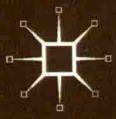
CRIME PREVENTION AND SECURITY MANAGEMENT

SHOPPING AND CRIME

JOSHUA A. N. BAMFIELD



Shopping and Crime

Joshua A. N. Bamfield
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I must also thank the anonymous retail executives and others who provided me with crime report information on thousands of customer thieves and employee thieves, published here as macro studies of shoplifting and employee theft.

All views and statements expressed in *Shopping and Crime* are of course my own and no other organisation or individual should be regarded as being in any way committed to the comments or claims made here. All errors are my own.

Series Editor's Introduction

Readers of this book will learn a lot about shopping, about the structure of retailing, about the changing role of retailers as well as about trends and patterns of crime and its prevention. Indeed, this book represents a rather different approach to understanding illegal loss and its reduction in retailing. For those who hitherto have not seen retail crime as a big issue, this book may be the seed of change. As Joshua notes, retailers are the most targeted of victims, and retailers are at the forefront of the fight against drug crime in the United Kingdom.

Joshua A. N. Bamfield is a recognised expert on retail crime who has developed a reputation around the world, yet this is his first book on this topic. His depth of knowledge is reflected in his robust evaluation of key ways in which retailers lose from crime, why they do so and how some of the remedies are neutralised by offenders.

He details the causes of shoplifting, noting some of the limits of both traditional theories and the approaches of different disciplines. He identifies the three 'motifs' of theft – the widespread availability of goods and the joys associated with shopping, an adverse view of how some retailers behave and the pain of having to pay which invites a different focus on the subject, not why some people do steal, but why so many do not.

One of the holy grails of loss prevention, and for that matter the broader subject of security management, is to show added value, cost effectiveness and/or return on investment. This book offers a novel and important insight into the costs of retail crime. Joshua highlights doubts about some common methodologies used and incorporates a broad analysis of elements that can and should be included in calculations. Crucially he questions the assertion that loss prevention measures have not worked and that retail crime is not a very costly experience, for retailers and society generally.

Joshua does not pull punches; he finds gaps in theories and in the arguments of others who have written on the topic. Retail crime partnerships, the role of the media, the realities of customer theft and the nature of threats posed by dishonest staff, the surveillance society and the lack of interest by the police are all critiqued. Joshua has long been closely associated with the development of civil recovery and in this area he advocates a new Code of Practice alongside more central control.

This book is likely to appeal to academics and practitioners. Joshua generates new insights into retail crime and presents new ways of interpreting it. The culmination of the book is a framework to guide good loss prevention practice, which is likely to remain a key focal point for years to come.

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1
Shopping and Crime

Shopping

For many people 'going shopping' is seen as one of life's great pleasures. It combines the excitement of a bargain, the thrill of the chase, new experiences, three-dimensional mental arithmetic, disappointments, successes, the pleasures of varied interactions with other people, the chance to renew old acquaintances, manual labour and, often, exhaustion. It is thought to be heavily gendered, with males being more utilitarian, focusing only on buying particular items (or refusing to engage in shopping), and females being as interested in the processes and often more wide-ranging in the product categories they will buy on a shopping expedition (Woodruffe, 1997; Miller, 2008).

At the same time, retailing is also a major crime scene, with retailers being the most targeted victims of crime. There are many times more crimes against retailers than domestic burglaries, robberies or car crime. The total stolen is also higher. Retailers in the United Kingdom lost goods and cash costing £3,664 million ($5.9 billion) to retail crime in 2010 (Bamfield, 2010a) and according to a sample survey by the British Retail Consortium (BRC) caught almost one-half million people stealing from them (BRC, 2011a). In the United States the total stolen was estimated to be as high as $32.6 billion. Police and retail loss prevention officers often argue that many people who steal from stores are attempting to raise money for drugs (discussed later). However, most retail thefts go undetected (Marris *et al.*, 2003; Statistics Commission, 2005). Home Office researchers in 2000 (Brand and Price, 2000) estimated the 'true' number of shop theft offences in Britain to be 11 million, compared to police arrests of 306,596 (Home Office, 2007c). The crime identified is large, but what is hidden is massive.

The 2011 riots in England that shocked the world, but primarily involved large-scale looting of retail merchandise, can be regarded simply as extreme versions of what store employees and retailers have to put up with regularly

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throughout the year (*Economist*, 2011). The implications of the riots are discussed more fully at the end of Chapter 2.

Costs of loss prevention

The amount stolen per incident is relatively low. The BRC (2011a) calculated the average stolen in every detected shoplifting incident to be £70 and every employee theft cost £290. It might be thought that large organisations can simply cope with this form of low-level crime. This might well be true if the problem occurred only two or three times every month. But the total impact of crime upon retailers, £3,664 million in 2010, is caused by the massive number of cases that occur every year, even though the average loss may be relatively low.

The constant pressure of low-level attacks upon retail corporations obliges retailers to spend heavily upon self-policing by employing loss prevention staff ('security staff' in the United Kingdom), investing in security equipment like CCTV, electronic tagging, access control and loss prevention software and meeting the costs of a central loss prevention department. Loss prevention (or crime prevention) in the United Kingdom cost retailers £977 million in 2010, whilst the total in the United States was $12.1 billion (Bamfield, 2010a).

Shopping as a crime scene

Shopping and Crime argues that it is no coincidence that Britain's most popular leisure activity is also its biggest crime scene. Retailing, for the range of offenders from prolific to occasional amateurs, provides *opportunity* together with *low risk*. There is a wide range of products to steal, indeed something for everyone's tastes, and successful theft can often be relatively easy (Farrington, 1999; Hollinger and Adams, 2010; BRC, 2011a). Shoppers are able to examine goods closely, hold them in their hands, place items in shopping baskets and carry them around the store. It is often difficult to tell whether an individual is a legitimate shopper or a shoplifter. Plain clothes police officers from the Warwickshire Constabulary were able to 'steal' more than £4,000 worth of merchandise in a morning from stores in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, to teach retailers how vulnerable they were to crime (BBC, 2003).

Retail crime is certainly not all about shoplifting. Indeed in the United States it is thought that more is stolen by employees than by customers (Hollinger and Adams, 2010). Employees, given a position of trust with access to cash, customer information and merchandise and aware of many of the security measures used by the store, may be in the very best position to steal from their employers.

The online crime scene

One of the major changes in retailing in recent years has been the growth of online retail sales. As well as being an important new channel of distribution, it has changed the way people shop in physical 'bricks and mortar' stores as well. More product and price information is now available online, creating a more educated shopper. Increasingly many people shop online and offline in a promiscuous fashion and will often use online data when shopping in a store and vice versa. But you cannot shoplift from an online store. Similarly an online employee cannot simply take £10 from the cash drawer. Online retailing has changed the way people steal as well as the way people shop. Already merchandise such as CDs sold online and digital downloads have made popular music so cheap that stealing music for resale may not repay the risks. Theft from e-retailers involves payment fraud, fraudulent orders, dishonest employees creating false orders or the computer hacking of customer data. These require radically different skills from the manual skills of shoplifting and hiding merchandise without being observed (Cybersource, 2011a).

Stealing from Fort Knox

Retail crime cost U.S. retailers $32.6 billion (£20.4 billion) in 2010 (Bamfield, 2010a). What does this mean? As a result of the financial crisis, we have all become used to hearing about what seems like impossibly large numbers. But based on the five-year spot price of gold for 2006–11, the impact of retail crime on U.S. retailers over the last five years is equivalent to the theft of all the federal gold bullion held in Fort Knox.

Shrinkage and the *Global Retail Theft Barometer*

Retailers are normally unable to calculate their losses from shoplifters and employee theft directly. They estimate what their losses have been in terms of 'shrinkage', which is formally the difference between the sales their stores should have made in relation to the value of goods shipped and the levels of sales they actually made (Highton and Chilcott, 1980). The shrinkage total includes a proportion of losses caused by poor administration. Estimates of customer theft and employee theft are normally determined as a proportion of total shrinkage.

The *Global Retail Theft Barometer* (GRTB) is an international survey of shrinkage and retail crime that I undertake every year. It is a (stratified) sample survey. By 2010 it covered retail corporations in 42 different countries, reporting separately on the situation in each country. The GRTB uses the same definitions and methodology throughout, thus overcoming one of the major problems of international comparisons, which is inconsistency

of approach, coverage and timescale. I use its results in *Shopping and Crime* because it enables accurate international comparisons to be made. I would prefer to use data from other researchers, including critical ones, but inter-country comparative data are rare. The strength of the GRTB is the large number of completed questionnaires received from the industry (normally more than 1,100 major retailers every year). In 2010 the respondents had combined sales of more than $873.8 billion (Bamfield, 2010a).

Retailing and its discontents

Retailing is an important part of the lifestyle of many people and the retail sector itself is huge. In the United Kingdom retail sales in 2009 were £316 billion (or $441 billion) (ONS, 2010). It employed 3 million people. Retail accounts for more than 22% of the United Kingdom's gross domestic product (GDP) and, depending on the methodology used, retailing is the second or third largest industry in the United Kingdom (ONS, 2011b). Although retailing represents a higher proportion of GDP in the United Kingdom than many other countries (including France, often seen as the emotional heart of retailing), in all developed countries retailing accounts for between 16% and 22% of GDP and employs between 8% and 12% of the total labour force (Euromonitor, 2008). The scale of U.S. retailing (excluding vehicles) in 2009 was $2,961.7 billion (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). The sheer scale and variety of the retail industry in most countries makes it a tempting target for thieves.

Recent criticisms about retail concern the dominance of large multiple groups, the difficulties faced by new retail entrants, the decline of high streets and the fall in the numbers and vitality of smaller retail businesses (Blythman, 2005; Simms, 2007). In the United Kingdom, design guru Mary Portas has been asked by the Prime Minister to identify how to reinvigorate Britain's high streets (Laffin, 2011; Poulter, 2011). The problems include the growth of retail malls, the competition from online retailers and a weak outlook for consumer spending (IoD, 2011).

Just as there is a tendency to blame the largest retailers for what is happening to Britain's shopping areas, the idea can gain ground that large-scale retailing is exploiting the poor and causing at least some of the problems associated with retail crime. Lord Phillips, a judge, discussing the appropriate penalties for shop theft, declared that for

> ... a 'comparatively trivial' offence not involving violence – 'helping oneself to somebody else's property, *perhaps where that property is temptingly displayed in a self-service store*' (my italics) the best response would be an appropriate community sentence rather than prison.
>
> (Rozenberg, 2005)

Obviously different judges may have different opinions, but Lord Phillips was not a part-time District Judge when he said this. He was the Lord Chief Justice of England, Chief of the Judiciary in England and Wales and the President of the Courts, so his views were of considerable importance. It is unclear exactly how the key element of *retail temptation* would be calibrated, but the Lord Chief Justice seemed to be suggesting that at least some crime was the retailer's own fault. The Lord Chief Justice was following in a well-trodden path: for example, a scholarly paper on kleptomania by a Dr. Bucknill in 1862 argued that 'on the whole we can find more pity for the poor woman who purloins a piece of lace, without which she thinks she will be absolutely not fit to be seen, than the smirking fellow who has caught her in his haberdashery trap by lying advertisements' (Bucknill, 1862). Criticism of the victim (the retailer) on behalf of people caught up in retail crime has been a constant theme of attacks made on retailers for at least 200 years (Abelson, 1989; Whitlock, 2005).

Concerns are also expressed about the costs of jury trials for small-scale theft. In Northern Ireland, Lord Morrow attacked the decision to prosecute a female accused of stealing a bag of prawns: the trial cost amounted to £17,000 (4NI.co.uk, 2011; BBC, 2011; *Belfast Telegraph*, 2011). Morrow, former chairman of the Northern Ireland Justice Committee, argued that the supermarket should be charged part of the cost of the four-day trial, although one could argue that the fault is in allowing small crimes to be heard before a Crown Court. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 8.

An under-researched area

Business crime is an under-researched topic in the United Kingdom (Gill, 1994; Green *et al.*, 2004; Ormerod, 2005). Crimes against retailers are no exception to this non-trend. Retail crime is not a mainstream issue for many criminologists. Farrell and Pease (2006) suggest that criminology's contribution to thinking about security may be undermined by its early emphasis upon the sociology of deviance rather than business context, though Hayes and Cardone (2006) give a contrary view. Leading criminologists like Hayward and Young (2007) also condemn current academic discourse which they see as being characterised by

> ... the inexorable rise of the 'market society' wherein corporate values and consumerist subjectivities are now the dominant ethos ....

One of the major criminological texts in the United Kingdom is *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, a major 1,138-page text now in its fourth edition, which should be on the shelf of anyone with more than a passing interest in crime. The *Oxford Handbook* is used by many universities and is edited by three of the most eminent British criminologists, Professors Maguire,

Morgan and Reiner. *The Oxford Handbook* reflects criminology as it is taught and researched in the United Kingdom. Its discussion of retail crime in this 1,138-page book only covers three pages (Maguire *et al.*, 2007).

Most retail management authors also have a blind spot about loss prevention, possibly because the academic disciplines that have contributed most to the study of retail management are marketing, management, geography and human relations (HR). Standard texts give little space to crime (Walters and Hanrahan, 2000; Varley and Rafiq, 2003; Ogden and Ogden, 2005; Alexander and Doherty, 2008). Exceptions include Levy and Weitz (2011), Berman and Evans (2009) and Fernie *et al.* (2003), and there is an important historical assessment of loss prevention and consumer misbehaviour in the United Kingdom food self-service sector in Phillips *et al.* (2005). Contributions towards thinking about the economics of crime and institutional frameworks can be seen however in mainstream economists such as Becker (1968), Ehrlicht (1973), Levitt and Dubner (2005) and Budden and Griffin (1996).

The approach of *Shopping and Crime*

Shopping and Crime is an addition to a relatively sparse body of knowledge about retail crime. Criminology is a multi-disciplinary subject, drawing on law, psychology and sociology (with some economics) (Maguire *et al.*, 2007), but *Shopping and Crime* also uses models and research findings from other areas including managerial/industrial economics, management (itself an interdisciplinary subject) and business strategy. The historical context is also seen as important in establishing many of the key issues facing retail businesses attempting to combat crime.

The rapid growth of online retailing, and online fraud, means that online losses can no longer be considered a separate topic from conventional loss prevention in retail stores. The problems of online fraud and the methods used to deter and prevent fraud must be considered at the same time as more conventional forms of theft from 'bricks and mortar' retail stores.

Shopping and Crime deals with the main types of crime caused mainly by customers and employees, building on the concept that this is not simply deviant or aberrant behaviour but may be related to shopping itself.

Shopping and Crime examines five key issues that need specific emphasis and are the basis of the book's argument. These are the specifics of retailing; the concept of business *criminomics*; the role of self-policing; retail crime prevention partnerships and the weakness of sanctions against retail crime.

- *The specifics of retailing.* Because retailing deals with satisfying consumer needs, consideration of retail crime has to involve issues of merchandising, layout, pricing and promotion which form part of how retailers position themselves in the marketplace to attract customers. It is no

coincidence that the Britain's favourite leisure activity is also its largest opportunity for crime.

- *Criminomics*. This book is based on a new approach, which I term *criminomics*. *Shopping and Crime* is the first systematic use of this concept. Criminomics is the study of business crime as though victims really mattered. It is derived from crim(e)+(ec)onomics and is based on viewing business crime as an issue of management economics as outlined in this text. Crime against business is an attack on the economics of the business. Retail crime is a business problem and fighting retail crime (and other business crime) takes into account the *financial costs* and the *opportunity costs* of doing so. Retailers making frugal use of scarce resources assess what and how they can apply resources. The aim of criminomics is to gain the maximum benefit in crime reduction from loss prevention spending, deterring offenders, apprehending malefactors and increasing the risks and costs of committing crime to wrongdoers. Retail loss prevention operates in an economic context: it has to take into account the costs of crime and the costs of reducing crime.
- *Self-policing*. Retailers normally receive support from the police and can hand over offenders to be dealt with according to the law of the country involved. However, unless retailers are prepared to police themselves through funding loss prevention departments and training employees, this can mean they fail to protect employees and customers. Lack of awareness and preparation may permit crimes to happen, because staff and managers may be unaware of the vulnerabilities caused by store layout or its security systems.
- *Retail crime prevention partnerships*. To improve their own effectiveness and to help the police, retailers have to take collective action and work in partnership locally and nationally, exchanging information about crime, prolific criminals and crime trends. The objectives include apprehending offenders, disrupting illegal activity and directing resource use. Such groups normally have close links with the local police and, when combating higher-level offences such as organised retail crime (ORC) and vehicle (cargo) theft, they may be linked to specialist crime units like the FBI or the new National Crime Agency. It can be difficult however to balance the needs of an individual retailer against those of the whole partnership.
- *The penalties for crime*. The penalties for retail crime are usually low unless the offender is prolific or violence is involved. If offenders are at all influenced by the possible sanctions they face then it would be rational to steal from shops, because it may be relatively easy to commit such crimes and the penalties are low compared to burglary, robbery or vehicle crime. There are many different types of offender. Ashby's (1958) law of requisite variety indicates that the criminal justice system (CJS) needs a similar variety of sanctions and penalties to deal effectively with

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