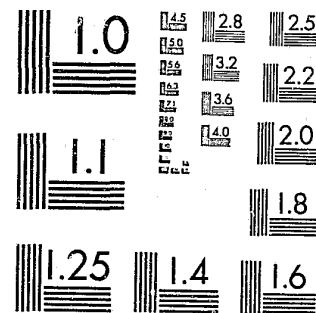


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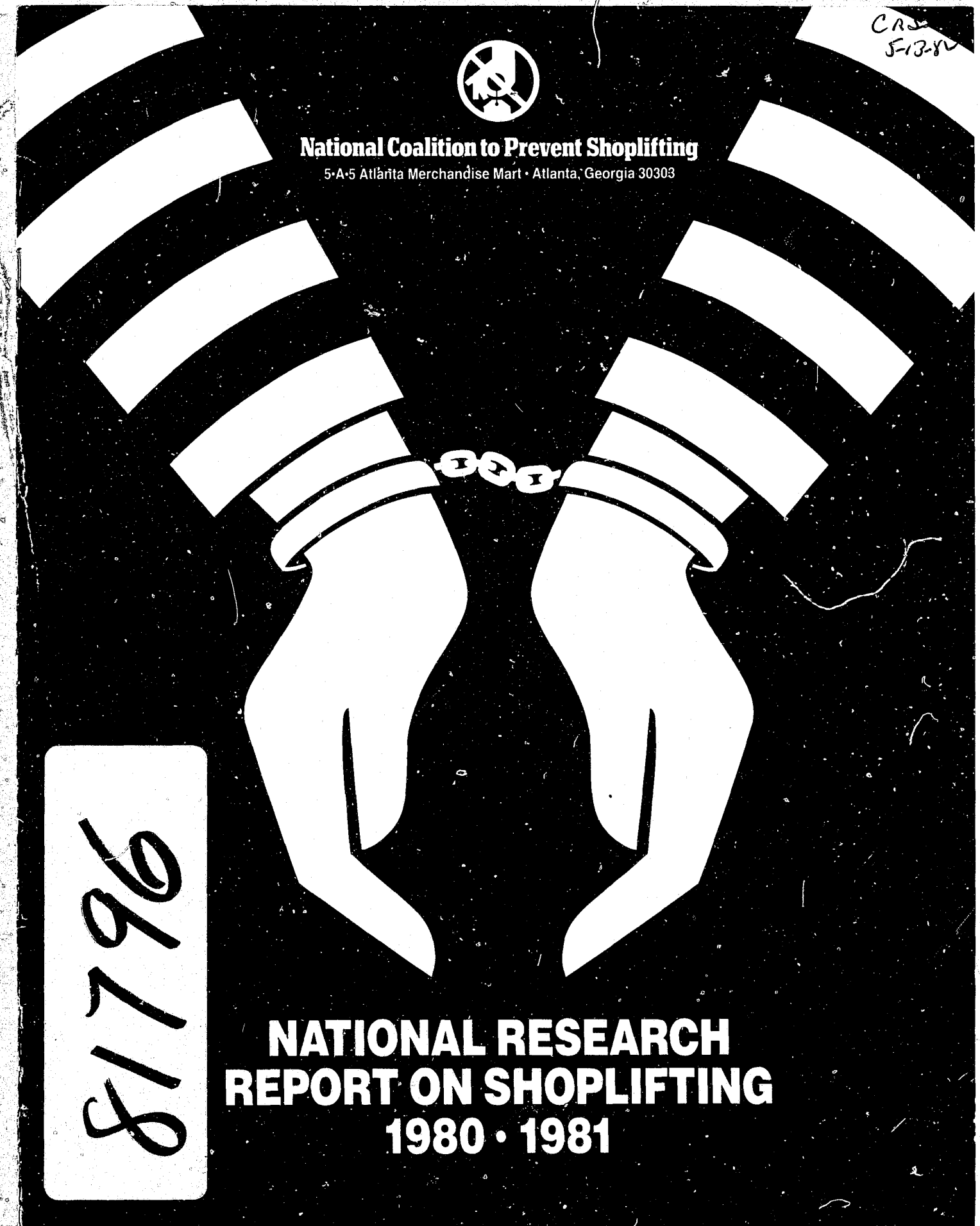
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National Coalition to Prevent Shoplifting

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NATIONAL RESEARCH
REPORT ON SHOPLIFTING
1980 • 1981

NATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT
ON SHOPLIFTING
1980 - 1981

Prepared and submitted by
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August 31, 1981

U.S. Department of Justice 81796
National Institute of Justice

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Shoplifters are commonly classified into three categories: 1) professionals--who steal for a living, 2) dope addicts--who steal to obtain money for narcotics, and 3) amateurs (by far the most numerous)--who steal for a variety of reasons.¹

While public opinion runs strongly against members of the first two categories, there is a tendency to dismiss the crime of amateurs as petty in its economic and social importance. Who is to criticize the impoverished elderly woman who steals a can of soup from a supermarket? But, it is not the elderly woman pilfering a 39¢ can of soup who is the typical amateur shoplifter.

Last year's study identified teenagers as the most likely group to shoplift.² That research was partially supported by a Commercial Service Systems Inc. (CCSI) study which noted that teenagers are 2.5 times more likely to be caught shoplifting than are adults.³ As to the economic impact of shoplifting, a subsequent CCSI study found the average value of merchandise recovered from shoplifters to be: \$8.69 in supermarkets, \$9.56 in drug stores, and \$48.46 in discount stores.⁴

B. Purpose

Behavioral scientists agree that attitudes influence behavior. If we wish to change or modify behavior regarding shoplifting, we must gain insight into the attitudes that underlie this behavior. Teenagers, given their proportion in the total population, are overrepresented in the population of shoplifters. They are also of an age where they can still be influenced--certainly more easily influenced than adults.⁵

The prime purpose of this research was to collect, tabulate and analyze data about young people's perceptions and attitudes on shoplifting. This information can be used as the basis of a plan to educate teenagers concerning the seriousness of shoplifting.

The second purpose of this study was to collect, tabulate and analyze retail store managers' opinions regarding shoplifting. This information can be used to gauge the economic impact as well as the consequences of the crime. In this assessment the retailer was asked to distinguish shoplifting from employee theft so as to focus on only the crime of shoplifting.

C. Methodology and Constraints

Questionnaires were developed which could be disseminated to and administered by volunteer workers. It is important to note that the student questionnaire was intended for a respondent group ranging from the fifth grade up through, and including, college students. Thus, the questionnaire had to be simple enough so that a nine to ten year old could complete it. In similar fashion, the student questionnaire had to be reasonably brief so that it could be completed in class without taking an excessive amount of time away from academic demands. Pretesting the 1979-1980 instrument indicated that the ten question instrument developed (See Appendix) could be understood and completed in ten to twelve minutes by young students.

The Retail Shoplifting Survey (See Appendix) was also designed to be completed in a short period of time in order to encourage response. Since this research sought attitudes and opinions from retail store managers, screening questions (see question one for example) were developed to eliminate non-qualified respondents. As a result of comments made by interviewers and survey respondents slight changes were made from the 1979-80 to the 1980-81 survey forms in order to facilitate comprehension.

As is true with any survey research, this study has numerous limitations. While this research reflects data collected from a 38 state area, it is by no means comprehensive. In some states information was collected from only one metropolitan area. Thus,

the data may not be representative of the entire state. Likewise, while the data in this report represents the most extensive data base existing on shoplifting, it still may not be representative of the entire country.

The single most important constraint affecting this research was the volunteer nature of the data collection. Women's Clubs volunteers (GFWC), DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America) students and faculty advisors, Retail Association personnel in various states, PTA (Parent/Teacher Association) personnel, Chamber of Commerce volunteers and various other individual and civic organizations all participated as data collection agencies. Since the nature of volunteer efforts is such that control is lacking, the number of completed questionnaires, the timing and place of data collections are all left to the discretion of the volunteer group.

D. Organization of Report

This report is organized around the two data collection instruments mentioned above:

Student Shoplifting Surveys, and
Retailers Shoplifting Surveys

Section II will present the findings from the student surveys.

Section III provides findings from retailers.

In both cases, a summary section precedes the complete data base. The summary section will highlight "key" findings from this research. Some final observations will conclude the report.

II. STUDENT SHOPLIFTING SURVEY

A total of 100,671 student shoplifting surveys were collected, tabulated and analyzed. This number is more than double the 49,376 responses obtained in the 1979-80 survey year. The student sample came from 38 states and ranged in age from 9 to 22 years old. Additional classification figures identify the composition of the sample:

46% males - 54% females

41% pre high school - 49% high school

Of the total sample 49% admitted that they had shoplifted at least once. Thirty percent of the entire sample or 60% of those who had shoplifted stated that they would continue to shoplift in the future. The reasons given by the students for their shoplifting are those of amateurs. Most of their shoplifting is unplanned and when planned seems to be based on thrill and get even motives.

There are three striking differences between the student responses for the 1979-80 and 1980-81 survey years. The first difference is the much larger percentage of students this year (30% versus 17%) who say that they will continue to shoplift. The second difference is that more students in the current survey believe that stores pass on the cost of shoplifting to customers in the form of higher prices. The third difference, which might be related to the first, is that students who have

% OF STUDENTS
AGREEING TO STATEMENTS

	<u>1979-80</u>	<u>1980-81</u>
Shoplifting is a crime.	91	91
Most shoplifters are never caught.	67	70
Stores force people to shoplift by charging prices that are too high.	42	41
Retail clerks watch teenage shoppers more closely than adults.	75	72
Teenagers are more likely to shoplift than are adults.*	51	41
Stores pass the cost of shoplifting on to consumers.	56	65
Have shoplifted.	49	49
(Of those who have shoplifted)		
Will continue to shoplift.	17	30
Have shoplifted in last two years.	N.A.	40
Planned act in advance.	27	26
Store personnel, police and judges are too soft on shoplifters.	35	43
Were caught.	14	17
(Of those who were caught)		
Lectured by store personnel.	N.A.	46
Detained by store personnel.	N.A.	36
Detained by store personnel and parents contacted.	N.A.	40
Arrested by police.	N.A.	16
Taken to court.	N.A.	7
Sentenced/fined by a court.	N.A.	5

(Reasons of those who have shoplifted)

	<u>1979-80</u>	<u>1980-81</u>
Didn't have the money to pay for the item.	35	30
Did it for a thrill.	27	17
Did it on a dare.	27	11
Just acted on impulse.	25	19
Wanted to get even.	9	6

*The results to this question are presented so as to allow comparisons between the two years.

shoplifted believe that the authorities are "soft" when it comes to prosecuting shoplifters.

The apprehension figures are low. Only 17% of those who had shoplifted have been caught. Of those apprehended only one out of eight have been arrested. In turn, of the students arrested less than half went to court and two out of seven of those were released without a sentence or a fine.

The opinions expressed by the entire student sample give a general feeling about young people's perception of shoplifting. Since one purpose of this research is to understand the attitudes of young people so as to plan shoplifting prevention programs, it would prove helpful to focus on any attitudinal differences between shoplifters and nonshoplifters. Toward that goal, a more detailed analysis was performed on a subsample (11,225) of the student responses. The results show a marked difference in the attitudes of those who have shoplifted versus those who have not.

Shoplifters, especially those who will continue taking goods, are not as convinced about the seriousness of their crime as are the students who have not shoplifted. They are also more inclined to project the blame for their actions on to the stores rather than on to themselves.

% OF STUDENTS AGREEING TO STATEMENTS

	<u>Nonshoplifters</u>	<u>Shoplifters</u>	<u>Continuing Shoplifters</u>	<u>Apprehended Shoplifters</u>	<u>Arrested Shoplifters</u>	<u>Court Punish Shoplifters</u>
Shoplifting is a crime.	97	91	71	85	76	60
Shoplifters are never caught.	58	65	65	59	56	53
Stores force people to shoplift by charging prices that are too high.	33	43	60	49	60	59
Teenage shoppers are watched closely by retail clerks.	71	77	79	77	79	65
Teenagers are less likely to shoplift than are adults.	21	21	24	21	33	25
Stores pass the costs of shoplifting on to consumers.	61	65	66	63	62	57

III. RETAIL SHOPLIFTING SURVEY

Approximately 77% of the 4,275 retailers contacted acknowledged a problem with shoplifting. Forty-three percent of the retailers also reported a problem with employee theft. Of those retailers suffering from employee theft or shoplifting, 75% noted shoplifting as the more serious problem. This relative rating might be caused, in part, by the increase in shoplifting that 80% of the retailers have experienced in the last two years.

The cost of shoplifting, averaged across the 38 states (plus Puerto Rico) which were included in this year's survey, exceeded 6% of sales. Translated into dollars, a raw estimate of this cost nationwide is \$24 billion for food, drugs and general merchandise alone. It should be emphasized that this figure includes the costs of security and prosecution as well as the value of merchandise stolen. Not included in this calculation, though, is the loss of revenue to states in the form of state and local sales taxes-- a figure which would approach an additional billion dollars. Also not included in the cost estimates is the cost to taxpayers for law enforcement, trials and probation activities attributable to shoplifting offenses.

Pilferage problems are greater for the retailers contacted this year as compared to those reporting in the 1979-80 survey. The figure for employee theft and shoplifting in the previous year were 40% and 71% respectively. To focus on differences in responses between the last two years the results are presented in table format in the following pages. The data in both years represent the opinions of all types of retail managers. Thus, the responses of a large department store manager or a small "mom and pop" store owner both count equally.

 SHOPLIFTING \$ LOSSES BY STATE, 1980*
 (in millions)

ALABAMA	385+	MONTANA	80
ALASKA	64	NEBRASKA	154
ARIZONA	283	NEVADA	108
ARKANSAS	224+	NEW MEXICO	129+
CALIFORNIA	2,860-	NEW HAMPSHIRE	104
COLORADO	319	NEW JERSEY	783-
CONNECTICUT	312-	NEW YORK	1,827-
DELAWARE	75-	NORTH CAROLINA	557
DIST. OF COLUMBIA	48	NORTH DAKOTA	58-
FLORIDA	1,263+	OHIO	1,228-
GEORGIA	581+	OREGON	341-
HAWAII	141	OKLAHOMA	329-
IDAHO	92-	PENNSYLVANIA	1,163-
ILLINOIS	1,175-	RHODE ISLAND	84+
INDIANA	536-	SOUTH CAROLINA	305-
IOWA	300-	SOUTH DAKOTA	63
KANSAS	239-	TENNESSEE	481-
KENTUCKY	399+	TEXAS	1,678-
LOUISIANA	446+	UTAH	135+
MAINE	115	VERMONT	44-
MARYLAND	524+	VIRGINIA	609
MASSACHUSETTS	655-	WASHINGTON	479-
MICHIGAN	1,043-	WEST VIRGINIA	209-
MINNESOTA	413-	WISCONSIN	467-
MISSOURI	514+	WYOMING	50-
MISSISSIPPI	249-		

NATIONAL TOTAL EXCEEDS \$24 BILLION!

*6.6% of total retail sales in "Food," "General Merchandise" and "Drug" store categories. Source: "1981 Survey of Buying Power," Sales & Marketing Management magazine.

+The average % losses reported by retailers in the state would indicate a slightly higher figure.

-The average % losses reported by retailers in the state would indicate a slightly lower figure.

% OF RETAILERS
AGREEING TO STATEMENTS

	<u>1979-80</u>	<u>1980-81</u>
There has been a definite increase in shoplifting over the last two years.	56	89
When shoplifters are apprehended and prosecuted, the treatment they receive in the courts is not fair and appropriate.*	37	42
The average person is aware that shoplifting is a crime.	64	88
Females are more prone to shoplift than are males.*	55	54
Teenagers are more prone to shoplift than are adults.*	63	57
Racial minorities are more prone to shoplift than are others.*	46	47
The law enforcement agencies in my area are insensitive to the shoplifting problem and give it the attention it deserves.*	42	33
The cost of shoplifting is directly passed on to my consumers.	45	76
If you could reduce shoplifting in your store, prices would decrease.	40	45
Your employees play a role in helping to reduce shoplifting.	82	84

*The results to this question are presented so as to allow comparisons between the two years.

The data base of retailers has increased 20% this year over the 3,550 retailers reporting during the 1979-80 survey period.

One survey response that merits particular attention is the concern of at least one-third of the retailers about the commitment of the police and courts to discourage shoplifting. This question may partially account for their inconsistency in treating shoplifters. While over 75% of the retailers say that they will prosecute shoplifters, they press charges on less than half of the people whom they apprehend.

The cost of shoplifting is reflected in current retail prices--a point agreed upon by both retailers and young shoplifters alike. A prorating of that amount over the entire population would show a cost of \$307 per household. A second point of agreement is that shoplifters know that they are committing a crime. Yet, it is a difficult task to stop this crime, even when over 80% of the store employees aid in prevention and detection activities. One deficiency in the prevention process is the lack of formal training noted by over one-third of the retailers for employees to detect shoplifters.

Retailers end up relying on intuition in an effort to prevent shoplifting. Intuition and experience have led them to rank potential shoplifters in the following order:

- 1) teenagers,
- 2) females,
- 3) members of racial minority groups.

Two general comparisons with last year's data (the first annual survey undertaken by the Coalition) are worth mention. First, concern over shoplifting losses has grown among retailers during the last year. This concern may be due to the higher percentage of losses reported by the current respondents. The gravity of the problem is evidenced by the role employees are playing to prevent this crime. Second, while improvements are still to be made in the areas of arrest and prosecution there is a more optimistic tone in this year's results. Retailers note an increased sensitivity on the part of the police to the seriousness of shoplifting. What now remains is for legislation and court action to reflect the gravity of the crime.

IV. OBSERVATIONS

The findings from the Retailer and the Student surveys show a harmony which is not necessarily healthy. Retailers have noted an increase in shoplifting while the number of students who state that they will continue shoplifting has also increased. Most retailers agree that the costs of shoplifting are passed on to the consumer--a fact understood by the sampled students. A final item of agreement deals with the inconsistent and "soft" policies on prosecuting shoplifters--a point well noted and exploited by the students.

To reduce shoplifting, retailers and legal authorities as well as students need to modify their behavior. Retailers must exercise a consistent policy of prosecution, a policy promulgated to their patrons. In turn, courts and legislatures must be convinced of the seriousness of the problem to make the penalty a deterrent to the commission of the crime. The dollar revenue lost to the states as well as the costs to customers are the best arguments to be used in instigating legal action.

Ultimately, it is the students who must be reached and then convinced that shoplifting is not worth the risks. Their value system as reflected by their respect for another's property is the focal point for efforts to modify attitudes and influence behavior. Appeals to their social and altruistic values can only go so far. A simplified view of the shoplifter's current

attitude is: "If I shoplift I won't get caught, and if I get caught I won't be punished." To change this attitude there must be some deterrent to committing the crime.

¹Dorothy B. Francis, Shoplifting, New York: Elsevier/Nelson Books, 1980.

²Dan H. Robertson, Final Research Report on Shoplifting--National, Atlanta: National Coalition to Prevent Shoplifting, 1980.

³"CSSI Reports Teenage Shoplifters Most Troublesome for Discounters," Merchandising, 5 (October 1980), p. 49.

⁴Roger Griffin, 18th Annual Report--Shoplifting in Supermarkets, Drugstores, Discount Stores, Van Nuys, California: Commercial Service Systems Ins., 1981.

⁵Fred D. Reynolds and William D. Wells, Consumer Behavior, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1977.

APPENDIX A
STUDENT SHOPLIFTING SURVEY

1. THESE STATEMENTS ARE NOT MEANT AS STATEMENTS OF FACT. RATHER, THEY ARE PROVIDED TO DETERMINE YOUR OWN ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS. We are interested in learning whether you definitely agree, somewhat agree, have no opinion, somewhat disagree, or definitely disagree with each statement. Please check the blank that reflects YOUR OWN FEELINGS about each statement.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Somewhat Agree (4)	No Opinion Either Way (3)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Shoplifting is a crime.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Most shoplifters are never caught	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Stores force people to shoplift by charging prices that are too high.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Retail clerks watch teenage shoppers more closely than adults.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Teenagers are less likely to shoplift than are adults.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Stores pass the cost of shoplifting on to consumers.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

2. Age _____
3. Sex: Male _____ Female _____
4. a. Have you ever taken anything from a store without paying for it? Yes _____ No _____
- b. If Yes, have you taken something within the last two years? Yes _____ No _____
- c. If Yes, will you continue to take things from stores in the future without paying for them? Yes _____ No _____

If "NO," **STOP!** If you answered "YES," continue to the dotted line.

5. Were you caught? Yes _____ No _____
- If Yes, were you (check ALL that apply):
- _____ Lectured by store personnel?
 - _____ Detained by store personnel?
 - _____ Detained by store personnel and parents contacted?
 - _____ Arrested by police?
 - _____ Taken to court?
 - _____ Sentenced/Finied by a Court
6. Did you plan to take something from the store in advance or was your decision made in the store?
Planned in Advance _____ Decision Made in Store _____
7. Which reasons describe your motives for taking something? (Check all the reasons that apply)
- _____ Didn't have the money to pay for the item.
 - _____ Did it for a thrill.
 - _____ Did it on a dare.
 - _____ Just acted on impulse.
 - _____ Wanted to get "even" because of store's high prices.
 - _____ Other (Describe) _____
8. Are store personnel, police and judges "too soft" on shoplifters? Yes _____ No _____

RETAIL SHOPLIFTING SURVEY

TO THE RESPONDENT: This survey is being conducted as part of a national survey dealing with the problem of shoplifting. The person who has called on you is collecting this information for overall tabulation purposes and in no way will your name or the name of your specific business be identified. Please help this person by providing the most complete and accurate information that you can. Note that it will only take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire.

1. Type of Business (Check the one that best describes your business overall):

- _____ Retail — Note: If Retail is Your Business (Check one):
- _____ Wholesale _____ Department Store _____ Drug Store
- _____ Industrial _____ Discount Store _____ Hardware Store
- _____ Other (Describe below) _____ Variety Store _____ Other
- _____ Apparel/Accessories Store

2. Do you feel that you have a problem with:
- Employee Theft? YES _____ NO _____ NO OPINION _____
- Shoplifting? YES _____ NO _____ NO OPINION _____
- If you answer Yes to either employee theft or shoplifting, which presents the largest problem for your business?
- _____ Employee Theft
- _____ Shoplifting
3. Now, we would like you to think of the cost to you of shoplifting losses. Please estimate the percentage of sales that you believe is accounted for by the cost of shoplifting prevention, prosecution, and actual shoplifting losses. These percentages represent a percentage of your sales.
- _____ 0 - 4.9% _____ 15 - 19.9%
- _____ 5 - 9.9% _____ 20 - 24%
- _____ 10 - 14.9% _____ 25% or more
4. If you could reduce shoplifting in your store, would prices decrease?
- _____ Yes _____ Don't Know
- _____ No
5. Do your employees play a role in helping to reduce shoplifting?
- _____ Yes _____ Don't Know
- _____ No

6. THESE STATEMENTS ARE NOT MEANT AS STATEMENTS OF FACT. RATHER, THEY ARE PROVIDED TO DETERMINE YOUR OWN ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS. We are interested in learning whether you definitely agree, somewhat agree, have no opinion, somewhat disagree, or definitely disagree with each statement. Please check the blank that reflects YOUR OWN FEELINGS about each statement.

	Definitely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Have No Opinion	Somewhat Disagree	Definitely Disagree
There has been a definite increase in shoplifting during the last two years.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
When shoplifters are apprehended and prosecuted, the treatment they receive in the courts is usually fair and appropriate.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
The average person is aware that shoplifting is a crime.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Females are less prone to shoplift than are males.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Teenages are less prone to shoplift than are adults.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Racial minorities are less prone to shoplift than are others.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
The law enforcement agencies in my area are sensitive to the shoplifting problem and give it the attention it deserves.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
The cost of shoplifting is directly passed on to my consumers.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

7. Does your store prosecute apprehended suspected shoplifters? _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, approximately what percentage of suspected shoplifters does your firm prosecute? (check one)

- _____ 0 - 4.9% _____ 25 - 49.9%
- _____ 5 - 9.9% _____ 50 - 74.9%
- _____ 10 - 24.9% _____ 75 - 99.9%
- _____ 100%

8. Does your store provide employee training regarding shoplifting detection, prevention and/or apprehension?

Yes _____ No _____

END