

NEXT TIME you're in a supermarket, stand for a moment near the clicking checkout aisles and consider this: of every 52 emerging customers, one has shoplifted something.

Shoplifting is even more prevalent in variety stores. In department stores, it is so costly that many won't even discuss it.

Shoplifting, a polite term for stealing, is taking place right now in supermarkets from Maine to California. One supermarket chain reports that last year the number of customers taken into custody for shoplifting totaled 152,000. The trade magazine *Progressive Grocer*, after an exhaustive study, concluded that shoplifting in food stores came to 260 million dollars in 1960—more than the annual food-sales volume of the entire city of San Francisco. There is evidence that this food-store total has now reached at least 280 million dollars.

An equal amount is stolen from department stores, variety chains, discount houses, apparel shops, drug and hardware stores, all of which offer higher-priced pickings to "respectable" thieves. In 1961, Sears Roebuck and Co.'s Eastern division alone apprehended 2,500 shoplifters. Alexander's four New York stores caught 5,700;

They sure do!" When variety stores began switching to self-service, the managers thought employee thefts would be cut through the reduction in the number of clerks handling cash registers. But the decrease of thefts by insiders was more than offset by the increase of thefts by outsiders.

2. The removal of most barriers between goods and customers in stores using clerks. Formerly all merchandise was in showcases or on shelves behind counters. With open display, shoplifting became easier. Also, it's believed that success of many shoplifters in self-service stores emboldens them to try it elsewhere. An old proverb says: "Opportunity makes the thief."

3. Improved display techniques psychologically designed to increase impulse buying. For example, huge stacks of nylons are more irresistible than a single pair—they overpower buying resistance but also have extra appeal to shoplifters. The manager of one chain says: "We try to tempt people into buying and at the same time tempt them into stealing."

Some people contend there is a fourth cause for increased shoplifting: declining morality. And there is ample evidence of changed attitudes among youngsters. Store managers, protection chiefs, and detectives all report a growing "boldness" on the part of teen-age shoplifters. They are cynical about their thievery, defiant when

SHOPLIFTING—

The thief isn't an underworld criminal but the respected citizen,

in 1962 the total had risen to 6,500 even before the Christmas rush started.

The FBI recently revealed that in the first three quarters of 1962, shopliftings reported to 4,836 police agencies (with jurisdiction over two-thirds of the nation's population) were up 21 percent over the same 1961 period. No one knows the exact national cost of this type of thievery, but the best estimate is well over half a billion dollars, plus huge expense for store protection, guards, detectives, lawyers, special packaging, and mechanical equipment. And this total cost is added, of course, to *your* bill.

Shoplifting has become so widespread and expensive that in the past eight years 46 states have enacted laws specifically designed to help merchants fight it. North Carolina has engaged a former FBI agent to give antishoplifting instructions to store managers, clerks, and special officers. He reports that North Carolina shoplifters are taking 15 million dollars' worth of merchandise a year—the state's most costly crime, far outranking embezzlement, automobile theft, and holdups of all kinds.

This upsurge in shoplifting is attributed mainly to three developments:

1. The advent and expansion of self-service stores. One Minnesota store owner says: "In self-service, we ask our customers to help themselves.

apprehended, rarely show remorse when proved guilty. One merchant in a high-income suburb tells me that out of several hundred youngsters he has caught only one seemed to feel he had done anything wrong. The others were sorry they had been caught, not that they had stolen. A standard reaction is casual assumption that all can be set right by paying for the goods.

Reactions of parents are equally distressing: a few bring the child back to the store to apologize, but most parents in this well-to-do community either (a) stop trading at that particular store or (b) become highly indignant and over-protective, claiming the manager doesn't know what he's talking about: "Why, Junior goes around all the time with \$5 in his pocket!"

LAX PARENTS are often responsible for juvenile shoplifting. A mother will come in with a three- or four-year-old, see him take a pack of gum or a candy bar, then neither offer to pay nor make him put it back. Many parents shrug off the comic book "borrowed" from a store rack as "a childish prank." Later, when the child comes home with a handsome sweater or an expensive lipstick, the mother casually accepts the explanation that "Sue gave it to me."

Few people realize the extent of teen-age shoplifting. Out of 7,500 confessed shoplifters last



PHOTOGRAPH BY ARTHUR LEIPZ