

year in Alexander's New York stores, 3,500 were teen-agers! Twenty-seven hundred were 12 to 16, about seven out of ten of them girls. Macy's, with department stores across the country, reports that since World War II teen-age shoplifting has greatly increased, with girls in the majority. The women's division of the Detroit police reports that among female shoplifters, 14-year-olds outnumber all other ages. Shillito's, a leading department store in Cincinnati, keeps all its shoplifting cases on IBM cards and has precise statistics: 78.2 out of every 100 shoplifters are under 18—45 girls to every 33 boys.

Shoplifting "clubs," which will not take in a member until he or she has stolen something, have cropped up, too. Several years ago the arrest of two sisters, 13 and 15, uncovered one in Miami. In Oklahoma City, a woman detective broke up a club composed of girls from several high schools. They began by swiping school supplies, then moved on to the downtown stores. One club required shoplifting of at least \$25 worth of merchandise, another specified cashmere sweaters. These club activities account for only a tiny fraction of juvenile shoplifting. But most experienced store-protection experts agree that girl shoplifters are apt to steal in pairs, occasionally in groups of three or four. Boys usually work alone. Mothers and daughters will shoplift to-

staples 137 to 60. William F. Alexander, one of the nation's top protection men, has reported: "In one city that I surveyed, I found that some 50 percent of those apprehended represented the better-fed, better-clothed, and better-housed."

Still another false image: that the typical shoplifter is a person suddenly overwhelmed by an irresistible impulse. A protection expert says: "I don't believe in 'impulse stealing,' not when a woman goes about it so craftily and the impulse lasts long enough for her to go from counter to counter and even from floor to floor." Most women caught shoplifting will first proclaim innocence—"I didn't know I had it" or "It fell into my bag." When that alibi is demolished, she'll say, "I don't know why I did it."

THERE IS statistical evidence that most shoplifting is a calculated operation. For example, an Oakland study of 205 supermarket shoplifters revealed that 118 took two or more items—33 took five or more apiece.

Moreover, even among those classified as one-item shoplifters, there were many who had taken three steaks or two cartons of cigarettes or six packages of candy.

Most shoplifters use the old standard techniques—the amateur simply secreting items under coats or in pockets and handbags, the pros em-

by having the sleeve around a record sealed.

Huge sums are also being poured into mechanical countermeasures. Many stores are equipping their detectives with radios so that they can be dispatched quickly to trouble areas. The detectives dress and act like regular customers. In self-service stores they even push carts around. Men attach the radios to their belts where they can't be seen; women carry them in handbags.

Some of our largest department stores (for instance, Hudson's in Detroit, one of the nation's biggest-volume single stores) are now using television cameras to spot shoplifters. Also, elaborate systems of mirrors are being installed in many stores so management can watch strategic areas—like counters selling such shoplifter favorites as cosmetics, costume jewelry, gloves, and nylons. Many stores mount their mirrors so as to make it obvious to shoplifters that they are being watched—because prevention is far more desirable than detection and apprehension.

Some stores also use the two-way mirror. It's a normal-looking glass on the customer's side, a see-through glass for detectives on the other side. Recently at one department store I watched through one covering a men's fitting room—the view was perfect. The next day a detective using that same mirror caught a man putting on a \$29.95 pair of ski pants, then putting his own

Newest Crime Wave

By
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housewife, or teen-ager you saw the other day at the supermarket or department store

gether, but fathers and sons almost never. The clubs are rare, but the gang spirit is widespread, including the treatment of shoplifting as a "sport," something "smart," hidden from parents but bragged about to schoolmates.

There are several misconceptions about shoplifters. Most prevalent is the notion that a great proportion are kleptomaniacs. Actually, the compulsive shoplifter is rare. Experienced observers estimate that kleptomaniacs account for not more than 1 percent of shoplifting losses. Between 15 percent and 20 percent are caused by professionals who make a living shoplifting—they convert the merchandise into cash through "fences." The remainder, at least 80 percent of the losses, are attributed to the so-called "amateurs" (two-thirds of them women), many of whom shoplift so regularly that they might be termed "semipro."

Another misconception is that the amateurs come mainly from lower economic groups and steal from need. The fact is they come from all economic strata, usually carry considerable cash, often have charge accounts, normally steal luxuries. From Oakland, Calif., comes an analysis of 197 apprehensions: 56 involved professors, doctors, teachers, engineers, salesmen, office workers, military officers, and the wives of such. When their thefts were classified, luxuries outranked

employing special belts for holding items on hangers, large bloomers for storing a dozen or more stolen skirts, sweaters, and blouses. A long-time favorite with pros of both sexes is the "booster box." It looks like a newly wrapped purchase but has a hinged bottom which springs open to receive merchandise, then snaps shut. Abercrombie & Fitch, the New York specialty store, reports that the newest thing in booster boxes is one made out of an attaché case.

Shoplifters are quick to find new and ingenious ways to take advantage of new products and new packaging. For instance, when cereal boxes were introduced with the new easy-open, easy-close tops, shoplifters began dumping the contents and slipping in two or three cartons of cigarettes. When supermarkets began selling frozen pizza pies, shoplifters began using them for hiding phonograph records.

It was to combat shoplifters that firms began mounting small items (for example, lipsticks and razor blades) on oversized cardboards. It made a large bulky package out of a tiny one, but shoplifters then began twisting the merchandise off the mounting board. The answer was the "blister pack" or "skin pack" with board and all covered by a tough transparent plastic. Another shoplifting technique is slipping two phonograph records into one sleeve. But this has been countered

trousers over them. The shoplifter was a \$12,000-a-year man, had \$90 in his billfold, and claimed he didn't realize he had the ski pants on.

In many cities retailers are holding shoplifting clinics and pooling their know-how. Many people do not realize how great the chances are that they will be caught. Also, many have the misconception that before apprehending a shoplifter management must wait for him to leave the store. That's not so. Forty-six states now have laws permitting in-store apprehension. A 47th, California, has court rulings to that effect.

In Oakland, Calif., the retailers have persuaded the police to set up a central file index carrying the names of all apprehended shoplifters, whether prosecuted or not. The result is that when a shoplifter puts in the usual claim that this is "my first time," the Oakland retailer can simply pick up his phone and check with the central index.

Store managers report that very often just the motion of reaching for the phone causes the self-proclaimed first-timer to admit he's lying.

Similar central files are being set up quietly in a few other cities—Cincinnati, for example. The central file is no panacea, but it does illustrate the aggressive action required to halt the shoplifting increase which burdens stores heavily, raises prices for honest customers, and schools so many youngsters for careers in crime.