

Chapter 3

Types of shoplifters

3.1 Introduction

Today retailing practices require that goods are displayed and revealed in the open, for customers to see, pick up, and examine. It is the preferred technique to encourage sales, but to potential shoplifters it provides the perfect opportunity to take such displayed goods unlawfully, for personal use. The consequences of this type of behaviour are that law-abiding people have to pay more for goods, and thus create a huge social, legal and economic problem for all. Shop theft is a serious problem that is very complicated and difficult to understand, and as a result varying perceptions are held regarding shop theft.

This chapter focuses on the different types of shoplifters. Shoplifters use various techniques and strategies; like walking out of shops with concealed merchandise or removing merchandise through glaringly obvious methods. The features of shop thieves will also be discussed.

3.2 The different types of customer shoplifters

Sennewald and Christman (1992:7) argue that different types of shoplifters exist, they fall into two categories: non-professional (amateurs/snitch) or professional shoplifters (boosters). Their motive for shoplifting is viewed as a determining factor in the categorisation process. The professional shoplifters' primary motive is to generate a source of income. They steal as a means to make a living. Those who steal for other reasons are referred to as amateur shoplifters.

Prior to discussing individual categories of shoplifters, it should be mentioned that nobody can point out a particular person that fits the description of a specific type of shoplifter since they come in different sizes, ages, genders, and from different ethnic, educational and economic backgrounds.

Naudé (1976: 121) and Livingston (1996:232) state that shoplifters do not share common characteristics, and may be differentiated in terms of:

- (a) the *modus operandi* and trademark they apply,
- (b) their primary reasons for stealing,
- (c) the features and personality traits they usually display and
- (d) the different perceptions they hold pertaining to shop theft.

In terms of these criteria, customer shoplifters may be broadly classified into two distinctive types, each with its own sub-classification. Bartol (1995:332) follows Cameron's study (1964) in classifying shoplifters into two categories; the amateur and professional shoplifters. The amateur is also known as the snitch.

Murphy (1986:245) defines a snitch as a pilferer and opportunist shoplifter, and distinguishes this type of shoplifter from a professional shoplifter because a snitch steals primarily small merchandise for personal use. They appear to be law-abiding, and respected citizens with no previous criminal records. They perceive themselves as non-criminals and are preoccupied with the fear of being arrested. When they are caught shoplifting, the non-professional shoplifters justify their actions by alleging that they have taken the merchandise as a result of absentmindedness.

Bartol (1995:332) cites that the snitches who were interviewed by Cameron revealed that ninety percent (90%) of them were either chronic or habitual shoplifters with some psychological or emotional problems. Some were impulsive offenders with the inability to resist the impulse to take merchandise when an opportunity presents itself at any particular time. Brown, Esbensen and Geis (1998:484) focus on Cameron's classic study of shoplifters who were arrested in Chicago's Marshall Field's department store. They conclude that the amateur shoplifters are not compulsive, uncontrollable thieves, who suffer from psychological problems, but some of them are respected people, pilfering systematically through stores, with the intention to steal, and continue with the act until they are caught.

The types of merchandise both male and female snitches, or amateur shoplifters steal, are interesting. Females prefer to take clothing, cosmetics and food, whereas males take small but very expensive items such as compact discs or records, jewellery and stereo equipment. On the other hand, Murphy (1986:243) refers to professional shoplifters as commercial shoplifters, who take merchandise and then resell these items, and they are also involved in other criminal activities, and take goods with the intention to trade or sell the items on the black-market.

Murphy (1986:186) says professional shoplifters steal merchandise in a professional way, because stealing is carried out regularly, on a full time basis and is regarded as an occupation that involves thorough planning and sophisticated skills. The professional shoplifters travel around the country and share some distinctive features with other professional criminals with regards to their way of life, and are part of a subculture. They are labelled as shoplifters because they make a living out of shop theft.

Brown *et al.* (1998:483), as mentioned before, agree that the professional shoplifters steal in order to resell merchandise, usually to a fence who will pay the thief about one-third the retail value of the goods. They therefore target expensive merchandise, which they sell to jewellers or clothing retailers, who have a lawful outlet for the goods. The research conducted by

Cameron indicated that 10 percent of the respondents were professional shoplifters. The professional shoplifters may be divided into two groups. The heels form one group and are viewed as specialists and ordinary thieves, for whom shop theft is just one of their many criminal trades. Brown *et al.* (1998:483) reveal, however, that some shoplifters steal on order. Customers specify their desired merchandise, and shoplifters go out and specifically target such goods.

Pilferers, a large corps of amateur shoplifters, take goods from stores to avoid spending their money on items they need. They flourish in department stores and supermarkets, where the invitation of self-service is taken literally and pilfers are allowed to pick merchandise items of their choice.

Cant (1991:149) says shoplifters fall into two broad categories, ordinary customer shoplifters and professional shoplifters. Cant used Post's (1972) classification, who classified shoplifters into six categories. The results of other researchers' work and various literary studies, which highlighted two common types (amateurs and professionals) and other known types of shoplifters, like kleptomaniacs, youths, vagrant and drug users and many more, will be imperative in this chapter.

Murphy (1986:129) examines the classification of shoplifters as demonstrated by other researchers, and focusses on the types of thieves rarely discovered, especially in field research: the Fagin syndrome, and employee thieves. Murphy cites that one security officer classified shoplifters into three categories: the needy, the greedy and the seedy. The needy are scares, the seedy refer to vagrants and drunks who were infrequent shoplifters, and the largest group was the greedy, deemed as individuals who want something for nothing from stores.

Next, the features of the different types of shop thieves will be analysed.

3.3 Features of customer shoplifters

3.3.1 The non-professional shoplifters

Naudé (1976:121) describes the amateur, non-professional shoplifters, as individuals who steal merchandise for personal use, to provide for their families, to show off, and to hand out as gifts to close family members, a view supported by Bennett and Hess (1981:347). When non-professional shoplifters are arrested, they have money to pay for the stolen goods. There are exceptional cases, such as people wandering in the streets who may not have money to pay for a bottle of beer, or a drug addict who may not have cash to pay for a compact camera. Their motivation to steal is to convert the stolen goods into cash by reselling it on the black market, so as to support their expensive drug habit. Few non-professional shoplifters take goods out of stores because of a hopeless situation. They usually target small merchandise items which is easy to conceal and, more importantly, they take advantage of an opportunity that has presented itself.

Livingston (1996:232) refers to non-professional shoplifters as opportunists and snitches, stealing from stores infrequently, and taking merchandise because a chance has presented itself, although a preconceived intention was non-existent when they entered the store. This view is also advocated by Naudé (1990:9) as well as Bennett and Hess (1981:374) who regard the acquiring of goods from stores as an impulsive act, and an element of intention cannot be identified.

Brown *et al.* (1996:446), however, disagree with the above-mentioned researchers that non-professional shoplifters are viewed as compulsive, uncontrollable individuals suffering from mentally related problems. They view them as people who pilfer systematically, coming to stores with the intention to take goods out of stores, without paying for them, and continuing with their shop theft activities until they are caught. Bennett and Hess (1981:347) say the non-professional shoplifters are under the impression that shops are in the position to manage

petty and insignificant thefts. There are non-professional shoplifters who commit shop theft acts because of the following perceptions, that it is all right to take merchandise when: merchandise prices are too high for customers, shops generate a lot of profit or services offered to customers by the stores are pathetic.

Naudé (1976:124) states that non-professional shoplifters are lone operators when they steal, and hardly ever make use of tools when they steal. If apparatus are used, they usually take the form of shopping bags, or they conceal the merchandise on their person or openly walk off with the goods. The amateur shoplifters are the most prevalent, comprising ninety percent (90%) of all known types of shoplifters. This point of view is cited by Curtis (1960:80), a large number of people commit shop theft and the overwhelming majority of those arrested are non-professional shoplifters, although it has been acknowledged that there are professional shoplifters. Ninety-five percent (95%) of those arrested do not sell items on the black market or fence stolen goods, nor do they need goods for personal reasons or depend upon them for their livelihood. It can also be mentioned that the high figures indicate that the non-professional shoplifters' involvement in stealing goods pose a serious problem for shops, even though they take small items per visit.

The non-professional shoplifters do not perceive themselves as thieves or criminals, but view themselves as honest, law-abiding citizens, who comply with the norms and values of society. They view themselves as individuals, strongly against illicit acts, they do not exhibit any other forms of deviant self-image behavioural patterns, and justify their acts when apprehended, and they are nervous and over-friendly, with shiftiness in their eyes. Cant (1991:149) indicates that the non-professional shoplifters impulsively take merchandise that they can afford to pay for, and are generally characterised by self-awareness and uneasiness.

3.3.1.1 The preteen shoplifters

The preteen shoplifter is a sub-classification of the non-professional shoplifter and poses minimal problems to retailers. Sennewald and Christman (1992:8-9) describe the preteen shoplifter as learners, usually in the lower grades in primary schools, who steal merchandise from shops. They are thrilled when caught, and are not aware of the serious consequences of their actions.

Shop theft is a behavioural problem among children in an early developmental stage. Usually concerned parents ensure that they return with their children to the shop, together with the merchandise in question. They identify this problem, and apologise to the store for the inconvenience caused by their children.

In terms of the South African law, children between the ages of seven (7) and fourteen (14) years cannot be held criminally liable for their actions, as a precedent was set - they cannot differentiate between right and wrong. Age is a significant factor that determines that preteens cannot be prosecuted, as is the case with mentally ill shoplifters. Little information is available on minors who steal from shops, and the problems they cause for retailers. An empirical research study regarding this subject can be considered, particularly within the South African context.

3.3.1.2 The juvenile shoplifters

According to Naudé (2000:147) in South Africa different age groups are used to define the term juveniles. The Constitution regards juveniles as a person below the age of eighteen (18) years, whereas the Correctional Services Act perceives all people in their custody below the age of twenty-one (21) as juveniles. The Central Statistics Services distinguish between juveniles, those who are between seven (7) and seventeen (17), and those who are between eighteen (18 years) and twenty (20), when their annual reports on the prosecutions and

convictions of offenders are published.

Young people are regularly in conflict with the authorities, for various reasons. Their involvement in shop theft acts is not as a result of needy situations, but for the sake of adventure. Cant (1991:149) mentions that teenagers are inclined to shop theft activities in the context of an informally formed group, and prefer to target merchandise that is associated with group membership, such as clothing, CD's and records.

Cameron (1964:104) indicates that the findings concerning group stealing, which involves young adolescents, do not come as a surprise, as most young people prefer to do most things in a group.

Cant (1991:150) says juvenile shoplifters have the tendency to regard shop theft as a sport. The nature of illegal behaviour committed by juveniles is often of a I dare you nature. It is a common trend that adolescent boys and girls function in a group context as opposed to individualism. This group influence upon certain individuals is referred to as reference group influence. Individuals apply reference in the group context when they assess themselves. The group's standards are used as a measuring instrument for the individual's behaviour.

For the perseverance of group prestige, juveniles adhere to the group's influence by conforming towards the groups' behavioural expectations. Group pressure plays a significant role, and motivates young people to commit shop theft, in order to be accepted by the group they belong to. Stealing for them symbolises group membership. They usually take merchandise that has prestige value or value within the group. Van der Walt *et al.* (1996:83) declares that the nature of reference groups, particularly gang membership, as well as the group's desires, exert pressure on an individual's behaviour. To preserve a particular position within a group individuals have to acquaint themselves with and conform to a group's behavioural expectations. Environmental factors also influence individual behavioural patterns in a number of ways. Young shoplifters are seen as human beings that also need to be

affiliated with other groups in the social environment, with the aim of realising certain social goals.

The norms and values of a particular group therefore have an influence on the behavioural patterns of its affiliates, because there are mechanisms, referred to as sanctions, imposed by the group if group members do not conform to its rules. Young people become part of a reference group that dictates what is acceptable and what is not acceptable behaviour. They then reluctantly act contrary to the conventional norms and values of the society, because they will appear ridiculous to their peers, and thus become part of a reference group. Group incentives (rewards), such as social acceptance and approval motivate an individual to conform to the group's behavioural norms. Punitive measures, such as ostracism, are seen as a severe form of punishment by most affiliates, as they become socially rejected, and held in contempt. Juveniles therefore choose to act according to the group's prescriptions, so as to be recognised rather than ridiculed.

3.3.1.3 The kleptomaniac shoplifters

Sennewald and Christman (1992:9) state that kleptomaniacs are individuals characterised by psychological instability and display uncontrollable urges to remove merchandise from shops, without the owner's consent or any form of payment, because they attach symbolic meaning to the particular merchandise. They are easily compelled by temptation to take something for nothing, and it becomes difficult for them to resist this temptation. Fischer and Green (1992:352) regard this category of shoplifters as compulsive thieves, individuals unable to control the urge to take goods from the shops. They are rare and do not constitute a significant difference or monetary loss to the retailing institutions.

Cant (1991:149) and Naudé (1976:126) are of the opinion that kleptomania is a concept that is closely associated to an irresistible impulse or urge to steal. No apparent reason, except childishness, can explain their misappropriation of merchandise from shops, as the stolen

goods have no sentimental value to the shoplifter. In addition, the kleptomaniac type of shoplifters cannot account for their acts when they are caught.

Cant (1991:147) states that one reason that might explain why kleptomaniacs steal is their psychological situation. They take merchandise from shops because it provides them with feelings of excitement and pleasure, which they associate with the act of stealing. According to Naudé (1976:127) kleptomaniacs take goods from shops to satisfy their neurotic compulsions, rather than to profit out of the appropriated merchandise. This is strongly linked to the individuals' inner most emotional needs, their acts are symptomatic and the results of profound rooted emotional needs that are very difficult to explain. Kleptomania is seen as an obsessive compulsion to steal, without any economically related motives.

The kleptomaniacs are the rarest type of customer shoplifter, since they constitute approximately one percent (1%) of overall shoplifters. Most shop theft literary studies that concentrated specifically on kleptomania revealed a focus on the kleptomania's connection with depression and anxiety. It was also uncovered that stress was identified as a common symptom displayed by people who were caught committing insensible acts, which include shop theft. Modern research findings no longer confirm earlier psychoanalytical outcomes, but maintains that, if kleptomania does exist, it appears to be a rare occurrence. In the qualitative research study conducted by Sarasalo and company, fifty (50) shoplifters, evenly divided into twenty-five (25) males and females who were caught shoplifting were interviewed in Stockholm. The findings indicated that none of those who participated in the survey met the requirements of the DSM-IV selection criteria for kleptomania. It seems that studies on kleptomania warrants' further investigation, as it remains a largely unexplored and incomplete field.

According to the DSM-IV classification (Theft talk 2004:2-4) individuals with kleptomania disorders experience the impulse to steal as ego-dystonic and they are aware of the wrongful

and non-sensical act. They are preoccupied with the fear of being arrested and often feel depressed and guilty about their stealing behaviour, because the disorder may cause legal and personal problems. Kleptomania is a rare condition that seems to account for less than five (5%) percent of all types of customer shoplifters. It appears to be a condition that is more prevalent among females and a disorder more likely to continue for years, irrespective of the number of times the kleptomaniacs are prosecuted. Occasionally the kleptomaniacs may guard the stolen merchandise or return the items to the shop in secret. Even though individuals who suffer from the kleptomania disorder will avoid taking commodities when they are more likely to be apprehended, they do not plan their acts in advance, like the professional shoplifters, or consider the prospects of detainment. Kleptomaniacs take merchandise without the assistance of other people or groups, and they do not collaborate with others.

Kleptomania may be differentiated from ordinary acts of shop theft. Ordinary theft, whether impulsive or intentional, is deliberate and motivated by the monetary value attached to the merchandise. Shop theft is relatively common, whereas kleptomania remains exceedingly rare. To avert any criminal prosecution individuals involved in shop theft acts often fake the symptoms of kleptomania.

3.4 *The professional shoplifters*

Livingston (1996:234) states that the term booster is used to refer to a professional shoplifter and is a more serious category of shoplifters who use the most sophisticated methods when they steal from shops. The term professional shoplifter or booster may be used synonymously and denote one and the same thing.

Bennett and Hess (1981:347) Sennewald and Christman (1992:7) and Cant (1991:150) state that professional shoplifters are described as skilful operators who are well informed on the subject regarding methods that can be used that are relevant for their careers. Their

behaviour is such that it averts distrust, and they show interest in small expensive items that can be sold on the black market. They are careful in the execution of their work and do not take unnecessary risks when they seize goods, since they plan their acts in advance. Fischer and Green (1992:352) pronounce that professional shoplifters appear to be ordinary customers, cautiously fitting into the surroundings of the shops they target, they aim at goods with high resale value, and goods that are readily sold on the black market.

According to Livingston (1996:232) and Conklin (1995:73) professional shoplifters regard their stealing as a means of regular income, and use highly sophisticated methods. Their plans include that they are able to leave shops unnoticed and do not take merchandise for the sake of stealing, but they target specific goods, and more importantly, stolen items with a high resale value. When caught, they do not show signs of social and psychological crisis as displayed by non-professional shoplifters, they view the situation as a technical one to be approached as a disorientation experience.

Fischer and Green (1992:352) indicate that the professional shoplifters are a real threat to the retail industry, they are linked to fences and lawyers, and are suppliers in the subsystem of unlawful merchandising. They also make the following comment regarding professional shoplifters: Not only do they create severe losses for the legitimate retailer, but also set up a system whereby they are effectively in competition with their victims' own goods. Sennewald and Christman (1992:10) are in agreement with other researchers such as Butler (1994:71) that the professional shoplifters are responsible for huge financial losses per shop theft incident, even though there are significantly less professional shoplifters when compared with the non-professional shoplifters. They are seen as business oriented people who rarely keep stolen goods for their own personal use. Instead they fence the items through individuals and institutions that deal in such merchandise. Van Blerk (2000:27) also advocates this view and indicates that professional shoplifters make a living from stealing specific merchandise. They work for crime masters and with groups of criminal gangs who resell merchandise. Of significant importance is that they target large department stores that are easily accessible

and sell items such as clothing, cosmetics and jewellery.

Professional shoplifters are able to take large numbers of goods, such as cases of beer and other heavy goods from stores. They hold these items between their thighs, but their movements still appear to be normal. Cant (1991:152) discloses that most professional female shoplifters train themselves to hold goods beneath their dresses and between their legs. They are referred to as crotch workers by Cameron (1964:43) and can reach fascinating levels. When the crotch workers manage to hold large items between their thighs and they are still able to walk normally, their goal has been met and they have completed their training exercise successfully.

The professional shoplifter's methods include the highly organised troupe (a group of professional shoplifters) often a group of three comprising of the lifter, the screen and the santar Murphy (1986:245). The structure also includes a spotter to keep an eye out for the store security and is often accompanied by one or more handlers whose task is to carry merchandise out of the shop, unnoticed.

Other methods include the removing of tags from clothes, using razor blades and scissors, booster boxes and bad bags, which Murphy (1986:243) describes as bags with the stores' logo, repeatedly folded and used, in which shoplifters hide the stolen merchandise, creating the false impression of a lawful purchase.

Maughan (2002:6) notes that professional shoplifters use unusual methods to practise their unlawful trade. They will, for example, place razors into frozen chickens to smuggle them pass the checkpoint area (cashiers). There is a syndicate that generated between R500 and R1 000 by stealing and reselling one carrier bag full of Canderel (artificial sweeteners) tablets. Usually they operate in a group of three or four people who move from one shop to another, and place goods into bags and then leave the stores as soon as possible, to avert detection.

Other techniques that professional shoplifters use are regarded as very sly, as the following example illustrates. Cornflake containers are emptied, and razors are deposited into the boxes, which are then marked so that their helpers would easily identify them. The accomplices then take the boxes to the cashier counter for payment, and less money is paid for the stolen goods, R15 in stead of R500, which was the original price marked on the merchandise.

Livingston (1996:235) differentiates between the professional and the non-professional shoplifter. According to Livingston the professional plans his/her acts ahead, and views the selection of a target as an important factor. They also target shops located on the outskirts of town with an easy escape route. They work in a group context (not alone, as most of the non-professional shoplifters do) and usually a group of three, and each one of them has a specific task to perform. For example: a driver of the getaway vehicle, who waits in the car while the engine runs, ensures that stolen goods are taken along, and prevents easy apprehension. There is also one member who acts as a lookout to distract the attention of the shop assistants, while the third member ensures that the intended merchandise is removed from the shop.

Walsh (1978:27) notes that adults, especially the professional male shoplifters, are responsible for huge numbers of shop theft incidents. They target jewellery and other shops that deal in goods with high monetary value. These shoplifters pretend to be good but restless customers, and ask to view a wide range of goods, such as rings, and then look as though they are indecisive. They then request to view other articles, until the counter is full of the requested merchandise. While talking to the shop assistant, they would wait for some time, even organise for a confederate to make a timely entry and divert the attention of the store

assistant and then carefully remove the goods that are at their disposal.

Walsh also mentions that some shoplifters might see the desired merchandise displayed on the counter or through the store window, and plan their thefts in advance. They acquire a cheap duplicate of the targeted merchandise, such as a ring. Upon entering the store, they will ask to view such a ring, and secretly replace the fake one with the authentic one. They will then pocket the real ring and return the cheap replica, which completes the theft, dubbed as ring switching. Some members of the shop syndicates will enter the store individually, as though they are not related to each other, since every group member is assigned with a specific task to carry out.

3.5 *Adult shoplifters*

Shoplifting is not only confined to children, teenagers, or the aged. Adults also commit these acts for various reasons. Sennewald and Christman (1992:10) pronounce that adult statistics add to the growing number of customer shoplifters. Most adults justify their stealing and explain that the acts are unintentional and accidental, and directed at some disorientating experience in their lives.

Fischer and Green (1992:352) discovered over a number of years, from different reports, that nearly fifty percent (50%) of individuals arrested for shop theft acts were adults, sixty percent (60%) were under the age of thirty (30) years, and eighty percent (80%) were under the age of forty (40) years. Females accounted for at least fifty (50%) percent of shop theft incidents. Some of the apprehended female shoplifters attributed their situations to the menopausal or midlife crisis stage, claiming to be physiologically disoriented or on medication for their conditions at the time of their arrest. No conclusive empirical evidence was found to support

these claims of a midlife crisis, so there may be some truth to that argument, or there may not be. Further research studies on the subject are needed. Some adult shoplifters deliberately take goods from shops in order to get psycho-medical help for their condition. For others it is the manifestation of a cry for help, even though it is rare. Research studies mention that menopause should not be viewed as a justifiable excuse to commission shop theft acts, but people should be made aware of the nature of this phenomenon, which is more likely to be encountered among middle-aged women, across the social spectrum.

3.6 The drug dependent shoplifters

The drug dependent type of shoplifters can be categorised in a number of ways to distinguish them from other types of shoplifters. Naudé (1976:126) referred to them as the drug dependents while Cant (1991:151) referred to them as narcotic addicts. Fischer and Green (1992:352) describe them as drug users trapped by their addiction. In order to sustain their expensive habit, they resort to numerous avenues, such as stealing from shops. To sustain their costly habit, approximately \$500 a day is needed, goods are stolen for fencing purposes at between ten (10%) and twenty (20%) percent of their retail value. In other situations goods may be appropriated and returned for refunds.

The Shoplifting problem (2004:1-2) mentions that drug dependants are categorised as professional shoplifters, a point of view supported by Naudé (1976:126). They associate with criminal subcultures, whose primary motivation for stealing is to resell stolen goods and generate money as a way of life, so as to maintain an expensive drug dependency habit. They are not only involved in shop thefts, but in other crimes as well, and lack conscience and remorse or an element of guilt.

Cant (1991:151) indicates that drug dependency among young people is a huge social problem, as most of these teenagers are involved in shop theft acts in order to maintain an

expensive lifestyle of drugs. The problem of drug addiction among shoplifters in the US is a huge one. It is presumed that a drug addict requires more than \$100 (R1 000) a week to support his or her narcotic habit, and these figures have most certainly increased.

In South Africa very little information is available on how much money drug dependants need to support their habit. Naudé (1976:126-127) also mentions that very little is known regarding the drug dependants' methods of stealing. What is known is that they usually target expensive goods, which will produce a profit when sold on the black market. Their involvement in stealing is not so prevalent, as the real incidence among customer shoplifters remains unknown.

3.7 *The foreign gangs*

Sennewald and Christman (1992:12) observe that there has been an increase in the number of highly organised shop theft activities in the US, where the renting of cars and travelling from one town to the other has become the norm. One of the recorded methods has been to steal goods, ship them to the offenders' native country, knowing that they will make more profit there than if they would fence stolen goods in the country where they have been taken from. An example of this type of shoplifting where people operate in a gang is The Columbians. They have been in operation for some years, and only a few of their group members have been arrested. These gangs are divided into groups with little or no structural links. If members are caught, they have little information regarding the gang or its hierarchy and as a result this creates problems for the criminal justice system, in particular the law enforcement agents, to counter these shop theft activities. These gangs are specialists and possess sophisticated skills, they are mobile, and have financial support and different links with criminal lawyers. The researcher views the existence of such gangs as a threat, not only to the US, but believes that they also pose a serious problem to other countries, including South Africa. It is a universal

problem. Further research on this particular subject is needed for future studies.

3.8 *The Fagin syndrome type*

Murphy (1986:134) mentions that the Fagin syndrome shoplifters are a rare category of customers' shoplifters. They comprise a huge part of the folklore of shop theft that is committed by young children and older people who work together in a syndicate. Murphy (1986:244) describes the Fagin syndrome system as one that is associated with the Dickens' character. Older people, who are well equipped regarding the methods one can use to steal from shops, are accompanied by children and use them as helpers. These children are specifically chosen because they are below the age of criminal liability, and the adults are aware of this, so that, if these children were caught they would not face criminal prosecution because of their age. In terms of South African law, children between the age of seven (7) and fourteen (14) years cannot be held accountable for crimes they commit, because it is presumed that they cannot differentiate between right and wrong. The child does the actual stealing, while the adult supervises.

To understand some methods used in the Fagin syndrome an extract from Murphy (1986:135) shows an example as presented by an inspector in Scotland Yard;

Whole families are going out on Saturday afternoon shoplifting expeditions, a Scotland Yard woman police inspector said yesterday. Children often aged only eight or nine - too young to be prosecuted - are used because, if they are caught, retailers are often likely to give them a smack on their bottom and send them home. Mother and father do their shopping and the children wheel the trolley innocently past the checkout to a car where the grandparents are waiting. Before the staff has time to do anything they are long gone.

Sennewald and Christman (1992:13) mention that, in addition, shoplifters use other

sophisticated methods to disguise the act. An adult person purposefully hand merchandise over to a child who, unknowingly, carries it out of the store, past the checkout point. An adult appears, as though surprised, and direct their anger towards the child, who knows nothing about being party to a crime.

Murphy (1986:245) mentions Star-glazing as an Elizabethan method of stealing, usually preferred by small boys. An adhesive substance is attached to a small glass pane; the glass is deliberately broken and then removed, so that a hand can break through the glass window to reach the targeted goods inside the shop.

3.9 *The mentally ill shoplifters*

Sennewald and Christman (1992:9) note that mentally ill shoplifters are regarded as such due to their psychological instability and their need for psychiatric help. This category of shoplifter is also very rare, and poses a minimal threat to shops, since they can easily be identified or arrested by store personnel. Jacoby (1994:145) points out that every mentally challenged person lacks one or more factor needed for a moral life and the ability to differentiate between right and wrong, and more importantly, the ability to resist natural impulses.

According to Jacoby (1994:141) the mentally ill shoplifter is a category often misunderstood and mistreated by the general public. They are driven to criminality, for which they are well fitted due to their nature. It is hereditary feeble-mindedness, not hereditary criminality that accounts for their condition. Sennewald and Christman (1992:9) believe that mentally disturbed shoplifters cannot be held criminally responsible for their actions, because of their mental conditions and impairment, which indicate that they have an inability to differentiate between right and wrong. This means that they cannot be formally prosecuted, due to their lack of accountability, and they should be treated differently, but in an appropriate manner, as they fall in a special category, and are referred to as State's president patients.

3.10 *The vagrant and transient shoplifters*

Cant (1991:151) identifies the vagrant and transient shoplifters as another type of customer shoplifter, which very little is known about. They are perceived as tramps and homeless people, whose main motivation for stealing is their needy circumstances. Murphy (1986:244) employs the term foilers, referring to the above-mentioned category of shoplifters as insignificant thieves and wanderers. Cant (1991:149) reveals that in most cases vagrant and transient shoplifters take merchandise such as food, alcoholic drinks, cigarettes and clothing for their own personal use, and for their family members who need these items.

3.11 *The elderly shoplifters*

Shop theft is a crime every type of person might commit, including the elderly. Klemke (1992:28-9) mentions that, like other types of shoplifters the thefts of merchandise from shops, by older people, also need attention. There are several statistical studies available as far as this category of shoplifter is concerned. In a journalistic approach to the topic *When Grandma is a thief* the information collected from the elderly who were caught shoplifting revealed various responses. These ranged from elderly people who are tired of eating dog food, they feel like eating a decent piece of meat, to extreme cases such as the society owes it to me and I was just taking back what is legitimately mine.

3.12 *The employee shoplifters*

According to Murphy (1986:129) the employee type of shoplifter is infrequently apprehended by store detectives, and plays a significant part in shrinkage, as they do often appear in literary studies. People who take goods from their workplace not only comprise a specific type of theft, but also constitute a category of shoplifters largely overlooked. Most researchers focus on the non-professional and professional shoplifters, ignoring the existence of other types of shoplifters that pose a threat to stores.

Murphy (1986:136) mentions that employee shoplifters is also a rare category, and when they are encountered, store management is reluctant to expose them for prosecution in order to protect the image of the store. It has been shown that stores are not prepared to accept that they have recruited untrustworthy staff members. They prefer to take internal disciplinary measures, as contained in their store policy documents, which entails the dismissal, without pay, of such staff members and will only consider formal prosecution as a last resort, after all available avenues have been explored.

Several reasons for employee theft have been cited, such the supplement of their pay, or ill treatment by their employers, which result in a vengeful act of shoplifting, or in order to assist other people. Cant (1991:189) supplies various methods that employees use when they take goods from their workplace. They range from highly advanced methods, where a number of employees are involved, to the most common methods, that of employees who take small items home by using their purses and pockets. The goods are either taken and sold to the general public, or are used as equipment for business purposes, or personal use, or the items are fenced.

Employee shoplifters use various methods, as listed here:

they carry the goods out of the store in trash containers, then deposit them into a dumpster, and return after some time to retrieve them,
they deposit goods in trash containers and allowing someone else to dump them, and place

goods in a pocket or purse, and carry them out during tea time or lunch breaks or at the end of the working day. Some wear small items such as earrings, clothing and jewellery to their homes.

Murphy (1986:136) mentions that other methods include that employees ring lower prices for expensive goods for other customers.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted various aspects that related to shop theft that has been identified, not only as a social problem but also an economic one. Different views regarding shop and customers exist, as customers, under the pretense of being a legitimate customer, commit the crime. There are different types of shoplifters, as defined by the definitions and characteristics of different categories. Two distinct types of shoplifters may be identified, namely, the non-professional and the professional shoplifters. Each type has its own subdivisions, as demonstrated in the above discussion, and there are other shoplifter categories that do not fall within either the amateur or the professional shoplifter's category. The various types of shoplifters indicate that shop theft is a specific type of crime, committed by people from all walks of life. They are classified as such, because of the manner in which they execute the theft.

The research study examined cardinal aspects of the literary review pertaining to shop theft, and focussed on the different types of shoplifters, although the distinction is sometimes vague. People involved in shop theft activities are either amateurs or professionals. The motivation (the driving force) within an individual impels action in order to attain a certain objective. This driving force is the result of an unfulfilled need. It can thus be said that unfulfilled needs motivate behaviour and serve as a determining factor when shoplifters are categorised.

As discussed, the non-professional shoplifters steal merchandise out of a desire to own it, for personal use, or to give the merchandise as a gift. The losses as a result of amateur incidents

are minimal when compared to the losses sustained by professional theft. The professional shoplifters' motivation for stealing is primarily income or profit making. They steal with the intention to dispose of the merchandise on the black market.

Shop theft is a complex type of theft and it differs from person to person. It is an opportunistic and impulsive crime, sometimes based on rational decisions and often just committed on the spur of the moment. The amateurs, the professionals and other categories of shoplifters have been discussed in terms of their operational techniques (chapter 4 deals with the *modus operandi*), primary motive for stealing (resale or own use), characteristics and personality traits and the different perceptions these shoplifters have regarding themselves and shop theft. Shop theft is a criminal offence that is covered by the South African law of theft.

It has also been mentioned that shop theft is a crime that everybody can commit, no stereotypical shoplifter exists, as no shoplifter fits one particular description. Shoplifters come in different sizes, genders, age groups, and from different ethnic and cultural as well as educational and economic backgrounds. Shop theft diversity may be understood in terms of some of the more atypical manifestations of shoplifting such as the Fagin syndrome, the elderly and employee thieves.

In chapter 4 the discussion is on the *modus operandi* and explanations of shop theft.