

BEING THE VICTIM: RETAIL CRIME AND LOSS PREVENTION

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ABSTRACT

Shoplifting is an issue for retailers. / Extensive research on retail crime and its costs highlights the need for retailers to counter shrinkage costs. This paper, however, highlights a tension between preventing losses and building relationships. Viewing loss prevention as a technical problem disregards the negative relational consequences for consumers, employees, retailers, and society.

Using a Memory-Work methodology, this research collected stories from nine women about ‘nasty’ clothing shopping experiences.

We report four stories that focused on accusations of shoplifting. Their stories tell of violated trust, damaged identity, powerlessness, and constrained freedoms. Store personnel singled out these innocent shoppers based on their colour, age, nationality, and behaviours – differences from the norm. They treated them with suspicion. The women’s stories expressed strong emotions and a variety of revenge responses.

We link their emotions and responses with those of victims. These women experienced emotions similar to those of victims; they were mad, angry, outraged, confused, stunned, and shamed. Their emotions motivated the women to thoughts of revenge coinciding with victims’ revenge responses, ranging from violence to forgiveness. Like victims, their identities were fractured, despite their efforts to defend who they are.

We conclude that the mechanized ways retailers deal with preventing losses is unhealthy for society. We all forget about the people involved. Loss prevention tactics symbolize distrust. This creates more distrust, restricts social freedoms, and compromises personal well-being. It works to the detriment of relationships. We call to re-examine how society deals with shoplifting, how we do business to benefit individuals, communities, and businesses. Researchers and retailers need to identify alternative methods of loss prevention – methods that are moral, relationship-enhancing approaches to loss prevention.

References available on request.