

## LIVING

## Theft that's trendy

*Pressure to keep up with pricey fashion trends has some teenagers turning to shoplifting high-end clothes*

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**T**ommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Adidas and Nike — hip teens wear those labels.

And those labels cost a pretty penny.

Once the domain of discerning adults, expensive designer clothing has a new market in today's fashion-conscious youth.

But the pressure to keep up with that pricey trend means some teens, who are desperate to fit in but can't afford the hottest designer clothes, are turning to shoplifting.

Brian Robinson, loss prevention supervisor at The Bay in Richmond Hill's Hillcrest Mall, says if youths could afford the clothing, they wouldn't be stealing.

Some teens have even stolen labels, to re sew them on to clothing they can afford, he says.

He agrees teens may feel pressured to have certain items, especially when they see friends wearing them.

#### THEFT GROWING

Studies conducted in the Greater Toronto Area show theft among youth is growing, and ever-changing fashion trends that can make or break a teen's social standing may be to blame.

According to statistics released by the International Protective Group, 44 per cent of 2,500 shoplifting arrests in the GTA involved youths under the age of 18.

Of the 44 per cent, young males accounted for 34 per cent of those arrests, while young females made up almost 10 per cent.

Youth theft accounted for \$48,997 in stolen merchandise.

"I once stole a shirt I really liked," said a 16-year-old Thornhill teen, who asked to remain anonymous.

"I really liked it, but didn't have \$110 to blow on something that isn't even worth



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Expensive designer labels such as Nike are the target of some young thieves, many of whom steal because of pressure to keep up with popular trends they cannot afford.

that much.

"Why should I feel guilty?" she added. "Manufacturers are charging outrageous prices for things that aren't even worth the money."

At Sport Check in Thornhill's Promenade Shopping Centre, manager Fil

Lima said teenagers steal clothing and sports caps that are easy to shove into school bags.

Brand names such as Nike, Fila and Fubu are the most sought-after labels.

Lima said the store relies on clothing tags to help prevent stealing, but he said

many teens have learned to thwart that system.

"When a teenager wants something bad enough, they'll do anything to get it," Lima said.

Robinson said many parents are refusing to dish out the cash for — or simply can't afford — these expensive garments.

Steve Lind of Richmond Hill, who has a 16-year-old son, said parents face an equal amount of pressure to provide their children with what's cool.

"You can't get away with going to Zeller's any more," Lind said.

"You spend \$150 on running shoes for them because you don't want to see them go without."

Lind said he spends the money on designer duds because he's aware of the peer pressure and he doesn't want his child known as the one wearing "the cheap stuff."

"It's just a good thing he's got a part-time job to help out," Lind said.

Not all teens steal because of the pressure to own the coolest clothes.

#### FOR THE THRILL OF IT

Some teens also feel peer pressure to steal to prove they belong to a group, or simply for the thrill of it.

"I've never stolen, myself," Ryan Perks, 17, of Richmond Hill, said.

But Perks said he knows many teens who have tried it and continue to do it, even if they have been caught.

"(They don't do it just) to keep up with fashion," Perks explains.

"A lot of them do it because they think it's the in thing to do. They like to walk around looking all tough."

Perks said it's not only males who steal. He knows of many females who shoplift cosmetics from drug and department stores because "things are loose there and it's so easy to do."

For whatever reason teens decide to steal, the consequences for those who get caught are not worth it, said York Regional Police Const. Mark Altermann.

Altermann said teens stealing to impress friends or for a lark don't realize even a first-time offender faces a community service sentence.

"Whenever I come across a shoplifter, I ask him, 'Why did you do it?'" Altermann said.

"Ninety per cent of the time I get a shrug and an 'I don't know.'"



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