

Hammurabi, the King of Babylon in 1780 B.C., was the earliest known ruler to publicly provide the people with a body of laws. His “Code of Laws” includes various references to the crime of theft:

- If anyone steals the property of a temple or of the court, he shall be put to death, and also the one who receives the stolen thing from him shall be put to death.
- If anyone steals cattle or sheep, or an ass, or a pig or a goat, if it belonged to a god or to the court, the thief shall pay thirtyfold therefor; if they belonged to a freed man of the king he shall pay tenfold; if the thief has nothing with which to pay he shall be put to death.
- If anyone takes a male or female slave of the court, or a male or female slave of a freed man, outside the city gates, he shall be put to death.<sup>66</sup>

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), larceny-theft is the “unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another.” Examples of larceny-theft include “bicycles, motor vehicle parts and accessories, shoplifting, pocket-picking, or the stealing of any property or article that is not taken by force and violence or by fraud.” Thus, such crimes as embezzlement, confidence games, forgery, and check fraud are not counted as theft.<sup>67</sup> Based on the 2014 report, the FBI summarized the following key findings concerning larceny-theft:

- There were an estimated 5,858,496 larceny-thefts nationwide.
- When comparing the 2013 and 2014 larceny-theft

rates, there was a drop of 2.7%.

- Larceny-thefts accounted for an estimated 70.8% of property crimes.
- The average value of property taken during larceny-thefts was \$941 per offense. When the average value was applied to the estimated number of larceny-thefts, the loss to victims was an estimated \$5.5 billion. The largest portion of reported larcenies (22.9%) was thefts from motor vehicles (except accessories).<sup>68</sup>

Table 11.2 provides a summary of larceny-theft by type from the FBI’s *Crime in the United States, 2014*.

The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) collects data to provide additional insight into what is referred to as the dark figure of crime (e.g., crimes unreported to law enforcement). In reference to property crimes, such as larceny-theft, the NCVS does not include those affecting businesses or other commercial establishments; rather, the NCVS collects data on households. Some key summary findings, based on 2014 data, include the following:

- In 2014, 10.4 million households experienced at least one or more property victimizations (this includes larceny-theft as well as other types of property crimes).
- In 2014, 46.0% of property crimes were reported to police.
- About 118.1 per 1,000 households experienced property thefts in 2014.<sup>69</sup>

In an effort to further illustrate key aspects of labeling theory, we apply this perspective to the crime of larceny-theft. Jeff was a 15-year-old boy who was getting into some

“minor” trouble at home (e.g., not cleaning his room, talking back to his mother). At one point, Jeff’s mother decided to punish him by taking away his allowance. Jeff was quite upset about this, because he was planning to buy an iPhone with his allowance. He decided to get this iPhone by shoplifting from a nearby discount store; however, Jeff got caught stealing. The police were called, and Jeff was formally processed in the juvenile justice system and adjudicated as a delinquent. Afterward, many of Jeff’s teachers, other kids at school, and neighbors knew he was caught stealing and processed through the juvenile justice system.

Initially, Jeff thought that he had made a “stupid” decision to steal the iPhone. He never considered himself a thief; he stole the iPhone in large part because he was angry that his mother took his allowance. However, after Jeff realized that many people around him, such as teachers, schoolmates, and neighbors, considered him a thief, he started to identify himself as a thief as well. So Jeff decided that if people were going to consider him a thief, he might as well start stealing more property. One evening, a neighbor left her garage door open. Jeff snuck in the garage and stole a bicycle. Identify some key features of labeling theory (e.g., self-fulfilling prophecy, secondary deviance, offense escalation) in this scenario.

### THINK ABOUT IT:

1. What was the pivotal point when Jeff decided to engage in more criminal behavior?
2. How does labeling theory designate this “pivotal point?”
3. What policies/programs should be implemented to address criminal/delinquent behavior that results from being labeled?