalled $148.00.

These results were explained in terms of the age of the women and the suggestion that one woman from Windsor was a commercial shoplifter or 'booster'. As well, the women from
Windsor stole a larger amount of items at any one time than those in Cape Breton, thus, accounting for the differences in value. From that discussion, it was suggested that the value of the items decreased with the increasing age of the women.

In terms of the amount of items shoplifted, most of the women interviewed shoplifted one to two items at any one time. One could suggest from this finding that most of the women interviewed were not commercial shoplifters, but pilferers. If they were boosters, they would be selling items to make a profit and would require a large amount of shoplifted items.

The type of items shoplifted also support the suggestion that most of these women were pilferers as opposed to professionals. The type of items taken included women and children’s clothing, personal hygiene and hair-care products, makeup, household items, cigarettes, food, batteries and school supplies. The most prevalent items shoplifted include women and children’s clothing and personal hygiene and hair-care products. This is not surprising, since nine out of the fourteen women were not married and twelve women had children.

Items of clothing include women’s sweaters and blouses, pants and shoes, children’s outfits and shoes. Items of personal hygiene and hair-care include deodorant, shampoo, hair coloring, mousse and hair clips. Two women shoplifted makeup. Two women shoplifted food and two women shoplifted cigarettes.

Other items taken include body lotion, ozonal medicated
cream, lingerie, curtains, batteries, air freshener and furniture polish, candy, 'Barney' video tapes for children and school supplies (See Appendix: Chart 11).

The type of merchandise taken from the stores is of relatively small dollar value, suggesting that the sale of the items was not a consideration. As well, the type of items do not appear to be the most 'saleable' items that one could choose from a store. This finding, combined with the fact that most of the women stole a small amount of merchandise at any one time seems to further support the suggestion that these women are not commercial shoplifters, but rather 'petty thieves' or pilferers.

In Part II of the Results, these findings are further explored in terms of their relationship to a woman's motivations to shoplift.

C: Where Do Shoplifters Shoplift?

The type of items taken is an indication of the type of stores where shoplifters shoplift. It would appear that most shoplifting occurs in department stores and drug stores. This was confirmed throughout the interviews. Out of a total of fourteen women, nine shoplifted from department stores and four shoplifted from drugstores. Five of the eight women in Cape Breton and four of the six women in Windsor shoplifted from department stores. Only one woman from Windsor, Jackie, shoplifted in grocery stores and boutiques. It is interesting
to note that she is the only woman who shoplifted with someone, her husband. She is also the woman suspected of being a commercial shoplifter.

Zellers, K Mart and Woolco/Wal-Mart seem to be the most popular department stores for shoplifters, with the Met and Sears being the second choice. Shopper’s Drug Mart was the most popular drugstore, where the remaining four women shoplifted. Grocery stores shoplifted by Jackie included Food Plus and a Super Store. Boutiques that were mentioned by her included ‘Suzy Cream Cheese’ and ‘Nightlights’.

From these results, it appears that adult, female shoplifters are shoplifting mainly from department stores and drugstores. This finding is apparent with both the Cape Breton and Windsor women. Could one suggest that women shop mainly in department stores and drugstores, thus, they are shoplifting in these stores as well?

D: When Does Shoplifting Occur?

One question asked throughout the interviews involved the month, day and time of the shoplifting offence. This question was asked to ascertain whether or not there existed a certain period of time when shoplifting was most likely to occur. There does not appear to be a particular time of day when shoplifting occurs, although half of the women interviewed stated that they shoplifted in late afternoon or evening. They did not provide a reason for the time of day.
In terms of a particular day when the women shoplifted, most women could not remember the exact day when the offence occurred. Thus, one can not determine whether or not there exists a particular day of the week when shoplifting occurs the most.

At first glance, there does not appear to be a particular month when the shoplifting occurred. Some women reported shoplifting in the spring and summer months of May, June and July, while others reported shoplifting in September, December and February. Most of the women interviewed in Windsor had shoplifted in May, June and July. However, these interviewees were recruited throughout the summer months at the Windsor Courthouse, most likely the time when their case would reach court. As such, one can not determine a particular month when shoplifting occurs from this sample.

The months that the women in Cape Breton shoplifted included September, October, December, February, June and July. Again, there does not appear to be a connection between shoplifting and a particular month. However, some women did report running short of money at certain times of the year, such as the months of September and December. Some of them stated:

**LORNA:** USUALLY, BEFORE SCHOOL GOES BACK, YOU KNOW THEN CAUSE I REALLY DON'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY... OR, THE HOLIDAYS... AROUND THAT TIME.
NANCY: I THINK IT WAS SEPTEMBER, GOING BACK TO SCHOOL TIME. YOU KNOW, I WAS TRYING TO GET THE KIDS IN AND LIKE I SAY... AND AH, I COULDN’T AFFORD TO BUY THE STUFF SHE WANTED. FIRST TIME WAS DECEMBER, LIKE I SAID I WAS CHRISTMAS SHOPPING, IN THE EVENING. THE SECOND TIME WAS ALSO IN THE EVENING AND THAT WAS IN SEPTEMBER.

From this, one may suggest that certain times of the year place a greater amount of stress on women to provide for their families. In September, school supplies and clothing are in demand and may create more of a need or a temptation to shoplift at that time. Similarly, in December, increased pressure to provide gifts and clothing to children may be felt by these women.

As well, the holiday season brings with it an increased amount of advertising by various stores for certain types of merchandise. This may contribute to an increase in the temptation to shoplift as well. Additionally, most of the women interviewed were receiving some form of social assistance, another indication of the financial stress experienced at these times of year.

E: How Does a Shoplifter Shoplift?

Historically, the literature on shoplifting is full of deceptive methods used by shoplifters to remove goods from stores. One of the methods Cameron (1964) refers to include the use of a large handbag, briefcase, shopping bag, or ‘bad bag’. A bad bag refers to a paper bag that usually has the store’s name or logo on it and has been folded and unfolded so many times that it is clear to see it has been used on many
occasions to steal merchandise (Cameron 1964). The use of a 'bad bag' may communicate to store security that a potential shoplifter is present.

For women, one of the most popular ways of concealing merchandise included a 'booster skirt' or 'booster bloomers'. The old-fashioned bloomers had double rows of tight elastic at the knees. A woman could stuff merchandise through a slit in the bloomers and it would not fall to the floor. The booster skirt could be designed in any current fashion, as long as it had a hammock-like bag suspended between the legs to carry merchandise (Cameron 1964).

According to Cameron (1964), a full skirt with an elastic waistband was most convenient. The woman could wear a booster skirt and acquire the appearance of pregnancy. She states, "If the store detective has not noted the rapidity with which the pregnancy symptoms have developed, he may be the more reluctant to arrest the shoplifter" (Cameron 1964, p. 47).

A booster box is "a garment box or other box designed in advance by the booster to look like a wrapped package but with an opening into which articles may be placed" (Cameron 1964, p. 43). She states that the booster box was normally used by the professional shoplifter. It may be wrapped to look like a package that is ready to be mailed or to be given as a gift. It may have an opening slit on one side or at the end to allow the shoplifter to slide cassette tapes, compact discs, or articles of clothing inside.
Some of these methods may still be used. Others include wearing the clothing to be shoplifted out of the store. A person may put on a jacket and attempt to wear it out of the store, for example. Or, a person may wear many layers of clothing in order to avoid apprehension.

Sometimes, shoplifters have been found to carry small scissors or a razor blade to cut the tags from clothing. This may be accomplished in the store’s washroom where tags and any other ‘evidence’ can be easily flushed down the toilet (Cameron 1964).

Another method that has been used is a shopping bag that has a double lining or a double bottom. The shoplifter is able to place goods into the bottom or side of the bag where they remain unnoticed (Brandy 1970).

Although all of the above methods have been used by shoplifters throughout history to remove items from stores, most of the women in this study used their purses to assist them in concealing the merchandise they were shoplifting. A total of seven women or one-half of the women interviewed used their purse to conceal items. Sharon and Nancy used a bag to conceal their items and Heather and Susan put items inside the pocket of their jacket. Lorna put items under her arm and Jackie put items in her shopping cart among the children’s coats. One woman did not state how she was able to shoplift the items from the store (See Appendix: Chart 12).

It is necessary at this time to return to the definition
of shoplifting, as a clarification is warranted. Cameron’s 1964
definition asserted that shoplifting was theft of
merchandise from display in a store by an individual posing as
a legitimate customer.

All of the women interviewed were apprehended after they
exited the store. This comprises a very important part of the
situation as it determines whether or not an offence has been
committed. A woman must exit the store with the merchandise
before she can be apprehended for shoplifting. As an example,
a woman may remove items from a shelf, place them in her
purse, but purchase them as she reaches the cashier. Although
she may be concealing the merchandise, she is not shoplifting
if she has properly paid for the items at the cashier.

However, if this same woman was to continue past the cashier
and out the front door of the store, then she is shoplifting
because she has left the premises with no attempts to pay for
the merchandise.

Additionally, if a woman is apprehended prior to exiting
the store, it is the store’s responsibility to prove that she
had no intention to pay for the item(s). A difficult, if not
impossible, case in court.
Chapter V:

Results of Research Part II:

Why Shoplift & Why Shoplifting

A: Why Shoplift?

The results reported in Part I focussed on the questions of who, what, where, when and how. All of these questions were examined with the intention of developing a picture of the adult, female shoplifter. In attempting to answer these questions, only part of the picture was created. The second half, and some would argue the most important, looks at the motivations of adult, female shoplifters by asking the question, "Why?" But, it is not enough to limit the question to uncovering why a woman shoplifts. To be able to gain an understanding of adult, female shoplifters, one must also ask the question, "Why shoplifting?" It is through the candid answers provided by the women that the road to understanding this phenomenon is travelled. Let's begin.

I Don't Know Why

Many women I spoke with tried to explain why they had shoplifted, but found it difficult to arrive at an overall explanation for their behavior. I heard many women say, "I
don't know why I shoplifted. I have asked myself that question over and over again." Still, through their discussions with me, they were able to formulate at least a partial explanation for their shoplifting.

During the interviews with these women, it became apparent that they were experiencing a tremendous amount of stress in their lives. The one common element among all these women was the fact that the stressors were occurring at the same time. Each woman was experiencing many stressors within a short period of time. Megan explains:

I WAS GETTING MARRIED AND MY FIANCEE DECIDED THAT HE DIDN'T WANT TO... HE WAS FALLING FOR SOMEONE ELSE, SO THAT HAPPENED AND THEN MY FATHER WAS DYING OF LIVER CANCER, SO I WAS NURSING HIM AND WATCHING SOMEBODY THAT I CARE FOR... JUST FADE AWAY AND I STARTED A NEW JOB FOR THE CITY, AS WELL AS I WAS WORKING ALREADY TEACHING AT THE COLLEGE... JUST A LOT OF THINGS AT ONE TIME AND I WAS TAKING PRESCRIBED MEDICATIONS FOR ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AND PAIN AND I GUESS I JUST WAS... TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE MEDICATION WHEN I DID THIS BECAUSE I DON'T REMEMBER DOING THIS AND I DID A REAL BIZARRE CRIME... BIZARRE IN THAT I JUST TOOK A LOT OF THINGS FROM THE STORE... JUST TOOK A LOT. I WOULDN'T WISH... I MEAN, A JOB, A MOVE, A DEATH, AND A DIVORCE...

This woman clearly had a great deal of stress to deal with in her life which she attributed to her shoplifting behavior. She did not, however, use the stress as an excuse for her behavior. She accepted responsibility for her actions by participating in the Adult Diversion Program in Windsor.

Another woman I spoke with, Anne, was 54 years of age and married for 36 years. She had six children, grade three education and was on sick-leave from work. She was a previous client of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton and
participated in their ‘Stop-Lifting Program’ for female shoplifters. She states:

... THERE WAS A LOT OF STRESS GOIN’ ON IN MY FAMILY... A FEW PROBLEMS WITH THE KIDS... I DON’T KNOW, I GUESS IT STEMS TO DIFFERENT PROBLEMS OVER THE YEARS AND THAT HAD BUILT UP, YOU KNOW... I WAS ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE THAT WAS ALWAYS THERE TO HELP EVERYBODY ELSE AND WOULD NEVER COMPLAIN ABOUT MY OWN PROBLEMS OR ADMIT THAT I NEEDED HELP... I’VE HAD A PRETTY GOOD LIFE, YOU KNOW. THIS IS WHAT’S CONFUSING... I HAVE HAD A GOOD LIFE, RAISING KIDS IS A TOUGHCALL FOR ANYBODY, BUT I CAN’T REALLY BLAME IT ON ANYBODY. ... STUPID, SCARED... SAYING WHY... GOING OVER AND OVER AGAIN WHY, WHY’D YOU DO THAT. DON’T EVEN REMEMBER DOIN’ IT LIKE. WHAT WAS I THINKING, YOU KNOW... BUT, I DID IT. I HAD A HUNDRED AND SEVENTY DOLLARS IN MY WALLET. I GOT PAID THAT DAY. OZONAL... TWO TUBES OF OZONAL... SOMETHING I DON’T EVEN USE. NOW WHY, I DON’T KNOW. I WISH I COULD FIND THE ANSWER.

Anne was under a lot of stress for medical reasons and was experiencing some problems with her children. She did not discuss the details of these difficulties in the interview, but her level of stress was apparent. Upon reading her words, one senses her need to search for an answer or an explanation for her actions.

Similarly, 56 year old Heather outlined her life prior to the shoplifting:

MY HUSBAND HAS CANCER FOR ONE THING AND HE’S HAD IT FOR A LONG TIME AND WE HAVE NO CONVERSATIONS CAUSE HE DOESN’T TALK. I HAD A DAUGHTER THAT TRIED TO COMMIT SUICIDE AND... A DAUGHTER THAT GOT MARRIED TO A BOY THAT WAS RETARDED AND SHE GOT PREGNANT BEFORE SHE GOT MARRIED AND SHE MARRIED HIM AGAINST OUR WISHES AND IT WAS JUST EVERYTHING JUST PLAYED ON ME AND IT BUILT UP AND... I JUST LOST IT, I GUESS. I STILL DON’T UNDERSTAND WHY I DID IT, BUT I DID IT AND I KNOW IT WAS WRONG... I WENT INTO THE STORE AND LIKE I PURCHASED... A BOX OF GARLAND AND I HAD THE CAN OF CANDY... IN MY POCKET AND I DON’T KNOW WHY I PUT IT IN MY POCKET. I COULDN’T TELL YOU WHY. I STILL DON’T KNOW WHY I DID. I DIDN’T REALIZE TILL THE MAN CAME OUT OF THE STORE AND HE ASKED ME WHAT I HAD IN MY POCKET. I HAD ALL KINDS OF MONEY IN MY POCKET AND
THERE WAS NO REASON FOR IT... I HAD A DOLLAR SOMETHING
CANDY CANE AND I HAD A DEODORANT AND DEODORANT THE
KIND... I DON'T EVEN USE...

Again, this woman repeats that she has no idea why she
shoplifted. She states that there was no reason for it and
she could have paid for the items as she had "all kinds of
money" in her pocket. Further, she states that what she stole
was a candy cane and a type of deodorant that she doesn't even
use. The total cost of the items was under $5.00.

Patricia reported that she grew up in an alcoholic
family. She explained the difficulty being raised by
alcoholic parents and the resulting low level of self-esteem.
She attained grade seven in the regular school system. She
believes that growing up in this environment, her low self-
esteeem and grade level contributed to her shoplifting
behavior.

Recently, she achieved grade eleven through the community
college system and has received support throughout her
studies. She believes she has increased her self-esteem and is
doing better. She states that she has no plans to shoplift in
the future because she has her own family now to think about.

Throughout the interview with a woman from Cape Breton,
it was very clear that she spent a lot of time trying to
analyze her motivations for shoplifting. Susan’s analysis
included the following:

I WAS DRINKING ALMOST ALL THE TIME, TAKING THE WRONG
MEDICATION. YOU KNOW, HYPER, VERY DISORIENTED. YOU
KNOW, LOST I FELT. AND I WAS SO ALONE FOR THE FIRST TIME
IN MY LIFE... I LIVED WITH FAMILIES AND THEN I GOT
MARRIED THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN BOOM, I AM ON MY OWN. WHAT WILL I DO? I DIDN'T KNOW, IT TOOK A WHILE FOR ME TO COPE WITH PAYING BILLS FOR MYSELF BECAUSE I DIDN'T HAVE THAT RESPONSIBILITY. TO BE INDEPENDENT BECAUSE I HAD ALWAYS DEPENDED ON OTHER PEOPLE AND I WAS ALWAYS MANIPULATED. THAT IS WHAT HAPPENED TO MY MARRIAGE. THERE WAS TOO MUCH MANIPULATION, TOO MUCH OVERBEARING AND AGGRESSIVENESS AND PHYSICAL ABUSE AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE. MY MIND HAD TO ADJUST TO ALL THESE THINGS. I THINK IT WAS STRESS. I GET STRESSED OUT SO EASILY... AND I GET UPSET... BECAUSE I DIDN'T SELL HARDLY ANYTHING [AT THE FLEA-MARKET] AND MAYBE... I WAS PEEVED WITH THAT SITUATION. TO HAVE SOMETHING I DIDN'T HAVE... AND IT WAS EXPENSIVE MAKE-UP. MAYBE I FELT CHEATED BECAUSE I DIDN'T SELL... I WAS WALKING OUT AND ALL OF A SUDDEN I FOCUSED ON THIS MAKEUP. I JUST STOOD THERE AND LOOKED AT IT. I DIDN'T NEED IT NOW... SOMETHING TOOK OVER AND I TOOK THE MAKEUP, APPARENTLY, PUT IT IN MY POCKET AND I WAS WALKING OUT THE DOOR AND THIS GENTLEMAN CAUGHT ME. YOU KNOW THAT EXPRESSION THE DEVIL MADE YOU DO IT, WELL IT'S TRUE. I THINK YOU HAVE TO GET YOUR AGGRESSION OR SUPPRESSION OUT SOMEHOW AND MAYBE THAT WAS MY WAY LIKE A LOT OF OTHER PEOPLE AS WELL.

Susan was dealing with her drinking problem, along with finding herself with a lot more responsibility in terms of paying bills and surviving on her own. She left an abusive relationship and was trying to cope. She expresses the need to release her built-up emotions and equates this with her shoplifting behavior.

Similarly, Ingrid spent a lot of time analyzing her motivations to shoplift. She stated that when she shoplifted makeup and lingerie items like camisoles and negliges, it was to make her feel like a worthwhile person, attractive to the man she was dating. She explains:

AT THE TIME IN MY LIFE WHEN ALL THIS WAS HAPPENING, I WAS JUST TRYING TO GET TO KNOW MY REAL SELF... I THOUGHT I WAS SUCH A BAD PERSON. EVERYONE WAS SAYING YOU'RE DOING SO WELL, I WAS THINKING I GOTTA PROVE ALL THESE PEOPLE WRONG BECAUSE I'M NOT THIS GOOD PERSON THEY'RE SAYING I AM. I'M A BAD PERSON. I FELT I NEEDED SOMEONE IN MY
LIFE, LIKE MAYBE A MAN TO LOOK AFTER ME... WHY DID I TAKE THESE THINGS... FANCY THINGS, SEXY LOOKING THINGS. I WAS THINKING, WELL... HE'D SEE ME WITH THESE THINGS ON... MAYBE HE WOULD BE ATTRACTED TO ME SEXUALLY, MAYBE LIKE ME THAT WAY AND I GUESS THAT WAS ABOUT THE CLOSEST THING I EVER FELT THAT THERE WOULD BE ANY LOVE THERE...

This woman was dealing with her low self-esteem which, in her words, came from a childhood where she was always trying to please her mother and be a "good girl". In her childhood, she would steal things and bring them home to her mother for approval. She believed she was still looking for this approval in her adulthood. She also explained why she shoplifted household items like curtains:

I WAS LIVING ON MY OWN AND I WAS JUST GETTING BACK TO LIVING ON MY OWN. I WAS COMING OUT OF AN ABUSIVE SITUATION. WHAT HAD HAPPENED WAS I HAD GOTTEN INVOLVED WITH ANOTHER WOMAN. THIS HAD LASTED FOR THREE YEARS. SHE TOOK MY IDENTITY AWAY BECAUSE SHE HAD MY DAUGHTER WITH HER AND MY DAUGHTER DIDN'T WANT TO COME HOME WITH ME. I JUST WANTED TO BE WITH MY DAUGHTER. I WOULD GO INTO THE STORE AND IF I SEEN SOMETHING, I WOULD TAKE IT IF I NEEDED IT... CAUSE I FELT THAT I HAD TO MAKE A HOME FOR MY CHILDREN... SOMETIMES I WOULD TAKE SOMETHING FOR THE KIDS EVEN THOUGH THEY WEREN'T HERE.

It appears that although these women are puzzled as to why they shoplifted, when they explain their life situation prior to their shoplifting behavior, it is clear that they have all been experiencing a tremendous amount of stress in one period of time.

The various stressors have included a loss such as a divorce or death, an abusive situation, a serious illness of a loved one, low self-esteem, a change in one's lifestyle such as a move or a new job, a high level of responsibility such as being the primary care-giver of the person who is ill or dying
and being alone for the first time, essentially dependence to independence.

The Role of Prescription Medication

Five women referred to being "numb" or "not thinking" at the time they were shoplifting. Most of these women were those that did not know why they shoplifted and were experiencing many stressors in their life. Some of them spoke of the prescription medications they were taking due to their problems:

SHARON: I WAS BUZZED UP FROM ALL THE MEDICATION... IT SEEMED LIKE SOMETHING TOOK OVER... I WAS TOTALLY NUMB. THE DRUGS, ALL THE IV'S I WAS ON IN THOSE TWO WEEKS, PLUS I WAS TAKING MY LITHIUM AND RIVITROL AND PROZAC FOR MY MANIC DEPRESSION AS WELL... AND I WAS DEPRESSED AT THE TIME AS WELL. I MEAN, IT'LL HELP ME SOMEWHAT, BUT WHEN I'M IN A STATE WHERE I CAN'T CONTROL... WITHOUT MY MANIC DEPRESSIVE STUFF, I'M REALLY A BASKET CASE...

She continued by saying that sometimes she tends not to take her pills or she wants to overdose. This is a part of being manic depressive, she says and she is also trying to deal with her bulimia.

Two other women spoke of the difficulties they experienced with their medication as well:

SUSAN: I WAS TAKING THE WRONG MEDICATION AND I WAS DRINKING... MY NERVES, DEPRESSION... I WAS ON LITHANE/LITHIUM. LITHIUM IS A CHEMICAL FOUND IN YOUR BRAIN. IT WAS OVER A PERIOD OF YEARS THAT I WOULD GO INTO A DEPRESSION AND NOT WANT TO SEE ANYBODY AND I'D GO TO BED AND STAY THERE. YOU KNOW, I DIDN'T WANT TO DO ANYTHING... WITH THE LIQUOR AND THE PILLS, I... I BLOCKED EVERYTHING OUT... I WAS IN A DAZE...
MEGAN: SO MUCH GOING ON IN ONE PERIOD... LIKE I WAS ON NINE DIFFERENT PRESCRIBED DRUGS FROM DIFFERENT DOCTORS, SO... IT WAS MY OWN DOING... I WANTED TO JUST KILL THE PAIN.

One may suggest that these women did not know why they shoplifted and felt "numb" when they did it due to the amount and/or misuse of medications they were taking at the time.

You Do What You Have to Do to Survive:

Another common theme throughout the interviews was the lack of financial resources available to the women. As stated above, the majority of those I interviewed were receiving some form of government assistance. Many women expressed their shoplifting behavior in terms of their limited finances. Sharon states:

I BARELY HAVE ANY MONEY. AND, MAYBE ONE OF MY INTENTS WHEN I WENT TO K MART... I CAN'T SAY IF I HAD AN INTENT BECAUSE I WAS SO OUT OF IT, BUT WAS THE FACT THAT I DIDN'T HAVE MONEY TO DO ANYTHING. IT'S REALLY DEPRESSING... IT BUMS ME OUT. YOU KNOW, THERE'S ALL THESE PEOPLE ON WELFARE AND THEY DON'T WANT TO WORK AND I WANT TO WORK SO BAD, I CAN TASTE IT, BUT... I WENT ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS BACK TO WORK AND THEY END UP SENDING ME BACK BECAUSE OF THE ASTHMA AND DEPRESSION...

She obviously has a desire to return to work, but is being prevented from doing so because of her health problems. She is frustrated by this situation as it results in her having no money "to do anything".

Brenda stated that every time she shoplifted, it was for her children. She stole clothing and food items. In her words, she would do anything for her children, including stealing for them. She expressed what her life is like living
on social assistance:

SEE, I LIVE ON SOCIAL SERVICES RIGHT NOW AND IT’S NOT ENOUGH TO PAY, LIKE I MEAN YOU PAY YOUR BILLS, YOU PAY YOUR GROCERIES AND WHAT NOT AND YOU MIGHT HAVE TWENTY DOLLARS LEFT. HOW DO YOU BUY YOUR KIDS ANYTHING? I’M A VERY FIRM BELIEVER WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO MY CHILDREN. THEY WILL NOT DO WITHOUT. IF I CAN GET IT FOR THEM, THEN... I’VE DONE GOOD SO FAR, IN PROVIDING FOR MY CHILDREN... MAYBE NOT THE MEANS OF HOW I GO ABOUT TO GET IT, BUT THEY DON’T GO WITHOUT.

Armed with the knowledge of the limitations of her household budget, this woman finds shoplifting an excellent supplement to her income. Through shoplifting, she is able to provide not only what is needed for her and her children, but she is able to keep them happy by providing them with the latest fashion items:

HE WANTS TOP OF THE LINE [HER SON]. HE WON’T WEAR A FOURTEEN DOLLAR PAIR OF... LIKE I Couldn’T SAY CALL UP MY WORKER AND SAY WELL MY SON WAS IN A BICYCLE ACCIDENT, GOT STITCHES, THEY CUT HIS SHOES OFF, I NEED A NEW PAIR OF SHOES. OH WELL, YOU DO WHAT YOU GOT TO DO. THEY’RE NOT GONNA SAY, WELL HERE’S NINETY DOLLARS, GO BUY A PAIR. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN? YOU DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Many others echoed these sentiments as well. As long as they were taking care of their children by providing them with clothes, food and a roof over their head, shoplifting was seen as an acceptable way to achieve their goals. According to Jackie:

I LIVE BY THE RULE THAT... I WILL DO WHAT I HAVE TO DO TO SURVIVE AND TO MAKE SURE THAT MY KIDS WILL BE O.K. ... I WILL DO WHAT I HAVE TO DO AND DON’T JUDGE ME. AND I DON’T JUDGE ANYBODY. IF YOU’RE DOING WHAT YOU GOT TO DO TO SURVIVE, THEN THAT’S O.K. YOU WORRY EVERYDAY, IS SOMETHING GONNA BREAK, YOU KNOW. IS SOMETHING GONNA GO WRONG WITH THE HOUSE. THE KIDS NEED THIS, THE KIDS NEED THAT.
Although there was no particular month when the women shoplifted the most, many did report shoplifting prior to the beginning of a new school year and Christmas. The women reported running short at these times of year when they are required to purchase clothing and supplies for their children.

Additionally, many women find themselves in a precarious financial position after a separation or divorce. As discussed above, many women are on their own for the first time and shoulder the responsibility for the finances and the children. As Terri expressed:

I WAS JUST STARTING TO GET SOCIAL ASSISTANCE. I WAS ON WELFARE AT THAT TIME. IT WAS WHEN MY HUSBAND AND I FIRST SPLIT UP AND I MOVED TO MY OWN APARTMENT. I LEFT MY HOME. IT WAS IN AROUND OCTOBER AND I WAS GETTING MY FIRST CHEQUE IN NOVEMBER. MY FIRST SOCIAL ASSISTANCE CHEQUE AND THEN I GAVE IT [RENT] OUT OF MY FIRST CHEQUE. I JUST NEEDED MONEY. LIKE I DIDN'T WANT TO TAKE MONEY FROM THE HOUSE FOR CIGARETTES. THE WAY I LOOK AT IT, WHY SHOULD MY DAUGHTER DO WITHOUT FOR ME TO SMOKE. SO I FIGURE I WILL GET A CARTON OF CIGARETTES.

Throughout the interviews, the themes of surviving and living "one day at a time" were echoed by the women. The constraints of living on a fixed income combined with the demands of raising a family contribute to a woman's motivation to shoplift.

Getting Away With It

Some women I interviewed spoke about the feeling of power and control that shoplifting gave them. These feelings resulted from the thrill of getting away with the merchandise. They were able to successfully steal something without getting
caught. By doing this, a sense of accomplishment along with the realization that they had full control of the situation overcame them. Victoria describes her feelings:

MAYBE I TRIED TO PROVE SOMETHING TO MYSELF... THAT'S THE ONLY EXPLANATION I CAN... GETTING AWAY WITH IT, YOU KNOW, GETTING AWAY WITH IT. IT'S NOT THAT I DIDN'T HAVE THE MONEY OR REALLY NEEDED WHAT I STOLE, IT WAS JUST LIKE... I DON'T WANT TO SAY BEING BRAVE, BUT BEING... JUST SAY I DO THIS AND I GET AWAY WITH IT... I DON'T UNDERSTAND. I HAVE A GOOD FAMILY. MY HUSBAND'S GOT A GOOD JOB, WE HAVE A NICE HOUSE. I DIDN'T HAVE A FIGHT OR AN ARGUMENT TO TRIGGER ME TO DO SOMETHING, I HAVE NO IDEA...

For this woman, shoplifting seemed to provide her with a sense of accomplishment. She was "brave" for those few moments and needed to "prove something" to herself; that she was capable of getting away with it. She could not understand any other reason for her behavior. She did not speak of any family problems or major stressors in her life, only that she kept wondering why she would commit such a crime. Further in the interview, she stated that she did a lot of volunteer work and was "always helping everybody". She kept searching for an answer to her question.

For most women I interviewed, the sense of accomplishment or the thrill of "getting away with it" seemed secondary to the motivation of providing for their family. However, they were very clear about the thrill that was a part of shoplifting. Brenda describes the thrill:

THE THRILL OF GETTING AWAY WITH IT, I THINK, IS WHAT IT IS. IT IS A THRILL TO GET AWAY WITH IT, YOU KNOW, NOT GETTING CAUGHT. A BIG THRILL... TERRIBLE THING TO SAY, BUT IT IS [LAUGHS]. YEAH, IT'S A CHALLENGE...
Ingrid spoke of shoplifting as providing her with a different kind of thrill:

I FELT THAT WHEN I WENT OUT AND I TOOK SOMETHING FROM A STORE, WELL THAT GAVE ME SOME KIND OF A... RUSH... AN EMOTIONAL KIND OF CHARGE I'M GETTIN' OUT OF DOING THAT, THE SAME AS WHAT I WAS GETTING WHEN I WAS A KID GROWING UP AND I USED TO BE BACK THERE AND MOM AND DAD WOULD BE ARGUING, YOU KNOW. IT GAVE ME SOME KIND OF... LIKE WHAT WAS NORMAL TO MOST PEOPLE, WAS ABNORMAL TO ME. THAT'S HOW I FELT.

She felt she was lacking something in her life. She felt that when her life became quiet and settled, it was "abnormal". She would then search for the "emotional kind of charge" she got from shoplifting which would make her life feel "normal" once again.

Nancy, a 31 year old woman I spoke with in Cape Breton expressed her motivation for shoplifting in clear and definite terms:

IT'S UNREAL HOW MANY PEOPLE DO IT. YOU KNOW, IT'S JUST MORE OR LESS THE THOUGHT ONE DAY, WELL IF THEY CAN GET AWAY WITH IT, WHY CAN'T I? AND I GUESS MORE OR LESS TRIED IT AND I GOT CAUGHT, SO THAT'S ALL. IT'S JUST MORE OR LESS THAT THEY CAN GET AWAY WITH IT. ...IT'S JUST SOMETHING I FELT I HAD TO DO, YOU KNOW.

She believed that if so many others were getting away with it, she should be able to as well. She stated that the pressure of being on social assistance along with seeing the possibilities of shoplifting that so many other people were enjoying convinced her to try it. Now that she was caught, she does not plan to do it again.

Lorna spoke of the connection between her shoplifting behavior and the abusive relationship with her husband:
WHEN I GOT MARRIED... I WASN'T ALLOWED TO GO OUT... IT WAS LIKE SOMETHING I COULD GET AWAY WITH... IT WAS LIKE A THRILL FOR ME... I DON'T KNOW. TO MYSELF, IT WAS LIKE SOMETHING STUPID, IT WAS LIKE A GAME I WAS PLAYING. LIKE, I CAN GET AWAY WITH DOING THIS, IF I DON'T GET CAUGHT. AND IT'S ALL RIGHT IF I DO IT. IT WAS JUST LIKE, WHERE MY LIFE WAS BEING CONTROLLED, AT THE TIME I GUESS. AND THAT WAS SOMETHING I COULD CONTROL. I COULD MAKE UP MY MIND TO DO IT OR NOT... KNOW WHAT I MEAN? LIKE, I'D HAVE THE MONEY TO BUY IT, BUT I WOULDN'T BUY IT. I'D STEAL IT, SO...

This woman spoke about a time when she purposely got caught for shoplifting. She saw it as the only way to avoid her abusive husband:

I WAS JUST STUFFING THE PANTS IN THE BAG, IN THE PURSE... SHOWING THEM IN AND EVERYBODY COULD SEE ME. AND THE ONLY REASON LIKE WHY I DONE THAT WAS FOR THE COPS TO COME AND TAKE ME AWAY, TO GET RID OF JOHN. CAUSE HE WAS OUTSIDE, LIKE TANTALIZING ME AND THAT. HE WAS FOLLOWING ME AND CALLING ME THIS AND THAT... A DOG AND WHY DON'T YOU JUMP OVER A CLIFF, ALL THAT KIND OF STUFF. SO I SAID TO MYSELF, WELL, I'LL GET RID OF HIM ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, SO I DONE IT.

It appears that shoplifting does carry with it the thrill of "getting away with it". However, this thrill does not represent a motivation for shoplifting in its entirety. It seems to be the combination of the thrill with another motivation that leads a woman to shoplift.

An Addiction?

Four women referred to shoplifting as a type of "addiction". They compared it to habit forming addictions like alcoholism and smoking. Once you try it and get away with it, it may turn into an addiction, something you feel you have no control over. Ingrid explains:
IT'S A COMPULSIVE DISORDER, THE SAME AS OTHER COMPULSIVE DISORDERS THAT I HAVE AND I KNOW THAT IF I DROP ONE, I'LL PICK UP ANOTHER AND I NEVER REALIZED IT BEFORE, BUT NOW I'M IN A TWELVE STEP PROGRAM OF A.A. ... I'M AN ALCOHOLIC... IT IS JUST ANOTHER COMPULSIVE DISORDER... I JUST COULDN'T STOP...

This woman said she was dealing with her shoplifting behavior just like her alcoholism, one day at a time. Her greatest fear was being successful in Alcoholics Anonymous, but unsuccessful by moving on to another compulsion. She was also a smoker at one point in her life and found that when she was experiencing a lot of stress, she would begin to smoke again.

Lorna referred to shoplifting as a "sickness":

IT WAS LIKE A THRILL FOR ME... TO GO IN THE STORE AND SEE IF I COULD GET OUT WITH SOMETHING... EVEN IF IT WAS A SPOOL OF THREAD, I HAD TO TAKE SOMETHING. LIKE A SICKNESS, IT WAS.

She spoke of shoplifting like a game she was playing. She would steal clothes and food for her children and feel great every time that she got away with it. She felt a sense of power when she shoplifted as this was something she felt she could do well and she had full control over it. This is the same woman who spoke earlier of the abusive relationship with her husband.

Two others referred to shoplifting in terms of an addiction as well. Victoria, when trying to explain her motivation, equated shoplifting with alcoholism and lying. Once you do it and get away with it, then there is a good chance of doing it again and again. According to Jackie:
IT'S A THRILL, IT'S AN ADDICTION. BECAUSE IT'S LIKE A DRUG THAT, YOU DO IT, YOU GET THE RUSH, YOU COME DOWN, YOU DO IT AGAIN.

Although these women referred to shoplifting as a compulsive disorder, a sickness and an addiction, they did so in combination with other motivations. As the thrill of "getting away with it", the addictive component of shoplifting seems to coincide with another, more prominent motivation.

Kleptomaniacs?

Two women made reference to kleptomania during their interviews. Both of these women were not referring to themselves, but to a woman they knew or heard about who was a 'kleptomaniac'. Victoria spoke of a woman she knew at the hospital where she worked. She would steal continually from the hospital and her co-workers approached their supervisor to seek help for the woman. She states:

SHE WAS SICK, I MEAN... SHE'S GOT A FAMILY, SHE'S GOT CHILDREN. SHE NEEDS HELP. SHE DOESN'T DO IT BECAUSE SHE REALLY NEEDS IT, IT'S JUST CONTINUALLY, EVEN IF IT WAS A LITTLE PACKAGE OF JAM LEFT... ONE THING OF SUGAR, SHE'D BE STUFFING IN HER POCKET, TAKING JUICE FROM THE HOSPITAL TO HER CHILDREN. SHE DIDN'T REALLY NEED IT, SHE HAD A GOOD INCOME, HER AND HER HUSBAND. IT WAS, ALMOST LIKE... WHAT DO YOU CALL IT? LIKE ALCOHOLISM, YOU HAVE TO DRINK, SHE HAD TO STEAL.

She thought a lot about this woman when she herself was caught for shoplifting. She said she remembered the situation and how her co-workers tried to seek help for her. She did not want to become the kleptomaniac she believed this woman to be.
Patricia spoke about a girl she knew who was a "kleptomaniac". She referred to her because she did not want to become one and have her son believe that it was acceptable to shoplift. The woman was "put away for it" in the Cape Breton Hospital for the mentally ill. "I guess she was a professional", stated the woman I interviewed. Neither woman believed herself to be a kleptomaniac.

It is important to note here that Sharon, Heather and Ingrid were seeking psychiatric help at the time of their shoplifting. All three women were experiencing many stressors in their life for which they were seeking help. They were not seeing a psychiatrist due to the shoplifting and none were classified as a "kleptomaniac".

To Support a Habit

Another motivation stated by two women I interviewed was the support of a drug habit through shoplifting. For Kathy, shoplifting began when she became addicted to a tranquilizer known as halcion. She kept getting more and more of this prescription drug and became addicted to it. She would take more pills than required and at inappropriate times. She would resist the sleep and get the 'high' from the drug. She states:
I HAD MY OWN SCAM RUNNING IN WINDSOR... I'D GO FROM DOCTOR TO DOCTOR OR ACTUALLY CALL IN THE PRESCRIPTIONS AND HAVE A TAXI PICK THEM UP. I WOULDN'T GO IN THE STORE IN PERSON. THIS WENT ON FOR ABOUT TWO YEARS. THIS IS WHAT LED TO THE SHOPPING. I CAN'T REMEMBER WHEN I SHOPLIFT OR THE ITEMS I STEAL, UNTIL I WAKE UP THE NEXT DAY.

She continued by saying that she would shoplift items that people wanted in exchange for the prescriptions. She would often take clothing or hair products in return for the prescriptions. She has been doing this for about eight years. She is now 33 years old and has had 42 charges against her for shoplifting.

Jackie was supporting her habit in Windsor by shoplifting with her husband. She is the suspected 'booster' or commercial shoplifter. Her and her husband would sell the items they shoplifted.

When speaking of the thrill of shoplifting, she compared it to the 'high' one would get from a drug. She states:

DRUGS... TO SUPPORT A HABIT. YEAH, IT'S A THRILL, IT'S AN ADDICTION. BECAUSE IT'S LIKE A DRUG THAT, YOU DO IT, YOU GET THE RUSH, YOU COME DOWN, YOU DO IT AGAIN. NO, I WAS USUALLY STRAIGHT WHEN I DID IT, BUT IT WAS TO SUPPORT A HABIT. I'VE BEEN CLEAN THREE YEARS THIS WEEKEND.

She has been incarcerated for her involvement with shoplifting. She stated that she lives her life on "the other side of the law" and will take care of her children the best way she knows how and "if you don't like it, oh well".
I Didn't Even Need the Items

Eight of the fourteen women stated that they did not need the items they shoplifted. Most felt that this was part of the difficulty in understanding their actions. If they did not need what they stole, why did they steal it in the first place? Some of their comments include:

**Anne:** Why would somebody be so stupid to do something like that. If I was gonna do something, why didn't I take something that I could use or... like jewellery or... I don't know, anything, but Ozonal.

**Heather:** I had a dollar something candy cane and I had a deodorant and deodorant the kind... I don't even use that kind of deodorant...

**Susan:** My boyfriend keeps teasing me, oh why didn't you take the radio or stereo or something or something that is around. Eventually, I would laugh but at first I didn't laugh, you know.

Interestingly, these women were the same women discussed previously. The majority of them were trying to deal with the many stressors in their life. Some were experiencing the loss of a loved one, an illness in the family, a lot of responsibility and so forth. Additionally, four of these women were those taking prescription medications and/or seeing a psychiatrist. Only Terri, not needing the items she stole, gave her financial situation as a motivation to shoplift. She states:

I guess I thought I needed it. I needed furniture polish [laughs]. I thought I did. I did without it all along, didn't I. I didn't get home with anything. I obviously didn't need it that bad.

Thus, it appears that many adult women do not need the items they shoplift. Some women take the type of merchandise
that they have never used, such as the woman who stole the deodorant. However, reasons for their behavior do exist and they are very important when trying to make sense of this phenomenon.

I Had the Money in my Pocket

As well as not needing the items, many shoplifters are found to have money in their possession at the time of the offence. Four women in this research stated that they did have enough money in their possession to pay for the items they stole. Some women were trying to understand why they shoplifted when they had the money in their possession. Their comments include:

VICTORIA: WHAT DID I DO THAT FOR? I'M TRYING, I SAY WHY? IF I WANT IT, I COULD HAVE BOUGHT IT, IT WAS 56 LOUSY DOLLARS, YOU KNOW. I HAD A HUNDRED DOLLARS IN MY POCKET THAT DAY AND I HAD A CREDIT CARD, SO REALLY, IT'S REALLY CHANGED ME INSIDE.

ANNE: I HAD A HUNDRED AND SEVENTY DOLLARS IN MY WALLET. I GOT PAID THAT DAY. OZONAL... TWO TUBES OF OZONAL... SOMETHING I DON'T EVEN USE. NOW WHY, I DON'T KNOW. I WISH I COULD FIND THE ANSWER.

HEATHER: I HAD ALL KINDS OF MONEY IN MY POCKET AND THERE WAS NO REASON FOR IT... I ASKED HIM [RCMP], I SAID, THERE'S NO REASON I HAD TO STEAL, CAN I PAY FOR IT? HE SAID, NO BECAUSE YOU'D BE SURPRISED HOW MANY STEAL THINGS AND THEY S:Y THEY NEVER DO IT BEFORE AND THEY DO IT ALL ALONG... YOUR GONNA BE CHARGED.

With four women having enough money in their possession to purchase the items they shoplifted, one might suggest that shoplifting is not solely an economic crime. In the discussion above, it was clear that for some women, they were
shoplifting due to the constraints of their limited income. However, it was also clear that for others, they were shoplifting due to the amount of stressors they were experiencing at one time. Still, others spoke of "getting away with it" and the thrill of shoplifting. Thus, it does appear that shoplifting is not solely an economic crime.

I Was Glad to Get Caught

During the discussions about their motivations for shoplifting, four women expressed their relief and happiness at getting caught. Victoria and Terri said that being caught for shoplifting has prevented them from doing it again. They stated:

VICTORIA: I DON'T KNOW IF I DIDN'T GET CAUGHT, WHAT WOULD IT HAVE LEAD ME, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?... MAYBE IT WAS THE BEST THAT I GOT CAUGHT RIGHT AWAY. IN THIS WAY, THAT WOULD PUT ME IN A PERSPECTIVE OF LIVING WITH THE CONSEQUENCES. I COMMIT A CRIME, INSTEAD OF DO IT, GET AWAY WITH IT AND THEN, GOING BACK AND... A LOT OF TIMES, LIKE, I WONDER, IF I DID NOT GET CAUGHT, WHAT THAT... THAT WOULD HAVE LEAD ME IN THE FUTURE... LIKE THE NEXT THING. I STOPPED RIGHT THERE... WOULD I HAVE DONE IT AGAIN, I DON'T KNOW BECAUSE I HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING.

TERRI: I WAS GLAD I DID GET CAUGHT CAUSE IT IS STUPID. I AM GLAD THEY DID WHAT THEY DID TO ME BECAUSE I KNOW I WON'T DO IT AGAIN. CAUSE I DON'T LIKE BEING AWAY FROM MY DAUGHTER. THEY HAD TO EVENTUALLY DO SOMETHING TO ME THAT'S GOING TO MAKE ME... LIKE PROBATION, BIG DEAL. GO DOWN TO SEE THE PROBATION OFFICER ONCE A MONTH. THAT DIDN'T HURT ME ANY. THAT IS WHY I ENDED UP COMING HERE [JAIL] THIS TIME.

It is interesting to note that Victoria was a first-time offender who was participating in the Adult Diversion Program in Windsor. Terri was charged three times for shoplifting and
sent to jail. Her actual offences totalled seven.

Thus, it does appear that being caught for shoplifting has a certain amount of deterrence to it, although the maximum amount of deterrence is different for different people. For Victoria, just being caught was enough to deter her from committing the crime again. However, for Terri, it took a jail term to deter her from this crime.

Another woman felt relief when she was caught because it allowed her to finally seek the help she needed to deal with her problems. She was the type of woman who was always caring for others and giving up her time to help those who needed her. She did not, however, take time for herself or nurture herself. It was her doctor who explained his observations of why she had shoplifted. Anne explains:

I WAS NEVER A COMPLAINER. EVERYTHING WAS KEPT INSIDE, YOU KNOW AND... I HAD ONE PERSON TELL ME, A DOCTOR TELL ME THAT I WAS REACHING OUT. IN MY OWN WAY, I DID IT, NOT BECAUSE I NEEDED IT OR, YOU KNOW. IT WAS JUST... IT WAS MY WAY OF REACHING OUT FOR HELP, BUT I DON'T KNOW IF THAT WAS TRUE OR NOT. ALL I KNOW IS THAT IT WOULD NEVER EVER HAPPEN WITH ME AGAIN. BUT, I KNOW... NOW, I THINK... IF I FEEL LIKE I'M GETTING STRESSED OUT OR IF SOMETHING'S PILING UP ON ME OR SOMETHING, THEN I CAN TALK ABOUT IT, WHERE BEFORE, LIKE... I COULDN'T.

Another woman was glad to get caught because she believed she was a 'bad' person. Ingrid was an alcoholic and was trying to deal with her low level of self-esteem. She states:

THE DAY I GOT CAUGHT, IT DIDN'T MATTER TO ME IF I GOT CAUGHT. BECAUSE I WANTED TO GET CAUGHT. BECAUSE I KNEW WHAT I WAS DOING WASN'T RIGHT AND THE OTHER THING WAS THAT I WANTED TO PROVE EVERYBODY AND MYSELF RIGHT. I WANT TO SAY I AM NO GOOD. AND I WANT TO SAY TO EVERYBODY ELSE WELL THERE, I AM NOT REALLY WHAT YOU THOUGHT I WAS AT ALL, YOU KNOW. I AM NO GOOD. WHAT I WANTED TO
BELIEVE SEEMED TO BE EASIER FOR ME TO BELIEVE THAT I WAS NO GOOD THAN FACE MYSELF AND SAY [HER NAME], YOU ARE A GOOD PERSON, YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD. YOU NEVER REALLY DONE ANYTHING THAT WRONG. I WAS LOOKING AT ALL THE NEGATIVE THINGS IN MY LIFE AND NONE OF THE POSITIVE THINGS.

For Ingrid, getting caught for shoplifting helped her to face her problems and seek the help she needed. She was finally able to focus on herself and see herself as a good person. She took control of her life.

B: Why Shoplifting?

It was stated at the beginning of this chapter that in order to understand the phenomenon at and, it was necessary not only to look at the reasons why women shoplifted, but to look at the reasons for shoplifting, as a crime, as well. More clearly, why do women shoplift as opposed to any other type of crime? Some of the themes arising from the interviews are discussed in this section with the goal of understanding in mind.

Shoplifting is Easy

When asked "why shoplifting" and not another crime, one striking theme that was clear throughout the interviews was the easiness of shoplifting. Six women commented on this theme. All had their own views on why shoplifting is so easy to do.

Victoria, who was struggling to find a reason for her behavior, stated that she just thought she could get away with

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it. She didn’t need the items she stole and she carried enough money to pay for the items. She said she could not think of a reason why she did it, but "just the fact that it was so easy to do it".

Terri discussed her frustration with seeing many other people, including her friends, shoplift and get away with it. She said it looked so easy for them and "it seemed that they always got away with it". She reasoned that because she needed things for her and her children and shoplifting looked so easy, she would try it. She comments:

IT IS TERRIBLE HERE. THERE ARE LOADS OF PEOPLE THAT SHOPLIFT. I USED TO KNOW PEOPLE THAT... I THINK THAT IS WHY IT WAS SO EASY. I KNOW PEOPLE THAT ARE MAKING ALL KINDS OF MONEY. THEY WOULD GO IN SYDNEY AND GET HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS WORTH OF STUFF AND SELL IT FOR HALF PRICE. IT WASN’T THAT EASY YOU KNOW. I DIDN’T THINK IT WAS.

She was glad to get caught for shoplifting as she knows she will never do it again. She stated, "I won’t take a bubble gum now".

Two others spoke of shoplifting as being an easy way to get what they wanted. Both Jackie and Kathy were shoplifting to support a drug habit. Shoplifting was seen as an acceptable means to an end. As Kathy states:

IT WAS THE MOST EASY WAY TO GET WHAT I WANTED. I SAW IT AS A WAY TO GET PRESCRIPTIONS. EVENTUALLY, FRIENDS OR PEOPLE I KNEW WOULD GET ME PRESCRIPTIONS... IF THEY NEEDED A PAIR OF PANTS... EIGHTY DOLLAR PANTS, FOR EXAMPLE, I KNEW I COULD SHOPLIFT IN RETURN FOR THE PRESCRIPTION.

She was addicted to the tranquilizer haldol. A total of 42 shoplifting charges had been laid against her. Some of her
comments were discussed above.

Jackie also stole to support her drug habit. When questioned why she shoplifted as opposed to another crime, she referred to shoplifting as an addiction as well as her drug habit. She needed one to support the other. She remembered the first time she realized how easy it was:

YOU’RE GOIN’ IN THERE [STORE], SAY IN THE WINTERTIME, YOU GOT FOUR OR FIVE KIDS WITH YA, YOU TAKE YOUR PURSE, THEIR COATS, EVERYTHING, YOU THROW IT ALL IN THE CART. YOU’RE SHOPPING, YOU THROW EVERYTHING IN THE CART, YOU THINK YOU GOT EVERYTHING OUT OF THE CART, YOU GET OUT TO THE CAR... 'OH, I DIDN’T PAY FOR THAT... HEY, THAT WAS EASY, I CAN DO THAT AGAIN', YOU KNOW.

She continued to shoplift with her husband and they would sell the majority of the merchandise they stole. Throughout the interview, she told me a story about one of the funniest times she ever had with her husband when they were both caught for shoplifting.

She explained that they shoplifted shrimp and meat from a grocery store. When they were caught, the security personnel knew she had shrimp in her purse. They also knew her husband had the meat in his coat. They asked him to take it out and put it on the table so they could total the cost of the theft. She explains further:


She continued by saying that the only reason they were
caught was that the 'floor-walker' knew her husband. After they were caught, the theft was jokingly referred to as "the great West beef and shrimp heist!"

The final two women who spoke of the easiness of shoplifting, Brenda and Lorna, stated that they stole to provide for their children. They also commented on the excitement or thrill of accomplishing the task. Both women have committed multiple offences of shoplifting, but have only been caught a minimal number of times.

Lorna, whose circumstances were discussed previously, has been shoplifting for the last twenty years of her life. She views shoplifting as an easy crime that she can get away with, while she can provide for her children. She described how easy it was by explaining how one can do it and get away with it.

She believes that one can easily shoplift on Cape Breton Island due to the lack of 'high-tech' security in stores. If someone wants to shoplift, all they have to do is pretend they are a customer of the store. Shop around until they find a place where nobody can see them and then "stick it under your arm". She says that mirrors in store corners should not be a deterrent because it is still easy to shoplift when they are used.

Additionally, she spoke of shoplifting items that would make money. She explains:
...LITTLE THINGS THAT ARE EXPENSIVE. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN? LIKE, THAT YOU CAN GET LOTS OF... CAUSE YOU CAN ONLY GET SO MUCH IN YOUR PURSE, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN? THAT'S WHAT I USE, I HAVE MY PURSE. BROWSE AROUND, BROWSE AROUND, LIKE I'M SHOPPIN' AND YOU JUST BROWSE AROUND AND SEE THE PRICES. I HOPE THIS IS NOT FOR... SECURITY [LAUGHS]. GIVE THEM TIPS [LAUGHS]. ...TO GIVE THEM LIKE A... CLASS. IT WOULD BE AN IDEA THOUGH, LIKE HOW TO CATCH A SHOPLIFTER.

She explained that most of the time, she shoplifted items that her and her children used, such as clothing and/or food. However, at certain times, like if she runs short of money at the end of the month, she has resorted to shoplifting items to get money in a hurry. Usually, she shoplifts "just enough", she says, to keep her and her children well.

Similarly, Brenda stole items for her and her children as well. Like Lorna, she stole a number of times and did not get caught. She explained the best way to commit this 'easy' crime:

YOU TAKE IT FROM WHERE THEY HAVE LARGE QUANTITIES... IT'S VERY [EMPHASIS] EASY TO DO IT. YOU GO WHERE THEY DON'T HAVE THE DOME. A LOT OF STORES HAVE DOMES... THE ONES THAT SAY 'SECURITY' DON'T MEAN NOTHING. IT'S THE ONES THAT SAY 'DOME' THAT YOU GOTTA WATCH FOR. K MART, ZELLERS, FOOD PLUS... THEY'RE ALL EASY. THEY'RE HARDER THAN THEY USED TO BE, BY FAR, BUT I'VE BEEN DOIN' IT FOR AWHILE SO I CAN GET AWAY WITH IT. ...YOU CAN SPOT A FLOORWALKER OUT. IF YOU'RE GOOD AT WHAT YOU DO, YOU CAN SPOT A FLOORWALKER OUT. I HAVE MANY A TIMES. THEY'RE SO OBVIOUS. ...LIKE YOU HAVE A RACK HERE YOU KNOW, AND THEY'RE LIKE JUMPING OVER THE RACK OR PEAKING THROUGH.

She continued by referring to the floor-walker who caught her the day the interview was conducted. She said that he had her fooled because of the way he looked. She said he looked like "a regular pill-popping bum [and] he had no hair, brush-cut, dirty as they came". However, now she knows who he is
and will watch for him when she shoplifts again.

According to these women, "shoplifting is easy". If this is true, one may ask whether or not they had the intention to commit the crime. If it is as easy as they say, then did they in fact have the intent?

I Didn’t Intend to Shoplift

Eight women out of the fourteen interviewed stated that they did not have the intent to shoplift. They were firm in their assertions. Megan explained that she did not have the intent to shoplift because she could not remember what happened and she was not concealing any of the merchandise at the time she was caught. She explains:

I DIDN’T INTEND TO SHOPLIFT, SO I DON’T BELIEVE I’VE SHOPLIFTED... SHOPLIFTING IS GOING IN TO STEAL WITH THE INTENT TO STEAL... GOING SOME PLACE AND YOU INTEND TO STEAL IT... TAKE SOMETHING THAT’S NOT YOURS. I DIDN’T HAVE THE INTENT... I DON’T EVEN REMEMBER THERE BEING AN INTENT TO DO IT... AS FAR AS I CAN RECALL, I JUST WENT UP AND DOWN THE AISLES... GETTING THINGS THAT I WANTED... JUST TOOK THEM. WHAT IT WAS, I DON’T KNOW, BUT OBVIOUSLY, AT THE TIME, I WANTED IT OR THOUGHT IT WAS A GOOD THING TO HAVE AND JUST PUT THEM IN MY PURSE, BUT I KNOW THERE WAS... THAT I WASN’T HIDING ANYTHING... OR CONCEALING...

Megan was visibly upset at the time of the interview. She could not believe what had happened to her and she was frustrated at the thought of participating in the Adult Diversion Program when she believed she did not commit the crime. She realized she committed the crime, but she felt she didn’t as she never had the intent to do so.

Most of the other women described their shoplifting
experience as non-intentional. During the interviews, they explicitly stated that they did not intend to shoplift. Two women referred to it as a "spur of the moment thing". They commented:

ANNE: I MEAN, WHEN I LEFT THE HOUSE TO GO AND PICK UP MY GROCERY ORDER, I CERTAINLY DIDN'T HAVE ANY INTENTIONS OF GOING AND TAKING SOMETHING BESIDES, YOU KNOW... OR SHOPLIFTING. I EVEN HATE THAT WORD. BUT, I NEVER EVEN... I MEAN I GOT MY GROCERIES. I DIDN'T DELIBERATELY GO OUT TO DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT. WHERE MY MIND WAS AT THE TIME, I DON'T KNOW...

TERRI: I DIDN'T GO IN JUST TO SHOPLIFT. JUST WHEN I GET IN THERE, I GUESS IT JUST CAME TO ME. IT WAS JUST AT THE SPUR-OF-THE-MOMENT THING. I DIDN'T LEAVE HOME AND SAY OH, I MUST GO IN AND SHOPLIFT TODAY.

Two women stated that they did have the intent to shoplift. They were Kathy and Jackie, who were shoplifting to support their drug habit. Jackie was selling the items she stole. Terri was 'selling' her items as well, through exchanging the merchandise for prescription medications.

Thus, it appears that the majority of adult, female shoplifters do not form the intent to shoplift prior to the actual offence. Those women who did form the intent were those who were supporting a drug habit and selling the merchandise.

Could one suggest that these women, having formed the intent to shoplift, were more likely to be commercial shoplifters rather than pilferers? As well, the sale of merchandise is characteristic of commercial shoplifters, not pilferers. Commercial shoplifters do have the intention to shoplift because they want to sell the items for a specific
reason, like the purchase of drugs.

Risks and Consequences

Twelve of the fourteen women never considered the risks and consequences of shoplifting. Most of them stated that they simply did not think of them at the time. Two women explained that if they had considered the risks and consequences at the time, they never would have committed the crime:

ANNE: I'D SAY IF I'D HAVE REALLY THOUGHT ABOUT IT, THEN I CERTAINLY WOULDN'T HAVE DONE IT, YOU KNOW. I MEAN, LET'S FACE IT, EVERYBODY IT MUST CROSS THEIR MIND WHEN THEY'RE OUT SHOPPING AND THEY SEE SOMETHING AND IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE GONNA GET AWAY WITH IT AND THAT, YOU KNOW. WHY DO THEY DO IT. THEY'RE NOT GONNA THINK, WELL GOD NOW, IF I DO THAT AND IF I GET CAUGHT, YOU KNOW, I'M GONNA HAVE TO GO TO COURT AND WHATEVER... NO, IF YOU THOUGHT AT ALL BEFOREHAND, I DON'T THINK THERE'D BE THAT MANY SHOPLIFTERS AROUND REALLY...

LORNA: I KNOW IT'S A RISK. ...I DON'T THINK ABOUT THEM [CONSEQUENCES] BECAUSE IF I DID, I WOULDN'T DO IT. IF I SAT DOWN AND THOUGHT ABOUT IT, I WOULDN'T GO UP THERE AND DO IT. I JUST PUT IT IN THE BACK OF MY MIND.

Similarly, Sharon spoke of turning her mind "blank", not thinking about anything and just doing it. She said that she thought about the risks and consequences afterwards, "but never while you're doin' it". She said that if she was to think about them at the time she was shoplifting, she would never be able to get away with it.

Nancy explained that she never used to think of the risks and consequences, but since she was caught, she always thinks about them. This has prevented her from shoplifting again.
She stated:

I HAVE BEEN TEMPTED, THOUGHT ABOUT, BUT SAID NOPE, IT IS NOT WORTH IT. IT IS JUST SOMETHING THAT... IF I AM BROKE AT THE TIME AND IF I SEE SOMETHING I WOULD REALLY LOVE TO HAVE AND I WOULD PICK IT UP AND LOOK AT IT AND SAY, I DON'T NEED IT THAT BAD, YOU KNOW.

For this woman, getting caught has kept her from continuing to shoplift. Getting caught has made her think of the consequences of shoplifting. She realizes that she now has a criminal record.

For Victoria, through her attempts to understand her behavior, she came to the conclusion that shoplifting carries a small amount of consequence to it. She believed this contributed to her motivation to commit the crime. She stated:

I THINK I DID THAT BECAUSE THERE WAS NOT A LOT OF CONSEQUENCE TO IT... IF I GET CAUGHT, I GET CAUGHT AND NOBODY ELSE WAS INVOLVED WITH... LIKE OF DOING THAT, I'M THE ONE THAT PAY THE CONSEQUENCE OF THE MISTAKE THAT I MADE.

She continued by saying that if her family were to discover what she had done, they would be "very disappointed and upset" because they wouldn't understand why. Is family disappointment not a consequence of shoplifting as well?

Similarly, Terri viewed shoplifting as a crime with minimal risk. She saw people around her committing the crime and getting away with it. It looked "easy" to her and she thought she would give it a try. She got caught and now states:
IT SEEM EASY FOR EVERYBODY ELSE. I DIDN'T FIND IT ONE BIT EASY. MY HEART USED TO BE POUNDING AND EVERYTHING. I THINK THEY COULD TELL JUST BY LOOKING AT ME. THAT IS HOW I END UP GETTING CAUGHT, I AM SURE IT HAD TO BE. I WAS RIGHT PARANOID IN THE STORE. I WAS SCARED TO DEATH.

Only two women stated that they did consider the risks and consequences of shoplifting. Brenda shoplifted clothing and food items for her and her children. She said she would continue to steal, regardless of the consequences, because she had to support her children.

Another woman who disregarded the risks and consequences of shoplifting was Kathy. She had 42 shoplifting charges against her. Her desire for the drugs outweighed the risks and consequences involved.

Thus, most adult women do not consider the risks and consequences of shoplifting prior to committing the crime. For most women, shoplifting is easy and low-risk with minimal consequences. Is it 'worth it' to shoplift?

Shoplifting's Morals and Values

Many of the women I interviewed said that they grew up with strong morals and values. This made it difficult for some of them to truly understand why they had committed this crime. According to Victoria:

I WAS RAISED WITH VERY STRONG VALUES. I'M A CATHOLIC, I RAISED MY FAMILY, MY CHILDREN AS BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE. THEY HAVE UNIVERSITY DEGREE, THEY HAVE COLLEGE DEGREE. THEY ARE VERY PROPER CHILDREN AND I'VE NEVER, EVER COMMIT A CRIME BEFORE. I'VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY. I DO A LOT OF VOLUNTEER WORK. I'M ALWAYS HELPING EVERYBODY. I DON'T KNOW WHY I DID IT. I DON'T
BELIEVE IN HURTING PEOPLE AND I DID SOMETHING THAT REALLY... THE END RESULT, THAT I HURT MYSELF.

This woman was struggling throughout the interview to understand why she shoplifted. Like so many others, she had the money to pay for the items and she didn’t need them as well.

Four others discussed the morals and values of shoplifting, in particular, why they believed it to be 'acceptable'. Their comments included:

KATHY: I BELIEVE STRONGLY AGAINST STEALING MONEY FROM SOMEBODY’S PURSE OR STEALING FROM SOMEONE I KNOW OR A PERSON WHO HAS WORKED VERY HARD IN THEIR LIFE FOR THEIR BUSINESS. I FEEL THAT THE LARGER BUSINESSES ARE COVERED UNDER INSURANCE ANYWAY AND IT’S NOT SHOPLIFTING FROM SOMEONE ON A PERSONAL LEVEL. I’D NEVER WRITE FALSE CHEQUES...

BRENDA: I DON’T STEAL OFF OF ANYBODY. LIKE, I’LL GO TO A DEPARTMENT STORE AND TAKE FROM THEM, YOU KNOW. SAY A FRIEND, I DON’T STEAL FROM FRIENDS... I DON’T B & E A HOUSE OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT. I STEAL STRICTLY FROM DEPARTMENT STORES. THEY CAN AFFORD IT, WELL, NOT THAT THEY CAN AFFORD IT, BUT YOU DON’T STEAL FROM FRIENDS OR FAMILY... YOU JUST DON’T DO THAT.

LORNA: I DON’T GO OUT TO STEAL SO I CAN GET A NEW CAR AND A NEW THIS AND A NEW THAT, JUST ENOUGH, YOU KNOW... I’M NOT ASHAMED OF IT. I MEAN, I SHOULD BE, BUT I’M NOT. I’M RIPPIN’ OFF STORES, I’M NOT RIPPIN’ OFF PEOPLE. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN? I WOULDN’T DO THAT, BUT TO GO INTO A BIG DEPARTMENT STORE... THEY’RE RIPPIN’ US OFF ANYWAY... THE PRICES THEY’RE CHARGING. WELL, THAT MAKES IT SEEM RIGHT FOR ME, IN MY MIND, TO GIVE ME JUSTICE OR TO MAKE IT SAY, WELL, YOU’RE NOT THAT BAD OF A PERSON... I JUSTIFY IT THROUGH THAT WAY, LIKE IT’S O.K.

TERRI: LIKE I WOULD NEVER TAKE FROM A PERSON, BUT IF... THERE WAS A HUNDRED DOLLARS LAYING ON THE TABLE, I WOULDN’T TAKE A NICKEL OF IT. I WOULD NEVER TAKE ANYTHING FROM ANYBODY’S HOME OR... LIKE, IF I WAS STANDING BEHIND SOMEBODY IN A STORE AND THEY DROPPED MONEY, I’D TELL THEM. I WOULDN’T PICK IT UP... IT’S JUST... DIDN’T SEEM LIKE I’M RIPPIN’ ONE INDIVIDUAL OFF. ...IT WASN’T REALLY HURTING THE STORE, I DIDN’T THINK...
I JUST FIGURED WELL, IT'S JUST A WRITE-OFF TO THE STORE KIND OF THING, YOU KNOW. I FELT BAD ABOUT DOIN' IT, BUT I DIDN'T THINK IT WAS LIKE HURTING ONE PARTICULAR PERSON BECAUSE IT WAS A COMPANY.

Thus, it appears that shoplifting from a department store is "O.K.". It is acceptable because it is a company and not an individual. A large company like a department store doesn't have a human face. A company is not as 'personal' as an individual.

Additionally, the items stolen are considered to be a "write-off" for the store. The store can easily replace them without losing a lot of money, whereas for an individual, the replacement costs and value are higher. It seems then, that shoplifting has its own morals and values for those committing this crime.
Chapter VI: Discussion of Research

and

Implications for Theory

From its beginning, the goal of this research has been the understanding of shoplifters and shoplifting. Through interviews with fourteen Canadian women, substantial understanding of the phenomenon has been achieved. Part I of the results focussed on the questions of who, what, where, when and how to create a picture of who shoplifts. Part II examined the motivations behind the offence by attempting to answer the questions of why shoplift and why shoplifting.

Part I:
A: Who? 'Ordinary' Women

The average age of the women in this study was 38.6 years. The youngest woman interviewed was 31 and the oldest woman was 56 years of age. As Klemke (1992) reported, the number of adult women apprehended for shoplifting remained high until age 55 when the number of apprehensions decreased. Similarly, from this research, it appears that most adult, female shoplifters are between the ages of thirty and forty years of age.
There does not appear to be a relationship between marital status and shoplifting behavior. Five women were divorced, two were single, one was separated, one was widowed, four were married and one lived common law.

Similarly, no relationship seemed to exist between number of children, ethnicity or level of education and shoplifting. The women I interviewed had an average of 2.7 children, ranging from none to eight. A small relationship may exist where a woman is shoplifting to provide for her and her children. The more children this woman has may contribute to her shoplifting behavior, such as the frequency and amount of items taken. Again, further research is needed in this area to determine a relationship between the above variables.

The women possessed a variety of educational backgrounds, with an average education of grade ten. Thus, one may say that they average a high school education of grade ten. As well, they came from a variety of backgrounds, with not one dominant ethnicity. As mentioned, the most representative sample was attempted.

These results point to the conclusion that adult, female shoplifters are very ordinary people. They come from a variety of backgrounds, possess an average education of grade ten and have an average of 2.7 children. Their marital status ranges from single to widowed and most are between the ages of thirty and forty.
Financially Restricted

A total of nine women interviewed were living on a fixed income, either assistance or disability pension. Two women were unemployed and one was on sick leave. Only two out of the fourteen women were employed.

Thus, one may conclude that the majority of these adult, female shoplifters, living on a low income, have faced poverty and restricted options in life. As mentioned above, this conclusion is not new. Most women in conflict with the law experience some form of poverty and restricted options.

Throughout the interviews, women expressed their frustration at trying to "survive" and to provide for their children. Their financial situation was a constant stressor in their lives.

Charges versus Offences

From the research, it was clear that more shoplifting offences occurred than were detected. The number of charges ranged from one to six with an average of 1.6 charges per woman. One woman, Kathy, had a total of 42 shoplifting charges against her. If this number is included, the average climbs to 4.8 charges per woman.

Actual shoplifting offences ranged from one to ten with Kathy committing a total of 50 offences. The average number of offences was 3.6 per woman. If her 50 offences are included, the average climbs to 7.2. Additionally, Lorna
stated she was shoplifting for approximately twenty years. If her actual number of offences were known, the average would increase further.

From this research, it may be concluded that two out of every four shoplifting offences result in charges. A woman has a 50 percent chance of getting away with the crime. Thus, shoplifting may be considered a relatively 'low-risk' crime.

Is this a valid conclusion? What about the offences that remain undetected or the women that are not charged? It is important to note that not one woman interviewed stated that the security personnel/floorwalker let them go. All detected offences resulted in charges for the women in this research. As for undetected offences, it must be assumed that the women revealed them through their responses to this research. This topic was discussed in the Methodology.

Recidivism

When questioned about the likelihood of committing future shoplifting offences, most women stated that they had no plans to continue shoplifting. Some felt that being caught was enough to deter them, while others thought of their families and the court experience. However, there is no way of knowing for sure whether or not these women will discontinue their shoplifting behavior.

Research of this type relies solely on the responses obtained from the interviewees. One must assume that their
responses are truthful. It is beyond the scope of this research to conduct a follow-up with these women to uncover future shoplifting activity or recidivism rates.

Alternatively, due to the minimal risk involved, it seems plausible that the recidivism rate may be high and/or the number of people committing this crime may be high. To know the women’s recidivism rate would be interesting as their responses clearly indicated that they did not wish to continue shoplifting.

Looking to Cameron’s (1964) study once again, she claims that once apprehended, pilferers stop shoplifting. However, a reassessment of her finding conducted by Klemke in 1982 found that "the most reasonable conclusion is that apprehension tends to result in modest deterrence effects" (Klemke 1982, p. 93). He cautions against using Cameron’s findings as support for the deterrence theoretical perspective. This discussion is continued in the following chapter, examining the Criminal Justice System’s Response to shoplifting.

**Shoplifting Alone**

Thirteen out of fourteen women reported shoplifting alone. This finding is one characteristic of pilferers, especially adult women, according to Cameron (1964). She found that adults caught for shoplifting were more likely to be alone than were youths. As well, she found that as the age
of women increased, the more likely they were to be alone.

All, but one of the women I interviewed shoplifted alone. Jackie was the only woman who shoplifted with a companion, her husband. As well, she was found to shoplift a large amount of items at any one time and items of a high dollar value. She and her husband would also sell many of the items they stole.

Lorna spoke of shoplifting alone or with a companion:

I ALWAYS WENT BY MYSELF... I WAS JUST DOIN’ IT FOR MYSELF. LIKE, IF I WAS GOIN’ OUT TO EARN SOME MONEY, THEN, I’D PROBABLY HAVE SOMEONE.. COUPLE OF OTHER PEOPLE WITH ME, MAYBE, I DON’T KNOW. THEN, YOU COULD TAKE THE HEAT OFF YOURSELF, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN... IF YOU GOT MORE PEOPLE WITH YA.... NEVER DONE THAT, EXCEPT FOR WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, LIKE, ME AND A FRIEND OF MINE...

Thus, one may conclude that the majority of the women in this research are not commercial shoplifters, but pilferers. As well, it appears that at least one woman may be a professional thief or commercial shoplifter.

Not Thieves

The majority of the women interviewed did not consider themselves as shoplifters or thieves. In their responses to this question, many women seemed to rationalize the crime or their role in it. Sharon stated that she would get a job if she could instead of shoplifting. Anne used to consider other shoplifters as ‘bad’ people until she committed the crime herself. Brenda said she’s not planning on shoplifting for the rest of her life, thus she’s not a thief.

Similarly, Cameron (1964) found that pilferers do not
consider themselves thieves. They resisted the notion that their behavior was theft and therefore, they were thieves. She continues by discussing the difficulty that store personnel have in convincing the individual that she/he has been arrested and will be charged with theft.

In the present study, several examples were given of women who did not consider themselves as thieves. Although they realized what they had done, many did not consider themselves as thieves for a variety of reasons, as above.

Again, this finding is characteristic of pilfering as opposed to commercial theft. Thus, it appears that the majority of these women are indeed pilferers, not professionals.

B: What? Value of Items

In total, the average value of the items shoplifted was $70.56. For Cape Breton alone, the average value of the items was $12.48. These women stole items valued at $20.00 or less. For Windsor, the average value of the items was $148.00 and only one woman stole items valued at $20.00. This difference was due to the amount of items taken at any one time by the women in Windsor and the suggestion that one woman, Jackie, is a commercial shoplifter.

Generally, it was found that as the age of the women increased, the value of the items decreased. As Cameron (1964) reports, "Among women, the proportion apprehended with
valuable articles increased until 40-50 years of age, then gradually decreased" (Cameron 1964, p. 73). One must wonder if this result would be achieved with adult men. As well, would the value of the items shoplifted be of a lesser or greater value? Cameron (1964) found that the value of merchandise stolen by men was greater than the value stolen by women. Future research may consider a comparison between adult men and women and their shoplifting behavior.

Amount of Items

Most of the women interviewed shoplifted one to two items at any one time. Those women who stole items worth the highest value, also stole the largest amount of items at any one time. It is interesting to note that Jackie, who shoplifted with her husband, stole relatively few items at any one time. However, she did state that the items she stole were of a high dollar value. She reported shoplifting from boutiques and grocery stores. As well, her husband would have a large amount of items in his possession. Thus, between the two of them, they would possess a large amount of stolen merchandise.

Additionally, those women who reported shoplifting a large amount of items did not necessarily possess individual items of a high dollar value. They simply stole a large amount of items which totalled a high dollar value.

Thus, one may conclude that it may not be the amount of
items taken at any one time, but the combination of the amount and value of the individual items as the determining factors between pilfering and boosting. For example, as a suspected commercial shoplifter, Jackie and her husband from Windsor could sell a large amount of high valued items to obtain the maximum profit.

Cameron (1964) found that the amount of stolen items for both men and women ranged from one to thirty-six. In her comparison of men and women, she found that women were apprehended with more shoplifted items than men. This finding was attributed to the shoplifting patterns of women as opposed to men. According to a detective she interviewed:

People steal in the same way they buy. A man comes in with something definite in mind. He sees it; takes it, and he leaves. Women shop around. They look at this and that, handle the merchandise, feel it, smell it, put it down, come back and go away again. It's just the way they shop (Cameron 1964, p. 81).

As a result of their shoplifting patterns, women were more easily apprehended than men. As well, women tended to remain in the store for a longer period of time than men, resulting in the increased apprehensions.

Although Cameron (1964) found that women were apprehended with more items than men, she found that men shoplifted items of a higher dollar value than women and were more likely to be boosters. Thus, it may be the combination of the amount and value of merchandise taken that determines a professional shoplifter.
Type of Items

The type of items shoplifted also support the suggestion that most adult women shoplifters are pilferers rather than commercial shoplifters. The most common items taken included women and children's clothing and personal hygiene and hair-care products. They consisted of women's sweaters, blouses, pants and shoes, children's outfits and shoes. As well, deodorant, shampoo, hair coloring, mousse and hair clips were common items. Make up, food and cigarettes were the next most common items.

These items are relatively low in value, suggesting their sale was not a consideration in the theft. As well, with most women shoplifting a small amount of items with a small dollar value, the suggestion that most adult, women shoplifters are not commercial thieves is further supported.

C: Where?

By looking at the type of items shoplifted, one can deduce where shoplifting occurs the most. It appears that most shoplifting occurs in department stores and drug stores. Nine women shoplifted from department stores, four from Windsor and five from Cape Breton. Four women shoplifted from drug stores, one from Windsor and three from Cape Breton. Jackie, the woman suspected of being the commercial shoplifter, shoplifted from boutiques and grocery stores.

Zellers, K Mart and Woolco/Wal-Mart were the most popular
department stores for shoplifters. Shoppers Drug Mart was the most popular drug store, with the remaining four women stealing from this chain of stores.

Thus, most adult, women shoplifters steal from large, chain stores, the most popular being department and drug stores. These women were not stealing from corner stores or individuals. They viewed the stores they shoplifted from as large, impersonal identities that could absorb the losses of shoplifting.

D: When?

There did not appear to be a particular time of day when shoplifting occurred, although half of the women stated that they shoplifted in late afternoon or evening. No reason was given for the time of day. One may question whether or not this time of day is also the time that most shopping occurs. Or, perhaps this is the time of day when security personnel are most likely to be on the job, resulting in increased shoplifting detection. Future research on this topic may attempt to answer some of these questions.

Most women could not remember the actual day when they shoplifted. As a result, it was impossible to ascertain whether or not shoplifting was most likely to occur on a particular day of the week.

Women reported shoplifting during many months of the year. Thus, it did not appear that this offence occurred
mostly in one month of the year. However, upon further examination, it was discovered that some women found themselves financially stressed during certain months, especially September and December. September was stressful due to the beginning of the school year when children require school supplies and clothing. December was particularly stressful due to Christmas and the demands of toys, clothing and other gift items.

Thus, one may conclude that shoplifting may be more likely to occur during those months like September and December when demands on finances are particularly stressful. In addition, the bombardment of advertising campaigns during these times of year may add a further temptation to shoplift. It is important to remember that the majority of women interviewed were receiving some form of social assistance as well, an indication of the financial stress experienced at these times of year.

According to Klemke (1992), "the peaks of shoplifting activity typically coincide with the peaks of legitimate shopping (late afternoons, weekends, and during sales and at Christmas time) (Klemke 1992, p. 78)."  

E: How?

It was found that one-half of the women interviewed used their purses to conceal the merchandise they were shoplifting.

See Cameron (1964) and Brown (1984) for a further discussion.
Sharon and Nancy used a bag to conceal items and Heather and Susan placed items inside the pocket of their jackets. Lorna put the items under her arm, while Jackie used her children's coats to conceal items within her shopping cart. Three women did not state how they shoplifted items from the store.

Thus, it appears that the most popular method of concealment is a woman's purse. In the past, one of the most common methods included the booster skirt or bloomers, providing a lot of space to conceal merchandise. However, the present day method of concealment seems to be the purse. One may suggest that a woman's purse is a practical location to conceal merchandise as it is always present, close to the individual and private, personal property. Brown (1984) discusses the prevalence of utilizing the purse as a means of concealing merchandise as well.

All women stated that they were apprehended for shoplifting after they exited the store. Thus, a clear case of shoplifting had been established. If the women were legitimate customers, they would have paid for the merchandise prior to their exit. By not making any attempt to pay and exiting the store, they were apprehended for shoplifting.

Clearly, a woman must leave the store before she can be charged for this crime. If she does not leave the store, she remains on store property. It is then the responsibility of the store to prove that shoplifting occurred.17

17See Brown (1984) for a further discussion.
Part II:

After obtaining a picture of who shoplifts, the most popular items shoplifted, stores where the crime occurred, how and when it was done, it was necessary to turn to the question of why.

A: Why? I Don’t Know:

"I don’t know" was a popular answer among the women interviewed. Many were searching for answers to this question and kept repeating it throughout the course of the interview.

It was found that these women were undergoing a high level of stress that was ongoing within a short period of time. They were experiencing many stressors at one time which left them feeling not only over-stressed and vulnerable, but with the need to release these emotions which had built up over time. Shoplifting was their expression or relief of these circumstances.

Many women were dealing with stressors like a new job, a move, a death or illness and a divorce. Some were living their lives for the first time on their own and some were experiencing the responsibility of the family finances for the first time. Others were laden with the responsibility of caring for a loved one who was dying and feeling helpless to assist them. Heather spoke of caring for her husband who could no longer speak to her. They could no longer communicate with each other as they had for 38 years of
marriage.

Other women were dealing with low self-esteem at the time they shoplifted. Ingrid believed herself to be a 'bad' person and was trying to prove it by shoplifting. As well, she was always trying to please her mother, to be a "good girl" by bringing her mother merchandise she shoplifted. When she stole makeup and lingerie, it was to make her feel like a worthwhile person, to be attractive and sexy.

Shoplifting, then, for many of these women was an outlet, a cry for help, an expression of their anger, fear and helplessness. For some women, shoplifting provided them with the opportunity to get the help they needed. Being 'out of control' for a short period of time allowed them to gain some control within their lives. For others, it made them feel good by looking good.

Thus, one may conclude that many stressors that are ongoing and experienced at one period of time places a woman at risk of shoplifting. It is necessary to focus on the "at risk" portion of this conclusion as everyone experiences varying degrees of stress in their lives. However, persistent stressors over a short period of time may indeed make a woman vulnerable to shoplifting.

As Carlen (1988) discussed, after many months of coping with their particular situation, some women reacted by returning to an addiction or a shoplifting spree. Her analysis of women and crime focussed on control theory as an
explanation of why the women in her study committed crime. She speaks of women "defending their domestic and personal space by any means within their power" (Carlen 1988, p. 14).

Applied to shoplifting, her theory has merit. Women who shoplift may indeed be rejecting the commitment and belief of the 'social bond' which includes society's norms and values. She may very well be shoplifting to gain or retain some control within her life.  

Prescription Medication

A small section of the results was devoted to the role of prescription medication. It must be stated that a study of this size could not possibly attempt to cover the role that prescription medication plays in shoplifting behavior. However, it was found that some women were taking prescribed medications at the time they shoplifted. They described themselves as being "numb", "not thinking", "in a daze", "a basket case" and "depressed" at the time they shoplifted.

Many of these women were those who were experiencing a variety of stressors in their lives. One may suggest that the prescription medication did play a role in their shoplifting behavior as they could have been prescribed the medication to help them cope with the stressors in their lives. As well, some women stated that they abused their medication at the

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18 In her article, Why Nice Women Steal, Esther Davidowitz (1993) speaks of the psychological aspects of shoplifting as well.
time they shoppedlifted. Some took the wrong medication while others took too much, suggesting that it did play a role in their shoppedlifting behavior. Future research could investigate the role of prescribed medications in shoppedlifting behavior more extensively.

Survival

Survival was another popular theme throughout this research. Many women echoed the phrase of living "one day at a time" through supporting themselves and their children. It was found that only two women were employed at the time of the interviews. A total of seven women were receiving Provincial Social Assistance, two were receiving a disability pension, two were unemployed and one woman was on sick leave. Twelve out of the fourteen women had children.

These women expressed their motivation to shoppedlift in terms of their limited financial resources. All stole merchandise for their children as well as themselves. Some women expressed their determination to provide for their children, saying "they will not do without".

Shoppedlifting was a supplement to the limited income these women received. Through stealing, they were not only able to provide for themselves and their children, but they were able to give them the latest fashion items. As Lorna stated:

I'm on welfare and I don't want them to feel like, you know, like poor and they can't have the same clothes as everybody else, so I'll take the chance... to give them what everybody else got...
Shoplifting, then, was an acceptable way for the women to provide for their children. As long as they were stealing clothing and food items, shoplifting was seen as acceptable and necessary.

The Christmas season and the return to school placed an extra burden on the women as well. Children were in need of clothing and school supplies to begin the new year and the holidays meant new outfits, toys and other gifts as well. Many women found these times of year particularly frustrating as they attempted to provide all the necessary items their children required. Some women turned to shoplifting to provide some of these items for their children.

Separation and divorce lead many women to shoulder the family finances for the first time. Usually, a woman’s financial situation deteriorates after this occurs and she finds herself under a lot of stress with the responsibility of providing for her children on her own. Some women turn to shoplifting as a way of supplementing their income.

Thus, one can conclude that living on a fixed income makes a woman vulnerable to shoplifting, especially when she is shouldered with the responsibility of providing for her children. It is important to emphasize that this financial situation places a woman at risk or vulnerable to shoplift. All women receiving some form of government assistance do not shoplift.
As discussed previously, women constitute the greatest risk of poverty. Many single-parent families headed by women are poor. They are faced with low wages, unstable employment, child care responsibilities, separation and divorce. A total of seven out of twelve women interviewed were the single supporters of their family. As Creating Choices reminds us, we must realize that women in our society who commit crime are those with the fewest advantages (Task Force Report 1990).

It is evident that women who come in conflict with the law are often the victims of poverty and restricted options in life. Economically marginalized, the women turned to shoplifting as a means of providing for themselves and their children.

Following Cloward and Ohlin’s (1960) differential opportunity theory, it appears plausible that women engage in shoplifting because of their financial restriction and limited opportunities. Frustrated at their financial situation, women turn to shoplifting as an illegitimate opportunity to get what they need.

Similarly, according to Carlen (1988), women may turn to crime because of the marginalization they experience within a capitalist society. Often, women will commit a crime as a way of solving some of their financial problems and getting some control in their lives. As discussed previously, they are rejecting the class and gender deals. A woman may shoplift as a way of obtaining a decent standard of living.
And, according to differential opportunity, shoplifting provides a woman with the means, although illegitimate means, of obtaining this standard of living. As well, the economic marginalization perspective states that crimes committed by women, and they are mostly property crimes, are rational responses to their poverty and economic situation.

The Thrill of 'Getting Away With It'

It appears that for some women, shoplifting provides them with a sense of accomplishment, a thrill, a feeling of power. Words like "brave", "challenge", "thrill", "rush" and "control" were expressed in the interviews. Lorna spoke of shoplifting like a "game" she was playing. To 'get away with it' seemed to be a secondary motivation to commit the crime. Many of the women who spoke of the thrill of shoplifting discussed other motivations like providing for their family as the primary reason for the theft.

Seeing other people getting away with it also appeared to be a motivator to shoplift. For some women, shoplifting looked easy because so many others were doing it and getting away with it. "If they can get away with it, why can't I" seemed to be the prevailing attitude of some of the women interviewed.

According to Katz (1988), the "sneaky thrill" of shoplifting is created when the individual gives to an object the power to seduce her/him while maintaining a 'normal'
appearance and experiences the thrill by accomplishing the task (Katz 1988, p. 53). His perspective rests on the premise that individuals give power to objects, in effect to the world, to seduce them into crime. He asks, "what are people trying to do when they commit a crime?" (Katz 1988, p. 9).

He does speak of the personal accomplishment or competence that one feels when successful at shoplifting. However, he goes further by empowering the item to be stolen. He empowers it with the property of seductiveness; that the item possesses the power to seduce an individual to steal it. It is not the value or material worth of the item that gives it power, but its orientation to the shoplifter; position in the store and attractiveness.

He then focusses on the individual's attempts to maintain the appearance of a legitimate shopper, browsing around the store looking at items. Once the shoplifter is successful at stealing the merchandise, the thrill of getting away with the crime is realized. Katz also discusses various metaphors of shoplifting, relating it to play, religion, sex and charisma. He states:

Appreciated from within, a sneaky property crime by an amateur is not a failure of social control but a personal esthetic triumph (Katz 1988, p. 73).

It appears that Katz' perspective has some merit in this discussion. One woman did refer to shoplifting as a "game" while others spoke of its thrill, rush and challenge. However, it is important to emphasize that all of these women
referred to the thrill, the addiction and the compulsion of shoplifting in connection with other motivations. Some were dealing with many stressors in their lives, while others stated they were providing for their family.

Although one can draw similarities between Katz' perspective and the information obtained from this research, it is necessary to discuss his research in further detail. According to Katz (1988), his analysis of shoplifting resulted from the self-reports of university students in his criminology courses, admittedly "an overprivileged group" (Katz 1988, p. 78). This group of students was also a captive audience and not the most random sample. As well, the majority of the self-reports used were those of his female students, "largely because they were the most numerous and sensitively written" (Katz 1988, p. 53).

Thus, it does appear that some women enjoy the thrill of shoplifting. Getting away with the merchandise without getting caught creates a sense of power and accomplishment for the shoplifter. For the women involved in this research, the thrill is secondary to their primary motivation(s) to shoplift. Although Katz' perspective adds to our understanding of the thrill, caution must be taken when utilizing his research.

Finally, a comment must be made on consumerism in relation to Katz (1988). As discussed previously, consumers are constantly overwhelmed by lavish displays of merchandise
within a store. According to Farrell and Ferrara (1985), the display of merchandise in this fashion calls upon consumers to purchase it. One is able to find items of every shape, size and color enticing people to pick them up, need them and want them. Additionally, campaigns to buy now and pay later add to the immediate gratification of the consumer. Like Katz, Farrell and Ferrara focus on the power of the goods to seduce the consumer.

Addiction or Kleptomania?

As stated above, four women spoke of shoplifting as an "addiction". Comparisons were made to smoking, alcoholism and lying where it is difficult to stop once started. Ingrid described her shoplifting behavior as a "compulsive disorder". She was involved with Alcoholics Anonymous at the time and referred to shoplifting as another compulsion that she was dealing with regularly, the same as her alcoholism. Lorna stated that she couldn't go into a store without taking something. Shoplifting gave her a sense of power.

Comments of this nature may lead one to surmise that some of these women were kleptomaniacs. After all, kleptomania is a compulsive desire to steal, thus, the gap between addiction and kleptomania may not be large. However, before such a conclusion can be reached, a close look at the results of this research is warranted.

First, it is necessary to clarify shoplifting in terms of
a 'female crime'. Although women shoplift, men do so as well. Whether or not women shoplift more or less than men is undetermined. However, of the crimes that women commit, shoplifting is the most common. Thus, a link between women and kleptomania may have been a result of this observation.

Second, only three women were seeking psychiatric help at the time of their shoplifting offences. Their reasons for seeking help were not a result of shoplifting. All were experiencing many stressors in their lives and were seeing a psychiatrist to help them cope with their situation.

Third, not one woman involved in this research was classified or diagnosed as a kleptomaniac. As stated above, only three women were seeing a psychiatrist at the time of their shoplifting offences.

Fourth, with kleptomania's sexual connotations (Cameron 1964), one might expect that the types of items shoplifted by the women would reflect such a relationship. They do not. As stated, the women stole items of clothing for themselves and their children, personal hygiene and hair-care products. Only two women shoplifted makeup and only one woman shoplifted lingerie. These women stole other items, such as clothing, as well.

According to Katz (1988), the accounts of shoplifting by his female students reflected a sexual metaphor of shoplifting. He believes that through shoplifting, these young women were trying to discover their sexual identity.
Additionally, he states that the types of items stolen by females represent the adult female identity and "it is notable that female shoplifters, rarely steal items to give to men or children" (Katz 1988, p. 71).

His observations of his female students were not repeated in this research. None of the women interviewed made a sexual reference to shoplifting and many women stole items for their children. As well, Cameron (1964) found "that pilferers generally take objects which are useful as status symbols rather than sexual symbols" (Cameron 1964, p. 156). It is notable again that Katz' research was conducted with his university students, a more privileged and younger sample of 'shoplifters', reflecting different experiences with the offence.

Fifth, in reference to kleptomania, Cameron (1964) also found that once an individual was arrested for shoplifting, that person did not shoplift again. The arrest was enough to deter the shoplifter from future offences. She states that her finding is inconsistent with kleptomania. If someone was in fact a kleptomaniac, they would not cease to shoplift.

In the present research, many women stated that they would not continue to shoplift in the future. Some referred to being charged, while others referred to the court experience and family shame as enough to prevent them from shoplifting again. However, some women stated that they would continue to shoplift, but their reasons were not due to
compulsion or kleptomania. They spoke of providing for their children and 'not doing without' as indications of their future shoplifting behavior.

Thus, after all the discussion, it may be concluded that the women in the present research were not kleptomaniacs. Although one cannot deny their comments about addictions, thrills and compulsions, care must be taken not to immediately equate them with kleptomania. I suggest that although some of Katz' interpretations of shoplifting may be useful, caution should be used when utilizing his research. As well, his discussion of the sexual metaphor of shoplifting in particular is not progressive. Rather, I would suggest that it takes us back to a time where female offenders were regarded as impulsive, neurotic females that committed crime due to the bodily effects of menopause or as a way of compensating for a penis.19

Supporting a Habit

Although not as prevalent as other motivations for shoplifting, supporting a drug habit was cause to shoplift for two women I interviewed. As discussed earlier, Kathy shoplifted items in exchange for the prescription drug halcion, while Jackie stole with her husband and sold the items to support their drug habit. She did not talk about the

19Abelson (1989) and Odem (1992) provide excellent discussions of this topic. See Smart (1976) and Bowker (1981) as well.
type of drug(s) to which they were addicted.

As expected, these women spoke of numerous offences for shoplifting. Their prior record of shoplifting offences was longer than the other women involved in this research. However, they stole similar items as the other women and Kathy stole from the same stores as well. However, Jackie spoke of stealing from boutiques and grocery stores.

Thus, one can conclude that although supporting a drug habit is a motivation to shoplift, it is not the most popular. Only two women were shoplifting for this reason. The only observed difference between these women and the others was a longer record of shoplifting offences, apparently due to the addiction to drugs.

Need

Just over half of the women stated that they did not need the items they shoplifted. They spoke of stealing medicated cream, clothing, candy, air fresheners and deodorant they don't use.

As well, many of the women were found to have enough money in their possession to purchase the items they shoplifted. It was a struggle for them to understand why they would commit this crime when they carried enough money. Victoria stated that she got paid the day she shoplifted and others spoke of having "all kinds of money" with them when they stole. Four women, three from Windsor and one from Cape
Breton, stated that they did not have enough money in their possession to purchase the merchandise.

Further examination revealed that these women described their motivations for shoplifting in terms of their life experiences at the time. Many were burdened with a tremendous amount of stress and/or responsibility, including personal and interpersonal problems.\(^{20}\) As well, this finding lends support to the suggestion that shoplifting is not solely an economic crime, as discussed above.

A Cry for Help

If many women don't need the items they shoplift and they carry with them enough money to purchase them, then why do they shoplift? Another factor arising out of this discussion seems to be a cry for help. Obviously, this motivation is linked to the "I don't know" responses provided by many of the women.

Two women in this study explained that getting caught finally allowed them to seek the help they felt they needed at the time. Ingrid was an alcoholic and dealing with a low level of self-esteem while Heather was a care-giver, always helping others, but not herself. To get caught was a relief for these two women.

Getting caught meant prevention for two other women.

\(^{20}\)See Klemke's (1992) discussion of shoplifters and shoplifting in Chapter 2.
They knew they would never shoplift again. Victoria was a first-time offender while Terri was sent to jail as she was charged three times for shoplifting.

It does appear that for some women, shoplifting is a cry for help. A feeling of relief surges when they are caught. It's as if a secret was finally told or a weight was finally lifted. They now are able to obtain the help they need, according to their life circumstances.

As well, getting caught for shoplifting appears to carry with it a certain amount of deterrence, although the amount of deterrence may be different for different people. For some, one apprehension is enough to deter them from future shoplifting behavior. This is especially true for those women who shoplift to seek help and are able to obtain the help they need. For others, a jail term may be the deterring factor.

B: Why Shoplifting?

It's Easy

Throughout the interviews, it was very clear that shoplifting was viewed as an easy crime. Walking into a store, taking something that may or may not be needed and walking out of the store without being detected is easy.

Some women commented that it looked so easy for others to do it and get away with it that they tried it themselves. Others viewed it as an acceptable means to an end. It is a crime that is not serious in nature and allows them to get
what they want at that particular period of time.

Others spoke of being aware of the security personnel or floorwalker within the stores. Once a woman is caught for shoplifting, she knows who the floorwalker is and is then able to avoid him. Brenda stated that even her teenage daughter was able to "spot a floorwalker out" in a well-known department store because he was "so obvious".

Lorna said she would continue to shoplift to provide for her children. She believes shoplifting to be easy due to the lack of security measures within the stores. Mirrors are not a deterrent for her and she simply pretends to be a legitimate customer shopping for merchandise.

Brenda and Jackie cautioned against shoplifting in stores protected by "the dome" as it makes stealing more difficult. As well, a floorwalker that looks like "a regular pill-popping bum" may be more apt to catch shoplifters as opposed to a floorwalker in uniform, according to these women.

Thus, shoplifting appears to be a crime that is considered easy and acceptable. Department stores are readily available in most communities and their security measures seem to be lacking. Floorwalkers can be easily spotted as well. All a woman has to do is to pretend she is shopping, something that is done on a regular basis.

Cameron (1964), Klemke (1992), Davidowitz (1993) and Brown (1984) all speak of the easiness of shoplifting. It is indeed a minimal crime with minimal risk.

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Intent

A majority of the women described their shoplifting behavior as non-intentional. They stated that they did not form the intent to shoplift prior to committing the offence. Two women described their behavior as a "spur of the moment thing" that happened while they were inside the store. They persistently stated that they neither left home nor entered the store with the intention to steal.

Only two women stated that they intended to shoplift. Both women were supporting a drug habit and selling their merchandise. It was suggested that these women, forming the intent to shoplift and selling the merchandise, were more likely to be boosters than pilferers. It must be remembered that one woman, Kathy, was 'selling' her merchandise through the exchange of items for prescriptions.

This finding is consistent with Cameron's (1964) results of thirty-one years ago. Pilferers committed the crime with no prior intention or consideration of risks and consequences.

Risks and Consequences

As stated, risks and consequences were also not a consideration prior to the shoplifting behavior. With most women not forming the intent to shoplift, risks and consequences were also not considered. Most women committed the crime with no prior thoughts of doing so. Many stated that if they had considered the risks and consequences
involved, they never would have committed the crime.

According to Cameron (1964), arrested individuals did not realize that they were being arrested and charged with theft. Many people kept offering to pay for the items they stole, hoping to be released.

Thus, one can conclude that the majority of adult, female shoplifters do not form the intent to shoplift or consider the risks and consequences involved prior to their behavior. Such a conclusion leads one to suggest that for the most part, shoplifting is a crime of the moment, committed with little or no prior thought of the crime itself or its risks and consequences.

The Morals and Values of Shoplifting

As discussed above, shoplifting is viewed as an easy crime. It is also viewed as acceptable for a couple of reasons. First, the department store is considered to be a large, faceless entity, distinct from an individual. Second, this large, faceless entity charges prices that are too high for the merchandise it sells. Third, due to its size and mass quantities of merchandise, it is considered to be able to absorb the costs of shoplifting.

To explain further, the large department store is just that; a large department store. It’s not a person. It has no human face, thus, it is considered a faceless entity. Women who steal from these stores believe strongly against stealing
from an individual because they can relate to the other person and would not want someone to steal from themselves. Cameron (1964) discusses the impersonality of the large corporation, stating that an individual is able to rationalize a theft from this type of organization as opposed to a theft from a friend.

Secondly, the women feel that the store is taking something from them by charging high prices for their merchandise. By shoplifting, some women believe they are getting something in return from the store; somehow compensating for the high prices. As well, some women would buy some items, but steal others for the same reason. According to Davidowitz (1993), "ripping off a big store is their way of saying, 'I'll show you'" (Davidowitz 1993, p. 56). Brown (1984) discusses this matter as well.

Third, the store is seen to absorb the costs of shoplifting because of its size and quantity of merchandise. The women consider the items stolen to be a "write-off" for the store. They believe the losses do not pose a financial threat for the store. Items are simply replaced without the loss of a lot of money, whereas for an individual, the loss is seen to be greater.

These morals and values of shoplifting are akin to the basic components of Neutralization Theory first posed by Sutherland in 1924, then his student Cressey in 1953 and later revised by Sykes and Matza in 1957 (Hagan 1991). Generally, the focus of neutralization theory includes the following:
...how the thinking of 'good' people sometimes leads them to deviate. The answer is found in the willingness to neutralize through the use of what we often call 'rationalizations' the norms and values that inhibit deviant behavior (Hagan 1991, p. 86).

It has already been stated that the women viewed shoplifting as an acceptable crime. Through a discussion of their reasons for this view, it became clear that their rationalizations of the crime fit closely with neutralization theory. It was concluded that the women were ordinary women with average morals and values. Yet, they committed this crime.

Throughout their interviews, they were able to rationalize or 'neutralize' their behavior so that it became acceptable. They believed they were not hurting anyone by stealing from large department stores. They felt that these stores were charging prices that were too high, thus, by stealing they were able to compensate. The shoplifted items were seen as a "write-off" for the store.

According to the theory, an individual neutralizes her/his behavior prior to the actual offence. However, with shoplifting it appears that these women neutralized their behavior after, not before, the offence was committed. Thus, according to Hackler (1971) as reported in Hagan (1991):

\[^{21}\text{See Cameron (1964, p. 168) for a discussion of the rationalizations of shoplifters and Cressey's study of embezzlement.}\]
neutralizations may be more likely to occur after the fact than before the act. In other words neutralizations, verbalizations, or rationalizations may justify, rather than cause, embezzlements and other acts of deviance (Hagan 1991, p. 93).

As seen throughout the interviews, the women were justifying their behavior through the above reasons so that shoplifting became acceptable. Thus, it appears that neutralization theory, in a specific way, contributes to our understanding of adult, female shoplifters.

Theoretical Perspective

After all the discussion, I would like to be able to state the theory of shoplifting. This of course, is impossible given the present study and past research on the topic. The goal of this research was stated from the beginning. To gain an understanding of the dynamics of shoplifters and shoplifting is what I have aimed for and hopefully achieved.

From the present research, we have seen that adult, female shoplifters are ordinary women with average morals and values. They are usually financially restricted, although their financial status does not comprise the sole reason for shoplifting. They are women without a lengthy criminal history and they do not plan to continue shoplifting. These women shoplift alone and do not consider themselves as thieves.
They steal items worth a relatively small dollar value and they steal a small amount of items at any one time. The most common types of items taken include women and children's clothing, personal hygiene and hair-care products. They shoplift from department stores like Zellers, K Mart and Wal-Mart which are considered to be large, faceless and impersonal entities. They would not steal from another individual. They shoplift at all times, days and months of the year, but especially during September and December. The most common method of concealing merchandise is the woman's purse.

Many women do not know why they shoplift. These women are usually experiencing a variety of stressors in their life that often occur at the same period of time. For some, shoplifting is a cry for help, while for others it provides them with a thrill, a sense of accomplishment, power and control. For others, shoplifting supplements their financial situation; they shoplift to provide for themselves and their family. As well, some women shoplift to support their drug habit.

Women who shoplift are not kleptomaniacs. One should be sceptical of research utilizing this label as it is regressive and outdated.

Most women do not need the items they shoplift. Many women have the money to pay for the items at the time they shoplift.
Shoplifting is considered an easy crime. Women do not enter a store with the intention to shoplift and they do not consider the risks and consequences of the crime.

In his book, *The Sociology of Shoplifting*, Klemke (1992) develops a deviance vulnerability - shoplifting attraction theoretical framework. Although Klemke is on the right track when he asserts that certain conditions make an individual vulnerable to shoplifting, he assumes that the individual makes a calculated choice to shoplift; that risks, consequences and rewards are calculated prior to the offence.

However, through the present research, this result was not realized. The women emphatically stated that they entered stores with no intention to shoplift. As well, they did not consider the risks and consequences prior to their shoplifting behavior.

From these conclusions, a clearer understanding of shoplifters and shoplifting has emerged. It is known that women who commit crimes are usually economically marginalized and the victims of violence, gender inequality and restricted options in life. It is known that the majority of the crimes that women commit are non-violent in nature. Women commit mainly property offences, including shoplifting, cheque forgery and fraud.

Of the crimes that women commit, shoplifting is the most prevalent. Thus, it is less difficult to understand why a woman would shoplift.
Many women are the sole providers for their families, responsible for both child-care and finances. The type of work a woman usually finds is low-paying, clerical and service occupations. Shoplifting, then, allows the woman to improve her lifestyle by supplementing her income.

Financial woes combined with other, stressful life events lead women to shoplift as well. Separation, divorce, a death in the family, a move and even a new job can combine to make a woman vulnerable to shoplifting. Shoplifting, then, allows the woman to improve her life situation. This may be through feelings of power and control, accomplishment, increased self-esteem or obtaining the help she needs for her particular situation.

Through shoplifting, a woman is able to achieve a sense of independence and accomplishment. By successfully shoplifting, a woman is controlling her life situation. Providing food and clothing for her children is an excellent example. The means to achieve these goals may not be the means of others, but it is difficult to escape the marginalization that women experience.

Shoplifting is available and is easily accessible. Through lavish displays and advertisements, department stores are not only attracting shoppers, but shoplifters as well. Every shopper is a potential shoplifter. Shoplifting, then, is a limited, illegitimate opportunity.
Chapter VII:

The

Criminal Justice System's Response

Sentences for Shoplifting

Most women received fines and/or probation for their shoplifting offences. A total of twelve out of the fourteen women received probation, four from Windsor and eight from Cape Breton. Probation sentences ranged from three months to two years, with 7.5 months as the average length of sentence. Brenda and Susan were handed a suspended sentence in conjunction with their probation order; the sentence being 'suspended' pending successful completion of the order.

Five women received fines of varying amounts for shoplifting, one from Windsor and four from Cape Breton. These fines ranged from thirty-five to one hundred and three dollars and were usually the sole sentences the women received.

Seven out of the eight Cape Breton women were court mandated to attend the Elizabeth Fry Society’s Stop-Lifting Program, again in conjunction with their probation order. Three of the six Windsor women were participating in the Adult Diversion Program operated by Windsor Probation and Parole,
Ministry of Corrections. These women would remain on probation, pending the successful completion of the Diversion Program.

Only one woman from Cape Breton received a Community Service Order with her sentence of probation. Ingrid was given a total of twenty-five hours to complete before the end of her two year probation period.

Two women, both from Windsor, were incarcerated. Kathy was sentenced to eight months due to her forty-two shoplifting convictions. Jackie received six months for a combination of shoplifting and possession of stolen property.

Thus, it appears that the women with prior criminal records receive the most severe sentences. The majority of shoplifters receive probation for their crime. Some receive fines, while a small number are handed community service orders and incarceration. Many women are required to attend programs designed to prevent future shoplifting activity.

From the previous results of this research, it was clear that many women shoplifted due to the levels of stress they were experiencing, some from living with abusive partners. As well, many women stated that for them, shoplifting was a matter of economic necessity.

Thus, to impose a lengthy sentence of probation may very well be subjecting that woman to further control by someone other than herself, without dealing with the real issues behind her shoplifting behavior. As well, the imposition of
a fine reduces shoplifting to a monetary issue, when the economic necessity of shoplifting was already stated.

Further, women are jailed if they are unable to pay a fine. Again, the issues behind the behavior are not being effectively dealt with by the criminal justice system.

Lack of Private Legal Representation

A further comment on the financial circumstances of the women in this study includes the lack of private legal representation. A total of four women, all from Cape Breton, utilized Legal Aid. Six women, three from each area, were not represented by a lawyer during their court proceedings. They acted as their own lawyer. Four women, three from Windsor, had private lawyers representing them (See Appendix: Chart 13).

It is interesting to note that the three women from Windsor were repeat offenders, including Jackie, Kathy and Brenda. As well, both Jackie and Kathy were involved with supporting a drug habit and selling the merchandise they stole. The one Cape Breton woman, Anne, had a private lawyer because she worked as the lawyer’s secretary for a period of time.

Thus, ten women had no representation or were represented by a Legal Aid lawyer. This result is a direct reflection of their low-income status, as qualification for Legal Aid services depend on the income of the individual. According to
the National Council of Welfare:

...people who apply for legal aid must demonstrate that they cannot afford to pay for the legal services needed to solve their legal problems (National Council of Welfare 1995, p. 34).

As discussed earlier, women constitute the greatest risk of poverty and those who come into conflict with the law are frequently the victims of poverty, gender inequality and restricted options in life. The utilization of Legal Aid or no lawyer at all demonstrates the restricted financial circumstances of the women in this research.

Groups and Programs Attended

Of the eight women interviewed in Cape Breton, seven had participated in the Elizabeth Fry Society's 'Stop-Lifting Program'. This program is offered through a group setting and runs for twelve weeks. Various topics covered in the group sessions include self-awareness, self-esteem, shoplifting, problem solving, anger management, assertiveness, grief and communication. Usually, women are court mandated to attend the program and do so under the direction of their probation officer. The goal of the program is to reduce and/or eliminate the shoplifting behavior by examining its underlying causes.

The women who participated in the Stop-Lifting Program spoke positively about the program and the topics covered. They felt that they were not alone and could share some of their problems within the group.
Of the six women interviewed in Windsor, Megan, Victoria and Sharon qualified for the Adult Diversion Program offered through Windsor Probation and Parole. Individuals qualify for the diversion program if they meet certain criteria which includes being a first-time offender, the offence is non-violent, the offender admits guilt and is willing to take responsibility for her/his actions.

Once the person appears in court, they are told that they may qualify for diversion and have the option to participate in the program. If they participate in the program and complete the requirements, they will not have a criminal record. Some of the requirements include participation in a two-hour group presentation usually by representatives from businesses in the area, police and probation officers. Discussion includes the effects of shoplifting on businesses such as high losses to retailers and resulting high prices.

Diversion may also include community service, restitution to the victim, a charitable donation and an apology to the victim. Shoplifting is one offence that is usually dealt with by way of diversion.

When asked about their perceptions of the diversion program, some of the women had the following comments:

VICTORIA: I WOULD DO ANYTHING, THAT I DON'T WANT A CHARGE, I WANT MY RECORD TO BE CLEAN... I'M VERY HAPPY WITH THE DIVERSION... THEY GIVE ME A CHANCE TO LOOK AT THE SITUATION OVER AGAIN AND SAY, HEY, THEY GIVE ME A CHANCE BEFORE, SHOULD I DO IT AGAIN, I CAN'T EXPECT IT, THE SAME... GETTING OFF SO EASY, BY MAKING A DONATION AND GOING TO A TWO-HOUR SESSION... IN A WAY, THEY GET ME OFF THE HOOK...
SHARON: I FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE WITH THIS ADULT DIVERSION, I MEAN, IT'S A GOOD PROGRAM THAT I HAVE GONE THROUGH, BUT I DON'T NECESSARILY THINK I'M GUILTY AND I HAD TO PLEAD THAT I WAS GUILTY... LIKE, YOU'RE IN A CATCH 22, SO I HAD TO SAY I KNOW WHAT I DID WAS WRONG, BUT I CAN'T SAY THAT I WAS GUILTY.

MEGAN: I'M REALLY UPSET THAT I'VE GONE THROUGH THIS BECAUSE THEY DANGLE IN FRONT OF YOU THAT YOU WILL HAVE NO CRIMINAL RECORD IF YOU DO THIS, BUT YOU HAVE TO AGREE THAT YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT YOU DID. YOU'RE... IT'S LIKE A BRIBE. ...I REALLY BELIEVE THAT A PERSON SHOULD HAVE TO GO TO COURT AND PLEAD GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY AND GO THROUGH THE RISK OF A LAWYER PROVING THAT THEY'RE INNOCENT... I JUST FEEL COERCED. I WOULD HAVE RATHER HAD NO CHOICE... ACTUALLY, WHAT YOU'RE DOING IS GIVING IN.

One must remember that these interviews were conducted after the court process, when the women qualified for diversion, and prior to the actual diversion program. If the interviews were granted after they participated in the program, their comments may have been different.

However, these are real concerns regarding diversion and should be considered in the developmental stages of this type of program.

The Most Difficult Part

The majority of the interviewees stated that going to court and appearing before the judge was the most difficult part of the entire shoplifting experience. The embarrassment of standing up in court in front of everyone was an experience that had a substantial impact on these women. Some of their comments include:
HEATHER: GOING TO COURT. I THOUGHT MY NAME WOULD COME OUT IN THE PAPER, BUT IT DIDN’T. IT JUST HAPPENED TO BE THAT WEEK, I THINK IT WAS A GODSEND THE PAPER WAS ON STRIKE THAT WEEK.

PATRICIA: IT’S PRETTY HARD TO STAND UP THERE IN FRONT OF A PILE OF PEOPLE YOU DON’T KNOW. YOU COULDN’T GET ANY LOWER THAN A SNAKE.

TERRI: HUMILIATION I THINK. JUST THE FACT THAT I HAVE TO GO TO COURT AND SIT BACK AND WONDER WHY I EVER DID THAT.

Others spoke about their family and the embarrassment of the experience:


VICTORIA: LIVING WITH THE ACTION ITSELF... LIVING WITH THE GUILT. I HOPE THAT THEY [FAMILY] NEVER FIND OUT.

JACKIE: THE HARDEST PART WAS TELLING THE KIDS ON THE PHONE THAT I WASN’T COMING HOME.

With their comments in mind, one must look at the impact that current diversion programs will have on deterrence. With the majority of the women stating that the appearance in court was the most difficult part of the entire experience, should a diversion program require an individual to appear in court prior to a referral to the program? In Windsor, individuals were required to appear in court.

Additionally, if one calls for alternatives for women who are charged with crimes of poverty as Skibbens (1991) has, and one looks at the new diversion programs, are these suitable? Is the imposition of charitable donations and victim restitution a practical solution?
Recommendations

As a conclusion to the interviews, I asked the women to recommend what they believed would assist with the prevention of shoplifting. Kathy felt that women had to be helped in the beginning, "once they start getting into that routine". She believes there should be some kind of program designed specifically for shoplifting. She felt the underlying problem is not being dealt with when women go through the court system. "If there was something that the women could go through and just stop them when they were getting started with shoplifting", she said.

Anne feels that the sentences for shoplifting should be more consistent. She has heard of others receiving heavier sentences than her, while others have received less. She states:

SEE, THE LAWYER TOLD ME THIS GUY HERE COULD GIVE YOU A YEARS PROBATION, ANOTHER FELLA COULD SLAP YOU WITH A TWO HUNDRED DOLLAR FINE. IT DEPENDS ON THE... NOT ON THE CASE ITSELF, BUT IT DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON THE JUDGE... HOW HE FEELS THAT DAY.

Lorna had the following comment concerning the sentences for shoplifting:

MAYBE, IF THEY GET A STIFFER PENALTY, THERE’LL BE NO MORE SHOPLIFTERS AROUND. YOU KNOW, A LOT OF IT’D STOP. IF I WAS EVER SENT TO JAIL, THEN I WOULD GIVE IT UP FOR GOOD.

Most of the other women commented on the Adult Diversion Program in Windsor or the Elizabeth Fry Stop-Lifting Program in Cape Breton. Generally, the women offered valuable comments on the process of Adult Diversion and their
experiences within the criminal justice system.

Many women stated that they had no plans to continue their shoplifting activity in the future. For some, getting caught was enough to deter them, as Cameron (1964) discovered. However, for others, getting caught did not have the same effect.

This result calls into question the operation of diversion programs in this country. As stated above, the majority of the women felt the court appearance was the most difficult part of the entire experience. Thus, it may be the person's experience of the criminal justice process that determines future criminal activity. If, through this process, a woman is diverted from the criminal justice system, thus, from her appearance in court, how effective is the experience with regard to specific deterrence?

Additionally, when most pilferers do not consider themselves thieves, appearing in court before the judge may bring the reality of the circumstances to the forefront.

So, given the above discussion, what type of response is an adequate one for female shoplifters? To answer this question, one must first question why shoplifters are initially prosecuted.

According to Sennewald and Christman (1992):

One of the main reasons given for adopting a policy of always prosecuting shoplifters is that prosecution is thought to act as a deterrent to others (Sennewald and Christman 1992, p. 73).
The two most important principles of deterrence theory are specific and general deterrence. As Clark (1988) states:

According to deterrence theory, three elements of imposed sanctions - severity, certainty and celerity - are related to the effectiveness of punishment in reducing or eliminating future criminal behavior by the individual being punished (Clark 1988, p. 109).

Celerity refers to the association between the punishment and the crime and is seen as one of the most important elements of punishment. As argued above, the sentences imposed upon adult, female shoplifters do not reflect the motivation to commit the offence. How then, can the criminal justice system deter shoplifting?

A better, more effective response to adult, female shoplifters is paramount. The criminal justice system must come to realize the inadequacy of its sentences by looking at the reality of the lives of those women involved in shoplifting.

According to the Elizabeth Fry Society of Vancouver (1991), diversion is "a formal procedure that offers a 're-routing' option for certain people accused of a criminal offence" (E. Fry Newsletter 1991, p. 2). The Shoplifters Counselling Program for adult offenders, run by the Vancouver Society, is one of these options.

As discussed above, the idea of diversion is not in question. It may be the process of current diversion programs that need to be examined. Diverting female offenders from the criminal justice system may serve both the offender and the
system itself. Women can be given an opportunity to effectively deal with their particular life situation and the criminal justice system may be spared the cost of further court appearances.

According to Shaughnessy Cohen, a Crown attorney in the city of Windsor, Ontario, "It's frustrating to watch how inconsistently the courts deal with criminals like (Kathy)" (Windsor Star 1993, p. E1). In the words of a prosecutor I interviewed in 1992, "Property offences are treated [as] more serious than offences against the person" (Sampson 1992, p. 48).

As stated, a woman can benefit from a diversion program through educational opportunities, employment training, workshops on self-esteem, anger management, assertiveness and the like by providing her with concrete resources and practical skills. Women need to take effective control of their lives through responsible behavior and the sharing of common experiences.
Chapter VIII:

Final Comments and Future Directions

Historically, we have seen the criminological literature ignore female criminality. Although the past two decades have contributed to the growth of research focussing on women and crime, gaps remain, especially in Canadian research. These gaps are due in part to the focus of criminology on men and crime and the relatively small numbers of women involved in crime at all.

As well, the crimes that women do commit are less violent than those of men and they are usually property offences. Shoplifting in particular is the most common offence committed by women. Yet, the research has been lacking in this area. According to Klemke (1992):

A number of deficiencies and gaps in our knowledge, particularly for adult, female, and middle-class shoplifting, remain as special challenges for future researchers (Klemke 1992, p. 137).

Thus, I have taken the challenge to understand adult, female shoplifters and their crime. Through interviews with fourteen adult, Canadian women in Windsor, Ontario and Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, I have attempted to meet this challenge to understand. The method utilized was interpretive interactionism, where understanding is the goal. This can only be achieved through the voices of the individuals...
involved with the phenomenon under study. In this case, those individuals were the women directly involved with shoplifting in these two locations.

Much information and insight was obtained from Cameron’s classic 1964 study of shoplifting, _The Booster and the Snitch: Department Store Shoplifting_ and from Klemke’s recent 1992 study, _The Sociology of Shoplifting: Boosters and Snitches Today_. Both works are essential for anyone studying this topic.

The results of the present research have been fruitful. Generally, adult women who shoplift are pilferers, not professionals (See Appendix: Charts 14A and 14B). They are ordinary, Canadian women, usually between the ages of thirty and forty years. They possess an average education of grade ten and have an average of 2.7 children.

As adults, women tend to shoplift alone. They do not steal in groups as youth are more likely to do. And, characteristic of pilferers, women do not consider themselves as thieves. Thus, shoplifting is viewed as an acceptable crime.

The most common types of merchandise that women steal are women and children’s clothing, personal hygiene and hair-care products. They include women’s sweaters, blouses, pants and shoes, children’s outfits and shoes. Deodorant, shampoo, hair coloring, mousse and hair clips were also shoplifted. Make-up, food and cigarettes were the next most common items.
Usually, women shoplift one to two items at any one time and they are relatively low value items. Shoplifting a small amount of items with a small dollar value suggests that their sale was not a consider in the theft as well as supporting the conclusion that most adult, female shoplifters are pilferers, not professionals.

The value of the items decreased as the age of the women increased. One must ask whether or not the same result would be achieved with adult men? Do men shoplift items of a higher dollar value? Do men shoplift a greater amount of items than women? A comparison between the shoplifting behavior of men and women is a challenge for future researchers.

Department stores like Zellers, K Mart and Wal-Mart are hit the hardest when it comes to shoplifting. Shoppers Drug Mart is the most popular drugstore. Adult women tend to steal from large, chain stores with department stores being the most common.

Although women shoplift at all times of the day, fifty percent shoplifted during late afternoon or evening. Future researchers of the topic may wish to investigate the patterns of regular shopping, such as times, days and months of the year when most shopping occurs. As well, patterns in the utilization of store security personnel may yield a relationship between times, days and months of the year and shopping or shoplifting incidents. It is well to note that the months of September and December are months when
shoplifting is likely to occur.

Although a variety of methods were used by women to shoplift, the most common method of concealing items was the purse. Others included the use of bags, pockets and shopping carts. Concealing items under the arm was another, less popular method.

Again, the methods used by women to shoplift lend support to the conclusion that they are not professionals, but pilferers. The methods used were by no means sophisticated. Booster boxes, fake pregnancies, disguises or coats containing specially designed hidden pockets were not utilized.

Many women find it difficult to understand why they shoplifted. A few don't remember the details of the experience. Many stressors occurring at once and continuing over a period of time seem to make a woman vulnerable to shoplifting. Dealing with overwhelming responsibilities, divorce, death, relationship difficulties and low self-esteem are some stressors that may make a woman vulnerable. For some women, shoplifting becomes a cry for help, an expression of what is happening in their lives. Once caught, they are finally able to seek the help they need.

It is easier to see shoplifting as a cry for help when need is taken into consideration. Many women have enough money in their possession at the time of the shoplifting incident to pay for the items they stole. As well, many women are found to have stolen items for which they have no need.
Items like candy canes and the type of deodorant not even used by a woman lend support to this conclusion.

Some women make use of prescription medication to help them cope with their particular life situation. The role of these medications in shoplifting has not been clear, although some women have been using or abusing prescriptions at the time of their shoplifting incident. Indications from the present research suggest that they do play a role in shoplifting, but the exact nature is not known.

It is worthy to note that the medications prescribed were for anxiety, depression and pain, which included lithium, rivitrol and prozac. One woman described them as "nerve pills". Future researchers may wish to investigate the role played by prescription medications in shoplifting behavior.

Economic marginalization is another motivation to shoplift. Many women are the sole supporters for their families and find themselves in restricted financial circumstances. Many women are unemployed, employed in low-paying jobs or receiving some form of government assistance.

Women are concentrated in low-paying jobs which provide little or no mobility and often shoplift to supplement their income and/or improve their life situation. Women move from their low-paying lifestyle, to low-paying crime; white-collar crime is not available to most women due to the "small numbers of women in positions of authority and influence" (Smart 1976, p. 24). Shoplifting provides an opportunity to supplement
their present lifestyle by allowing the women to feed and clothe themselves and their children.

Separation, divorce, children returning to school and the Christmas holidays all place women at risk for shoplifting as well. Generally, these are times when a woman lacks the financial resources required to survive. Again, she may turn to shoplifting to supplement her limited income.

Although not a prevalent motivation, supporting a drug habit was another reason to shoplift. Whether addicted to prescription or illicit drugs, women stole to support their habit. Merchandise obtained through shoplifting was either sold or exchanged for drugs.

Women who are shoplifting for this reason seem to have a longer record of shoplifting offences than women shoplifting for other reasons. Are these women more likely to be professional shoplifters or boosters? Future research may investigate such a relationship.

The thrill of getting away with the crime seems to be another, yet secondary, motivation to shoplift. Feelings of power, accomplishment and control result from the successful shoplifting incident. The thrill seems to occur in connection with other stated motivations, such as stress and supporting a drug habit.

The thrill of getting away with the crime is similar to the 'sneaky thrills' researched by Katz (1988). The sneaky thrill is created when the individual empowers the item to
seduce her/him to steal it. When accomplished, the individual experiences the sneaky thrill. Katz also relates shoplifting to play, religion, sex and charisma.

It was suggested that caution be taken when utilizing the research of Katz (1988) due to his sample selection. His respondents were university students in his criminology courses. Research undertaken on the topic of sneaky thrills may wish to examine the relationship among shoplifting, sneaky thrills and the power of consumerism.

As well, future researchers may aim to dispel the myth of kleptomania and its association with women. The relationship that does exist between women and shoplifting simply reflects the fact that shoplifting is the most common crime committed by women. Adult, female shoplifters are not kleptomaniacs, nor are they being classified as such.

Further, adult women rarely steal items that reflect their sexual identity. They often steal clothing for themselves and their children and cease to shoplift once caught. Some women do continue to shoplift, but for reasons stated above. The finding that adult women are not kleptomaniacs lends support to the conclusion that they are pilferers, not professionals.

No prior intention to shoplift or consideration of the risks and consequences lends support to this conclusion as well. Most women shoplift with no prior thoughts or plans of committing the crime. The risk of getting caught and the
consequences if they do are not a consideration in the theft.

With this information in mind, stores may consider 'advertising', if you will, the risks and consequences of shoplifting. In full view for shoppers and shoplifters alike, the advertisement may serve as a 'reminder' to potential shoplifters with the result of preventing shoplifting. Some stores are doing this type of advertising already, but usually only state the basic facts that shoplifting is illegal and all shoplifters will be prosecuted. A more detailed campaign may serve the store better.

We have seen then, that shoplifting is an 'easy' crime. Although all of the women who shared their experiences for the present research were caught, they couldn't believe how easy it was to shoplift. Seeing others committing the crime and getting away with it makes shoplifting look easy as well. Combined with a lack of security measures and floorwalkers who are easily spotted, shoplifting provides women with a fifty percent chance of getting away with the crime. It is a crime that provides an easy means to an end.

As well, shoplifting is acceptable because it allows women to avoid the label of thief. Most women do not consider themselves as thieves because they are shoplifting for legitimate reasons, such as providing for their family. Women who shoplift due to stressful life circumstances often don't understand why they committed the crime. Some do not remember the details of the offence. Thus, even though they have been
caught shoplifting, they do not consider themselves as thieves.

The large, faceless entity of the department store allows shoplifting to be acceptable as well. Stealing from a department store is not the same as stealing from an individual. The large, department store charges prices that are too high for the merchandise it sells, so shoplifting a few items compensates for this travesty. Stores of this size are also considered to be able to absorb the costs of shoplifting, whereas an individual could not. Stolen items are considered to be a "write-off" for the store.

With the impersonality of large department stores, establishing a presence or a real identity with customers to bring the shopping experience to a personal level, may help to curb shoplifting. Managers advertising their store's products is an example of establishing a presence or identity for the store.

As well, stores, in their efforts to minimize the instances of shoplifting may wish to consider sales campaigns where they offer something of value to the customer, who is the potential shoplifter. By buying some items and shoplifting others, women feel they are getting something in return from the store; compensating for the high prices being charged. By offering something in return to the customer, the store may stand a better chance of reducing shoplifting.
Shoplifting, then, is a crime that is considered easy and acceptable. It is also easily accessible with department stores being the main target of this crime. Shoplifting allows a woman to improve her life situation, whether financially or emotionally through seeking the help that is needed.

Shoplifting allows a woman to be in control, providing independence, not dependence. It leaves her with a sense of accomplishment and power over her particular life circumstances.

Similar to neutralization theory, women rationalize their behavior so that it becomes acceptable. Their 'neutralizations' justify as oppose to cause their shoplifting behavior.

Although a theory of shoplifting is desirable, it is not possible from the present research. We have moved toward a greater understanding of the phenomenon and perhaps toward a theoretical perspective. As Klemke states:

While... the development of a theory of shoplifting might be desired, it is not feasible given the present state of knowledge (Klemke 1992, p. 82).

Further, with the present research focussing solely on adult, female shoplifters, it is impossible to develop one theory for the phenomenon. The theoretical perspective serves to contribute to our understanding of the shoplifting behavior of adult women. One must be wary of any attempts to develop a single theory of shoplifting as differences in the patterns
and motivations of shoplifting between adults and youths have already been detected.

It is suggested, then, that research aimed at the development of a theory of shoplifting must separate the shoplifting behavior of adults and youths. As well, comparisons of the shoplifting behavior of men and women must be investigated prior to the development of the theory.

The present research must be considered a stepping stone in the development of our sociological knowledge of shoplifters and shoplifting.
APPENDICES
INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW
- date
- location
- client

DESCRIPTION OF SELF
- age - marital status - children
- race - ethnicity - education/occupation

LIFE BEFORE THE CHARGE FOR SHOPLIFTING: MOTIVATIONAL SOURCES
- stress: financial, emotional, physical, etc.
- kleptomania/compulsion: power/control/high
- one word to describe oneself/life

DESCRIPTION OF THE DAY WHEN CAUGHT FOR SHOPLIFTING
- month/day/time
- item(s) shoplifted (amount/value/type)
- offence committed alone/with someone

WHY SHOPLIFTING?
- motivational sources
- previous criminal activity
- consideration/knowledge of risks/consequences

DESCRIBE WHAT HAPPENED AFTER YOU WERE CAUGHT FOR SHOPLIFTING
- security/police
- legal aid/duty counsel/private lawyer

MOST DIFFICULT PART OF THE EXPERIENCE
- caught by security - court
- charged by police - family/friends

SHOPLIFTING EXPERIENCE
- age (when shoplifting began) - location/type of store
- amount/value/type of merch. - ’tricks of the trade’
- number of charges

GROUPS/PROGRAMS ATTENDED
- name - type/length of program - type of referral

LIFE AT PRESENT
- direction of life: positive/negative
- one word to describe oneself/life
- follow-up/ongoing contact with previous groups/programs
- current/future shoplifting activity

OPINION RE: OPTIONS FOR WOMEN WHO SHOPLIFT: WHAT WORKS?
- groups/programs
- types of sentences (diversion, probation, fines, jail)
- changes/suggestions
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT
BETWEEN RESEARCHER AND RESPONDENTS

This agreement confirms the following:

- You are consenting to be interviewed by Gina Sampson, a student at the University of Windsor, Ontario who is interested in interviewing adult, female shoplifters for an M.A. Sociology (Criminology) degree.

- The purpose of the research is to gain an understanding of a woman's motivation(s) to shoplift and her experiences with the criminal justice system.

- All information obtained in the course of the interview will remain anonymous and confidential.

- No identifying information will be used. An alternate name will be used if you are referred to in the thesis.

- Participation is completely voluntary and you may stop the interview at any time.

- You may refuse to answer any question and to ask your own questions at any time throughout the interview.

- Permission, support and cooperation has been obtained from Probation and Parole in Windsor, Ontario (Ministry of Correctional Services) and the Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton in Nova Scotia.

- Your participation in the interview does not change your relationship with Probation/Parole of Windsor or the Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton.

- The interview requires about one hour of your time.

- The interview will be tape-recorded for accuracy.

- Only myself, Gina Sampson, will transcribe the interviews for the purpose of the research.

- All tapes will be destroyed by the University of Windsor upon completion of the research.

- Results of this research will be made available to you through the University of Windsor, Ontario.

Thank you for your cooperation and participation.

Gina Sampson
RECORD OF INTERVIEWS:
JUNE 2 - AUGUST 31, 1993

WINDSOR COURTHOUSE: JUNE 2-JULY 30 AND AUG. 19-31

<table>
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<td>4TH *</td>
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<td>5TH -</td>
<td>20TH -</td>
<td>5TH * (*)</td>
</tr>
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<td>17TH *</td>
<td>8TH -</td>
<td>23RD -</td>
<td>6TH *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21ST -</td>
<td>14TH !</td>
<td>25TH !</td>
<td>9TH * (*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24TH -</td>
<td>16TH -</td>
<td>26TH -</td>
<td>10TH *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25TH *</td>
<td>21ST !</td>
<td></td>
<td>11TH</td>
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<tr>
<td>30TH -</td>
<td>22ND -</td>
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<td></td>
<td>27TH !</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28TH * *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29TH (*)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30TH *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WINDSOR
TOTALS: 7 INTERVIEWS
6 USEABLE
20 REFUSALS
23 COURT DAYS

CAPE BRETON
TOTALS: 10 INTERVIEWS
8 USEABLE
0 REFUSALS
6 DAYS

TOTAL: 14 USEABLE INTERVIEWS COMPLETED TO DATE

* INDICATES USEABLE INTERVIEWS

(*) INDICATES NON-USEABLE INTERVIEWS:
- JULY 29TH (WINDSOR): THEFT UNDER $1,000, NOT SHOPLIFTING
- AUGUST 5TH (CAPE BRETON): 16 YEAR OLD GIRL
- AUGUST 9TH (CAPE BRETON): FOUND NOT GUILTY IN COURT

- INDICATES REFUSALS

i INDICATES DAYS IN COURT DO NOT NECESSARILY CORRESPOND WITH DAYS OF INTERVIEWS AND/OR REFUSALS DUE TO MISINFORMATION FROM COURT PERSONNEL: NO CASES WERE SCHEDULED FOR THAT PARTICULAR DAY OR CASES WERE SIMPLY WITHDRAWN.
WOMEN ACCUSED/CONVICTED OF

----------

SHOPLIFTING

----------

If you are a woman who has been accused or convicted of shoplifting, you are needed to talk about your experiences in a confidential interview.

I am a student at the University of Windsor who is interested in your experiences with shoplifting and the criminal justice system.

ALL INFORMATION IS CONFIDENTIAL

You do not need to tell me your name. I will not use any information that may identify you.

If you are willing to be interviewed, please call:

GINA SAMPSON

254-5452

** Please leave a message if I am unavailable **
RECORD OF REFUSALS*

INTERVIEWS: JUNE 2 – JULY 30
AND AUGUST 19 – 31, 1993
COURTHOUSE: WINDSOR, ONTARIO

INTERVIEWS: AUGUST 4 – 11, 1993
CAPE BRETON, N.S.
NO REFUSALS FOR CAPE BRETON**

JUNE:

2ND: WHITE, OVER AGE 30
17TH: WHITE, OVER AGE 30
21ST: WHITE, UNDER AGE 30
24TH: WHITE, OVER AGE 30
30TH: WHITE, UNDER AGE 30

JULY:

5TH: WHITE, OVER AGE 30
8TH: WHITE, OVER AGE 30
16TH: WHITE, OVER AGE 40
16TH: WHITE, OVER AGE 30
22ND: ASIAN, OVER AGE 40
22ND: WHITE, OVER AGE 30
29TH: WHITE, OVER AGE 30
30TH: WHITE, OVER AGE 40

AUGUST:

19TH: WHITE, OVER AGE 40
19TH: WHITE, OVER AGE 40
20TH: WHITE, OVER AGE 50
20TH: WHITE, OVER AGE 40
23RD: ASIAN, OVER AGE 30
23RD: ASIAN, OVER AGE 30
26TH: WHITE, OVER AGE 20

TOTAL: 20 REFUSALS TO DATE

* WOMEN WHO REFUSED TO BE INTERVIEWED WERE GIVEN THE SHEET, 'FEMALE VOLUNTEERS WANTED', INCLUDING MY NAME AND PHONE NUMBER. NONE OF THESE WOMEN HAVE CALLED FOR AN INTERVIEW.

** I BELIEVE EASY ACCESS WAS GAINED DUE TO MY PREVIOUS VOLUNTEER AND WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ELIZABETH FRY SOCIETY OF CAPE BRETON.
FEMALE VOLUNTEERS WANTED

I am a student at the University of Windsor, Ontario who is interested in interviewing adult, female shoplifters for my M.A. Sociology (Criminology) degree. I would like to gain an understanding of a woman’s motivation(s) to shoplift and her experiences with the criminal justice system.

Participation is completely voluntary and you may stop the interview at any time. You have the right to refuse to answer any question and to ask your own questions at any time throughout the interview. I am asking for about one hour of your time. The interview will be tape-recorded for accuracy and all information will remain anonymous and confidential. No identifying information will be used.

Your participation in the interview does not change your relationship with Probation/Parole of Windsor.

I assure you that you will remain anonymous. Results of this project will be made available to all participants upon completion.

Your participation is greatly appreciated. If you are willing to be interviewed, please contact:

GINA SAMPSON

254-5452

** Please leave a message if I am unavailable **
Admissions to Probation
Cumulative % Change
Chart One

Campbell 1990, p. 9
Correctional Services Canada
Criminal Code Offences, 1985
Chart Two

Women Charged

Men Charged

Adelberg and Currie 1991, p. 28
Average: 38.6 years

Total Subjects = 14
Age Vs. Value of Items Shoplifted
Cape Breton and Windsor
Chart Four


Total Subjects=14
Marital Status
Chart Five

- Divorced: 36%
- Married: 29%
- Widowed: 7%
- Separated: 7%
- Single: 14%
- Common Law: 7%

TOTAL SUBJECTS = 14
Number of Children
Chart Six

- 1 Child: 33%
- 2 Children: 17%
- 3 Children: 17%
- 5 Children: 17%
- 6 Children: 8%
- 8 Children: 8%

Average: 2.7

Total Subjects = 14
Education
Chart Seven

Grade Ten
20%
Grade Nine
7%
Grade Eleven
7%
Grade Twelve
33%

Grade Eight
7%
Grade Six
7%
Grade Three
7%
Community College
7%
One Year University
7%

Average: Grade Ten
Total Subjects=14
Ethnicity
Chart Eight

- Scottish: 24%
- French: 20%
- Ukrainian: 4%
- Norwegian: 4%
- Dutch: 8%
- Welsh: 4%
- English: 16%
- Italian: 4%
- Irish: 12%
- Lebanese: 4%

Total Subjects = 14
Financial Circumstances
Chart Nine

Disability Pension 14%

Unemployed 14%

Employed 14%

Sick Leave 7%

P.S.A.* 50%

(*) Provincial Social Assistance
Total Subjects=14
Charges Vs. Actual Offences
Chart Ten

Ratio of 2:1

* Each number represents one woman in the research.
** Arbitrary number assigned to woman who shoplifted for twenty years.
Type of Items Shoplifted
Chart Eleven

- Household Items: 6%
- Personal Hygiene: 9%
- Children's Clothing: 13%
- Food: 6%
- Shoes: 9%
- Women's Clothing: 13%
- Cigarettes: 6%
- Hair-Care Products: 13%
- Makeup: 6%
- Other: 16%

Total Subjects = 14
Methods Used to Shoplift

Chart Twelve

- Purse 50%
- Bag 14%
- Pocket 14%
- Under Arm 7%
- Shopping Cart 7%
- Unknown 7%

Total Subjects = 14
Legal Representation
Chart Thirteen

Legal Aid 29%

Private Lawyer 29%

No Representation 43%

Four women utilized private lawyers; three were from Windsor.

Total Subjects=14
**Pilferers Not Professionals**

Characteristics of Adult, Female Shoplifters

Chart 14A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pilferers</th>
<th>Boosters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- use items</td>
<td>- sell items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- may be small # of items</td>
<td>- may be large # of items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- inexpensive items</td>
<td>- expensive items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no specific purpose</td>
<td>- specific purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- non-intentional</td>
<td>- intentional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- easy to do</td>
<td>- easy to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- shoplift alone</td>
<td>- shoplift with another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- may shoplift less frequently</td>
<td>- may shoplift frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no consideration of risks and/or consequences</td>
<td>- consideration of risks and consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- may rationalize behavior</td>
<td>- rationalize behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- not focussed on store security</td>
<td>- focussed on store security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- may or may not have prior criminal history</td>
<td>- usually have prior criminal history</td>
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### Pilferers Not Professionals

**Characteristics of Pilferers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress-Bound</th>
<th>Habit Supporting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- usually have money</td>
<td>- don't have money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- don't need items</td>
<td>- sell/exchange items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- easy to do</td>
<td>- easy to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- glad to get caught</td>
<td>- don't want to get caught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- may be cry for help</td>
<td>- short-term happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- primary motivation</td>
<td>- primary motivation</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power/Control</th>
<th>Financially Restricted</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- usually have money</td>
<td>- don't have money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- don't need items</td>
<td>- need items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- easy to do</td>
<td>- easy to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- don't want to get caught</td>
<td>- don't want to get caught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- sense of accomplishment/</td>
<td>- sense of accomplishment/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>power and control (thrill)</td>
<td>power and control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- usually secondary</td>
<td>- primary motivation</td>
</tr>
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<td>motivation</td>
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</table>
BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS


**GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS**


**JOURNAL ARTICLES**


OUTSIDE AGENCIES


Gina Sampson Ryan was born in 1968 in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. She graduated from Memorial High School in 1987. From there, she went on to the University College of Cape Breton where she obtained a B.A. in Community Studies in 1990 and returned for a fourth year of study. She is currently a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in Sociology, specialization in Criminology at the University of Windsor and hopes to graduate in Fall 1995. She has returned home to Cape Breton where she resides with her husband, Mark, in Sydney Mines.