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CONSUMPTION RESTRICTION IN A TOTAL CONTROL INSTITUTION:

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH IN A MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON

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Abstract

The marketing and public policy field has enjoyed a lengthy history studying consumer decision making under conditions of abundance, but less effort has been dedicated to learning about restrictions to choice, especially as imposed by institutional forces. To help fill this gap in the literature, we offer an ethnographic investigation of a maximum security prison conducted over an eighteen-month period using participatory action research (PAR). This environment is a total control institution where depersonalization and commoditization of 4000 men in its charge regularly occurs. Our findings reveal a complex relationship between these processes and various psychological reactions and resulting behaviors that are acted out within and outside licit and illicit marketplaces of the prison. Discussion of theoretical implications of consumer constraint closes the manuscript, along with presentation of public policy implications.

Keywords: choice behavior; consumption restrictions; public policy and prison reform.

> He said that he understands that prison is not supposed to be a place of luxury and comfort, *"but damn, it doesn't have to be this m****r-f*****g miserable!"* He stated, *"How does society expect to rehabilitate someone to be released back into society under these oppressing conditions?"* [Inmate Interviewer describing reactions of incarcerated man]

Introduction

Consumer choice is one of the most studied phenomena in the larger marketing literature, allowing scholars to discern emotional and psychological drivers and reactions to interactions within the marketplace (Luce, Bettman, and Payne 2001). While a majority of this literature evaluates consumer choice architectures and decision-making in situations of abundant choice (see Chernev and Hamilton 2009), we seek to expand our comprehension of the less understood context of consumption under *severe restriction* (Botti et al. 2008). Markus and Schwartz (2010, p. 344) aptly define choice as "what enables each person to pursue precisely those objects and activities that best satisfy his or her own preferences within the limits of his or her resources," but they also recognize that "there is bound to be someone, somewhere, who is deprived of the opportunity to pursue something of personal value." Thus, we seek to specifically learn more about how consumers react to situations of systemic restricted choice induced by a total control institution that negates the kinds of freedom implicit in most of our current research models.

Under ordinary circumstances, consumers view some behaviors as freer than others, and they view actions of other people in a similar fashion. For example, Baumeister et al. (2008) posit that freedom exists when consumers believe that they have more than one option in the marketplace. This statement implies that choice behavior also is exercised by choosing *not* to act in a particular situation, such as foregoing purchasing today because greater utility is predicted for purchases in the future. Such a notion dovetails with additional consumer behavior studies that tap into reactions to consumption options (or lack thereof), categorizing resulting feelings by

level of felt control within the situation (see Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989 for more details on this research).

Of course, consumer restrictions exist in a variety of consumption situations such as those characterized by limited product availability (Folkes 1984), legal prohibitions (Davidson 2003), physical disabilities (Baker et al. 2005), and low literacy (Viswanathan, Rosa, and Harris 2005). In these cases, consumers find themselves facing restricted options and/or opportunities that they must navigate or circumvent to reach consumption goals. Our focus is beyond such experiences and is consonant with Bone, Christensen, and Williams (2014), who acknowledge that systemic restrictions on choice behavior, exemplified by constraints imposed by poverty and race, place the locus of control in decision making on providers – not consumers. Their research supports previous findings and shows, for example, that retail establishments in poverty communities continue to charge higher prices and offer lower quality goods than in affluent neighborhoods (Andreasen 1975, 1993; Hill 2002; Hill and Gaines 2007), with price differentials as high as 10-15% for everyday items (Talukdar 2008). Additional scholarship continues to look at restrictions associated with impoverished material circumstances but now incorporates non-Western cultures and base-of-the-pyramid consumers (Martin and Hill 2012; Viswanathan, Rosa, and Ruth 2010).

Given this background, the intended contributions of this paper include: (1) providing an emic perspective of consumption under restriction in a total control institution that has important policy implications for prison reform, (2) using participatory action research methods to enhance this emic perspective in ways that serve people engaged in the research process who reside in the total control institution, and (3) developing citizen-based, policy insights on the resourcefulness, survival strategies, and identity-management techniques of humans under conditions of severe

restriction. We present next the ideology of consumption restriction within total control institutions that frame the data collection, findings, and theoretical and policy advances.

Total Control Institutions and Severe Restriction

The most extensive forms of restriction may occur in what Goffman (1963) calls total-control institutions, exemplified by prisons, psychiatric hospitals, concentration camps, and other intensive forms of person-over-person control. For instance, individuals who are incarcerated in certain lock-down facilities face elimination of nearly all human rights as punishment for crimes committed (Conrad 1982). Early views of such treatment are often rooted in the stereotypes that incarcerated persons are "outlaws," and are not protected by the same legal rights as law-abiding citizens (Vogelman 1968). Accordingly, inmates are stripped of most freedoms in the outside world and transition into a life of complete control and regulation, thus leading to heightened levels of psychological distress and subsequent behavioral reactions.

Our understandings of psychological and physical reactions to control within the prison system are rooted in seminal work of Sykes (1958). Introducing the five pains of imprisonment, Sykes highlights that, despite the transition away from brute physical force and abuse, modern imprisonment practices of restriction and deprivation generate equally damaging effects, thus contributing to the destructive inmate culture (Riley 2002). Categorized through five distinct forms of deprivation (liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy, and security), the driving forces of detrimental psychological effects experienced by incarcerated individuals is revealed. Accordingly, deprivation of needs associated with Maslow's hierarchy (1954, 1970) severely tarnishes an individual's sense of self, subsequently leading to reactive behaviors to both rectify felt injustices and regain a semblance of one's own former being.

For example, subjugation to confinement and isolation (i.e., loss of liberty) coupled with abrupt and often ill-prepared introduction to a world of minimal access to material possessions and sexual contact (i.e., loss of goods and services, and heterosexual relationships), aggravate the individual's sense of what has been previously learned to be a *human* (Sykes 1958). Further, new threats to one's sense of individuality and autonomy, as well as personal safety and security (both elements often taken for granted in the free world) contribute to a variety of emotional consequences, most commonly including anxiety, depression, severe anger, various phobic reactions, hallucinations, and lowered self-esteem (Brodsky and Scogin 1988; Grassian 1983; Grassian and Friedman 1986; Scott and Gendreau 1969).

Broader applied literature corroborates Sykes' assertions, suggesting that individuals faced with restrictions – of items and of privileges – experience more reactive tendencies than persons with greater freedoms (Miller 1994). Further, imprisoned individuals leave confinement with greater dysfunctional tendencies than when they entered (Haney 2006). Citing a substantial effect on personality, Sykes (1958) argues that destruction of one's sense of self occurs through dehumanizing practices imposed by prison systems and operationalized by corrections workers. Accordingly, it may not be the segregation of prisoners from their external communities causing the predominance of negative psychological reactions, but, rather, restrictions placed on inmates *in* prisons that have the greatest impact (Bone et al. 2014; Brodsky and Scogin 1988; Miller and Young 1997).

This same literature reveals that restrictions and concomitant reactions to processes of dehumanization begin during intake at the start of existence behind bars and continue unabated for the duration of sentences (Haslam 2006). Coined from the military-industrial complex, the parallel prison-industrial complex (PIC) seeks commoditization and negation of personal identity

for inmates and their use as cheap labor to fuel capitalistic society (Magnani 2011), and it is considered a principal force behind inhumane treatment of incarcerated individuals. Industries are created within prisons themselves, through which inmates provide labor at sub-minimum wages and produce goods for companies such as Microsoft and Victoria's Secret (Smith and Hattery 2006; also see Pelaez 2013). Further, critics of the prison system argue that development of industries *encourages* higher rates of arrest and longer sentences in order to meet production demands, citing a six fold increase in the U.S. penal population between the years of 1972 and 2000 (Pettit and Western 2004). Thus, inmates are stripped of ordinary rights within prisons, and they are forced to adapt to an environment that negates status as human for others profitability.

Of course, proponents of the prison system exist, citing substantial reforms that may have lessened the barbaric nature of prison practices, as well as developmental opportunities afforded to prisoners of good status. Some educational programs offer GED completion, college credit, and vocational training focusing on skill development (Stephan 1997), and several facilities have an open policy for external communications with family (National Institute of Corrections 2002). Such opportunities provide inmates with greater abilities to move beyond the implied detriments of incarceration and develop skills necessary for rehabilitation and assimilation back into society at the conclusion of their sentences. Even for those serving long terms or life sentences, state and federal legislative actions of this ilk benefit incarcerated individuals through types of protection actions that appear consonant with important needs including religious practice (Fischer 2001) and access to health care (Pérez, Ro, and Treadwell 2009).

However, proponents of the internal prison labor industry argue for narrowly-construed job and skill development to meet their purposes, exacerbating other detrimental outcomes that incarceration has on inmates and their family systems (Smith and Hattery 2010). Since

incarceration changes inmates in ways that are a barrier to any expectation of normal living after one's sentence has been completed, including a steady drain on financial, human, and social capital, the inmate is often unable to sustain a normal sense of self due to the inability to earn a living wage, advance professionally, or contribute back to the larger community. Few deny that in the end inmates are stripped of human rights within the prison system and, given severity of restrictions, experience behavioral modifications that are used for physical and emotional survival and coping rather than any type of positive rehabilitation and renewal (Dupre 2007).

Our goal is to advance an understanding of consumption restrictions and their impact on reactions and subsequent behaviors through first-hand accounts of life in a maximum security prison. The site for this eighteen-month ethnography is presented next and is grounded in work by Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008) on participatory action research so as to yield a more complete portrayal of conditions and their consequences as they pertain to the definition of the self and resulting consumption. Given products play a pivotal role in development and maintenance of our identities, their absence or severe restriction may hinder self-definition and self-continuity (Kleine and Baker 2004). While the U.S. prison system has experienced many policy reforms since Sykes' (1958) original scholarship, our findings show striking similarities to emotional consequences of depersonalization and commoditization experienced historically by incarcerated men, causing a host of reactions that have short-term and long-term consequences. Implications for theory and understanding severely restricted consumer choice are an important outcome of this study, along with a novel way of considering incarceration and prison reform.

Methodological Considerations

Maximum Security Prison at Gramercy (MSPG) is an imposing structure located in a working-class town 35 miles from a major city. Designed to house about 3,300 men, it typically operates beyond capacity by several hundred prisoners. The 60+ acre walled complex lies in the middle of the grounds and contains several cellblocks, along with a variety of service units for food, spiritual needs, medical care, education, and work. The average age of the men is 37 years old, with a racial balance of 50% black, 38% white, 11% Hispanic, and 1% listed as other. The dominant licit occupation before arrival is unskilled laborer, the mean reading level is below 8th grade, and over 40% did not graduate from high school or have a diploma equivalent. Men arrive shackled in the back of police vans after stays of up to one year or more in a local jail while awaiting sentencing. The intake process follows a strict routine and consists of psychological testing, removal of possessions including clothing, a cavity check for contraband, assignment of a number that is used to refer to them instead of their names, and provision of prison garb and toiletries of state issue. The men are also asked where they want their bodies delivered at their deaths, emphasizing the unlikelihood of parole.

The men who were active participants in the research process are enrolled in an on-site degree-granting program offered by a local private university. The majority were sentenced to life terms between their 14th and 19th birthdays without the possibility of reprieve unless their original verdicts are overturned or they receive pardons from their governor. In many cases, murder occurred and these men were found partially or wholly responsible. Thus, few of the limited services available to the larger prison community are provided for them because of the institutional prerogative that such opportunities should be given to men with a greater likelihood

of release. For a variety of reasons, the men enrolled in this program refused to accept their fates both inside and outside the institution, and they actively sought ways to advance personally and professionally. A typical illustration is petitioning externally to be allowed to receive GED (graduate equivalency diploma) training, followed by similar actions to enter the AA or BS university program. Completion of the former, because of poor literacy/numeracy skills, takes two-to-four years; completion of the latter takes ten-to-twenty years. Approximately 1.5% of the prison population has attained this status, revealing extent of restriction. However, demographics of these students and the larger prison population are nearly identical.

Data Collection

The process of discovery passed through three phases that were co-created by one of the researchers and the men. Tenets of ethnography where researchers occupy a locally appropriate role (Hill 1991), as well as principles of participatory action research (PAR) where community members are invited into research on their terms for the purposes of consciousness-raising and institutional change (Ozanne and Saatcioglu 2008), guided this project. The sensitive nature of the men's subordinate position in the prison system required an initial period of trust building (phase 1), while phase 2 involved a shift in the power relationship away from the traditional researcher role to that of facilitator and active participant in the process. The final phase (3) required reversal of leadership, whereby the men used data and interpretations to press for collective agendas in formal settings and initiate novel methods of advocacy.

Phase 1. The first phase extended over a period of several months and coincided with attendance by the men in a course taught by the researcher titled "Marketing and Society," which included readings on poverty and the marketing system. Trust developed over time, and the men were eager to explore nuances of the material world as it pertained to their search for goods and

services, emphasizing criminal activity as one avenue to accumulation of wealth. Additionally, the men came to believe that the researcher had a sincere interest and appreciation for their lives and, therefore, several offered up poems, short books, and novels written that spoke to issues discussed in class (see Table 1 for an example), as well as their personal experiences within the prison system. The men also used this time to develop a new vocabulary consistent with the empowerment tenet of participatory action research in order to describe how and why they felt compelled to commit felonious crimes.

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Table 1 about here

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Their final assignment within Phase 1 involved description and discussion of the licit and illicit market-based exchange options within the prison system under the framework of restricted consumption. As the relationship between the researcher and men matured, students took control of the project, and each person developed an individual model reflecting his understanding of current prison practices[1]. There was much variety in final documents, suggesting that the men differed in perspectives and felt comfortable writing their versions of consumption experiences. Nonetheless, models of consumption behavior had the same or similar components: sources and intentions of restrictions, resulting affective states and their consequences, licit and alternative illicit markets within the institution, and various coping strategies that sought to regain individual and collective dignity.

Phase 2. The second phase came on the heels of new legislation that was introduced in the state assembly that would give incarcerated men ability to engage in outside work, which

[1] All members of the research group worked to ensure that any details provided would not be traceable to persons vulnerable to institutional retribution (Hill 1995).

suggested more PAR opportunities. As a consequence, the researcher and the men explored the prospect of starting an inmate-run marketing research firm from prison that would serve the vast nonprofit community in their state. To help develop necessary skills, the men began a new data collection effort with the larger prison population on restricted consumption that utilized dialogic methods, requiring observational, interview, and action research abilities necessary for future work. The goal of these efforts was to develop a comprehensive understanding of restrictions experienced by the inmates, with a deeper level analysis on consequences across the incarcerated population. It is important to recognize that the men did not discount their crimes or society's right to seek retribution. Yet, extent and nature of their punishments were subject to continual criticism for lack of humanity and resulting reflections within one's construal of self-identity. It is this emic perspective that permeates the rest of the paper.

Training began with classic PAR-oriented texts about process (Herr and Anderson 2005) and interaction (Bohm 2004), as the men struggled to find the most appropriate ways to capture their perspectives of restricted consumption among the collective inmate population. To enhance both written and cognitive skills, the men were also encouraged to keep individual journals that allowed them to record thoughts, feelings, and impressions as time passed and findings emerged. No attempt was made to reduce the sense of subjectivity of such writings, and, instead, they were encouraged to seek an understanding that resonated regardless of the multitude of viewpoints that existed across constituencies within and outside the prison. Criterion for soundness of these findings was that they ring true to the men who provided these data. Procedures based on the protocol offered by Herr and Anderson (2005) were eventually negotiated and utilized.

To actively collect additional data, the men were organized in research teams based on their blocks of residence and spent several weeks working together to come up with descriptions

of consumption and exchange in prison life that could be subject to verification. They practiced interviewing skills with one another and in the class, seeking ways to introduce the topic without influencing the reactions of cellmates. Out of concern that the study could be viewed as another example of restricted choice, the men went out of their way to describe the project as voluntary and gave interviewees considerable time to agree to participate. If they agreed, they were told that all information provided would not be traceable back to them in order to protect privacy as well as the possibility of retribution. As a consequence, descriptions of "informants" that are typical of many qualitative investigations were deemed inappropriate. Extensive notes were taken, with discussions opened by grand-tour questions, allowing interviewees to choose the direction of conversations. They were given as much time as they needed and many interviews had multiple sessions. Based on Creswell (2007), each team got together several times over the course of three months to refine and revise developing perspectives of restricted consumption and its consequences as new data and ideas emerged.

Phase 3. In the final phase, the researcher moved into the role of advisor as the men organized their findings for the purposes of advocacy. The end product is three interrelated themes that portray their consumption circumstances as existing in an oppressive environment designed to negate their status as human beings (referred to subsequently as "humanness") and, intentionally or unintentionally, cause the men to suffer a series of emotional consequences that drive both functional and dysfunctional behaviors (Freire 2000). After data collection was done to the men's satisfaction, they turned all materials, approximately 1500 pages of text, over to the researcher. These materials were read into a voice-recognition software program to be condensed and so that original data, often written in the men's own hand, could be removed from inquiry and no longer subject to identification. The resulting transcription of over 750 pages was subject

to final thematic analysis, along with 200 hours of *in situ* observational work by the primary researcher. Findings were presented to representatives of the commissary supplier and state government in order to support consciousness-raising and positive change with Participatory Action Research dictates. Table 2 provides a summary of how the three phases evolved.

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Table 2 about here

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Data Interpretation

The interpretation of the data moved beyond use of junior collaborators as expressed by Wallendorf and Arnould (1991), and is more akin to the PAR model of empowerment advanced by Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008). As a result, the researcher co-developed a democratic process with the men that encouraged them to understand situations and to confront systemic challenges within the prison. Several themes emerged during the interpretation process as the men came to articulate and challenge inequitable distribution of power and impoverishment of resources in the institution. As is common with ethnographic inquiry, data collection and interpretation operated as a continuous and seamless process (Baker and Hill 2013). Thus, individual, team, block, and systemic notions of exchange advanced from one to the next by building upon each other and recognizing the integrity of each perspective. As interpretation progressed, all levels of thematic development were revisited on multiple occasions to ensure that their impact on any emerging understanding was fully appreciated.

Voices of the men themselves provide for deeper comprehension of their situations and are utilized throughout the entirety of this paper. It is unethical and a violation of their privacy to provide identifying characteristics; however, we do give research position details about sources

of all verbatim comments. As noted in the follow section, men are presented as *co-researchers* (i.e., written remarks from thirty-five individuals involved in this research that are contained in reflections in personal journals), and *interviewers* (i.e., comments by the same thirty-five men from materials written during or after interviews with individuals on their blocks). Others are referred to as *interviewees* (350 men not engaged in the research enterprise but residing at MSPG and interviewed for this project). It is through the use of PAR methodology that both the men and research team involved in data collection were able to accurately understand and interpret complexities of the prison system and, more importantly, emotional and consumption reactions of the inmates.

Outcomes were negotiated with the men from the beginning of interactions and continued until the final written document was completed. Every possible avenue for input from the prison population was considered, and the men went out of their way to ask permission to discuss this topic with persons on their blocks that were less familiar or demonstrative. Once interviews were completed and the men began the process of organizing and interpreting data, sharing of insights and possible meanings occurred while seeking evidence of the accuracy of this understanding. Further, the larger prison population was made aware of presentations to external powerbrokers and the final paper that was submitted for publication. Finally, these findings continue to be used to advance new degree granting programs and create novel solutions to intractable problems of incarcerated life.

As implemented, this methodology benefited the men at MSPG in several ways. For example, the first part of the investigatory process was designed to teach the men new language that allowed them to comprehend and communicate how restricted consumption and its various consequences occurred in MSPG. As noted previously, this design permitted them to accept

responsibility for criminal behavior and incarceration without agreeing that sanctions or actions by prison workers were appropriate. Additionally, the collection and dissemination of data and findings led to a second level of empowerment. Communicating this work to individuals whose actions impacted the quality of their consumer existences was seen as especially gratifying to the men and served to maintain a limited sense of positive self-identification as a listened-to member of society. Most importantly, the outsiders were struck by their thinking and articulation, leading to new, positive opinions of the men and their capabilities. A third level of empowerment is the continuing collaboration between the men and researcher that ensured a commitment to advance their situations over time.

Thematic Results

There are many ways that restricted consumption manifests in MSPG, which often have dramatic impacts on the lives of these incarcerated men. As noted earlier, the process of intake removes any sense of individuation - through dress and most previous possessions - as the men are stripped of material things that marked earlier lives and fuller personhood (see Sykes 1958 for another example). These experiences are viewed as dehumanizing and continue unabated during stays in this institution, as additional restrictions on consumption are imposed that further take away humanness, constrain choice behaviors, and negate attempts to regain personhood. The men react with varied psychological responses and coping strategies that include self-blame and disparaging others, and self-imposed isolation and community bonding. These reactions have consequences on consumption, as the men turn to self-medication through drugs, alcohol, and unhealthful foods, hustling (buying and selling) in licit and illicit markets in ways that mirror

their previous lives, and seeking to regain some self-respect and advancing their individual identities (Figure 1 provides a summary). We discuss these three interrelated and overlapping themes below.

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Figure 1 about here

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Depersonalization and Commodification through Restriction

There has been limited investigation within marketing and public policy research of depersonalization and consumption. Only a few studies of subpopulations such as the homeless describe the impact of negative labels in ways that significantly impede ability to navigate the marketplace (Hill and Stamey 1990). In some cases, individuals are commoditized and subjected to treatment like work animals or expendable and replaceable machines such as European Jewry during the Holocaust (Hirschman and Hill 2000; Klein and Hill 2008). The theory behind depersonalization and commoditization is credited in our literature to Kopytoff (1986), who described changes in the social value of things and how material objects move in and out of commodity states and into states of meaningful possessions via the process of singularization. Hirschman and Hill (2000) show that this transformation includes person to *thing* and is caused by removal of former identities, reduction in status relative to others, and restriction in abilities to navigate their natural and material worlds.

In a consistent fashion, depersonalization and commoditization have demoralizing effects on the men in MSPG. They typically begin with realization that they have exchanged monikers of personal identities for numbers that signify the impending transition (see Skyes 1958 for a similar finding). Dehumanization processes associated with number assignment propagate the

notion to prison workers that “inmates” are no longer members of society in good standing, and it also signals to the men to drop any expectation of humane and civil treatment (also see Dupre 2007). Commoditization begins when the men come to realize that imprisonment is part of a larger industrial enterprise that benefits from their long-term stay. Through what was referred to earlier as the prison-industrial complex, the men end up working at menial labor for a few cents an hour (Figure 2 provides a portrayal that captures many nuances of the men’s perspective).

Figure 2 about here

Consider the following remarks on depersonalization and commoditization by the men as examples of this finding.

[*Interviewee*] “My situation is purely punitive I feel like the people who are in control believe that I’ve forfeited my rights. I’m not considered a human being. I’m considered an animal.”

[*Interviewer*] “With that in mind how does that make you feel?”

[*Interviewee*] “Less than human; to be dehumanized is worse than my actual physical incarceration.”

The men have individually and as a community of the imprisoned considered why this condition is so pervasive. Without negating reasons for their incarcerations, they believe that they are caught in a web of institutional prerogatives that uses them as fuel to serve its interests.

[*Interviewer*] “How do you think the system perceives you?”

[*Interviewee*] “I’m not human, I’m money. I’m a number.”

[*Co-researcher*] When the incarceration of men and women becomes big business, then they become nothing more than a commodity to be utilized for that purpose.

Emotional consequences of such dehumanization in a total control institution without expectation of change are expressed next as affective "numbing" and hopelessness, especially among those serving indefinite sentences.

[*Interviewer*] He stated that prison is a place that numbs your feelings and emotions, and desensitizes you as [a] human being.

[*Co-researcher*] Hopelessness seems to thrive in this environment because I truly think it is designed that way. We see that all around us every single day in this place and it's almost like a contagious disease.

Depersonalization and commoditization are operationalized through exertion of control by prison employees, using constraints placed on the men. While this control over choices occurs with every aspect of their existences within the prison system, from when to sleep, when to rise, when to eat, when to shower, and when to work, consistent with both Conrad (1982) and Skyes (1958), its greatest impact is on inmates' ability to consume goods and services. These systemic restrictions are viewed as pervasive and emanating from the prison-industrial complex as noted, which is centralized in operations of the department of corrections. Such restrictions are seen as part of a larger design of centralized control by the provider to reduce all options until choice is essentially eliminated (Bone et al. 2014). Since these tactics support their dehumanization and potential compliance, concern for negative consequences are overlooked by prison workers.

Perceptions of the men are that various internal and external constituencies have the ability to dictate need satisfaction without their input, and that depersonalization processes and

incarceration rules and procedures result in a total lack of interest in who they are and what they desire. The first comments that follow by one co-researcher reveal their lack of agency, while the second comments by another co-researcher show resulting contempt for the men.

> [*Co-researcher*] In simplest terms, a prisoner's needs, wants or wishes are provided for or bestowed by those who control the environment. Any and all can be withheld on the basis of what "controllers" decide is realistic or pragmatic.

> [*Co-researcher*] As a result of the stranglehold held over the [prisoner as] consumer, power is restricted. Preferred choices are minimized which creates a display of disrespect shown by the corporate umbrella of the department of corrections and the corporate activities beneath which provide the products.

The end result is a contracting set of consumption options that may limit choice to having something or having nothing. This situation goes beyond prison-provided goods and services and includes selections available in the only operating retail outlet referred to as the "commissary." The next two sets of remarks demonstrate the sense of futility about choices and the perceived negative consequences, respectively.

> [*Co-researcher*] Prisoners are only presented with two options: buy or do not buy commissary. Prisoners' opinions are minimized by the system in which they belong due to this lack of avenues in which their input can be heard.

> [*Interviewee*] "Being a vegan, I need a daily ration of fresh fruit and vegetables. There is no variety of foods and rarely do I get a balanced meal. The absence of such causes atrophy. It also results in a lack of energy because of the lack of B vitamins. I lack fatty acids, some of

which comes from soy oils which is one source of Omega 3 and Omega 6. The protein in my diet is completely deficient. It consists mainly of starch which causes the pancreas to secrete a lot more insulin than it should. Then there is the overcooking of the vegetables which destroys the needed nutrients."

Such constraints on choice by the institution over incarcerated men are utilized as a means of further breaking down their sense of power and autonomy (Skyes 1958). As expressed within the second quote above, the inmate's vegan self-concept was not only threatened, but it was also disregarded by mandates of the institutional processes because of his defined identity as an "inmate." Despite attempts to maintain some semblance of a former self, inmates are provided with limited, if any, consumption freedoms. Accordingly, we find such control mechanisms are used for the purpose of identity destruction and commoditization, as inmates are no longer considered human, but rather "part of the system."

Men who seek to pursue satisfaction of their consumptive needs in ordinary ways are often rebuffed by rules of conduct and their enforcement by prison workers. Rationale for this negation is, in part, associated with their status as less-than-human, which removes ordinary citizen rights to better treatment, especially within the marketplace of goods and services, and any obligation to provide it (see Haney 2006 for additional support). However, another reason is actions on their behalf by staff would elevate their humanness and make other aspects of prison life, from labor at $.19 to $.42 per hour to placement in solitary confinement for 23 hours per day, incongruent and harder to enforce. Thus, rigidity of fraternization policies, which allow for private conversations that only last for 30 seconds or less, disallows a greater awareness of individuality between the men and prison employees.

Consider two areas of consumption that are at the most basic levels of need—healthcare and food. Few goods and services are more central to our sense of humanity and desire to lead engaged, fulfilling lives. Yet, mirroring the findings of Sykes (1958), denial of such necessities persists, in an effort to maintain depersonalization as noted.

> [*Interviewee*] "For example, I haven't had my annual physical checkup in 4 years, and we are supposed to have one yearly. Also, I recently found out that we can only have our dental checkup once every two years. So that means no more annual checkups to make sure everything is alright."

> [*Interviewer*] The [man] spoke about the time when he and other inmates filed complaints to the administration here in regards to the unhealthy food products being responsible for the cause of health-related problems, and suggested that healthier products replace the unhealthy ones. He said that complaints fell on deaf ears and, in fact, none of the complainants received a response.

Negation of humanness is also likely to occur when the men attempt to rise above their circumstances and advance their lives. Not surprisingly, attempts to move beyond previous status through training, education, or other forms of enrichment, particularly if it elevates credentials beyond those of prison employees with whom they interact on a constant basis, resulted in both harassment and derision by these workers and treatment that makes further personal development more difficult. The first verbatim below reveals administrative passive aggression combined with a desire to keep them in their place. The second reaction is an active resistance in order to thwart personal development.

[*Interviewee*] "If you want a skill or some kind of rehabilitation you basically have to get it on your own. It seems like the administration don't really want prisoners to educate themselves or rehabilitate themselves because we are their meal ticket. It's like keeping your woman barefoot and pregnant."

[*Researcher*] One co-researcher explained to me how he was treated on the block when he asked for a pass to attend college classes. He stated that, "The guard told me I should not be allowed to get an education and would never receive recommendation for parole as a result."

Psychological Responses and Coping Mechanisms

The marketing and public policy fields have a lengthy history of looking at negative emotions and other psychological responses to choice difficulties (Luce, Bettman, and Payne 2001), with some relevant work based on the original research by Goffman (1963) of total control institutions that recognizes the impact of spoiled identities or social stigma from labels such as "mentally ill" or "prisoner" (Cornwell and Gabel 1996). Psychological reactions to lack of full human status and external control over options and opportunities to consume are broad and deep, and they are made up of a variety of healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms (Hill 1991; Hill and Stamey 1990) that help determine self-concepts and interactions with the social world. This stream of research intimates an interrelated set of psychological reactions and coping tactics that operate in this particular context as self-blame and disparaging others, isolation and emotional bonding, and seeking to advance personhood that manifests and evolves over time.

The use of self-blame and disparaging others as coping mechanisms for loss of consumer agency may seem like a dichotomous choice between accepting responsibility for their situations or placing responsibility on others within the criminal justice and/or prison systems. However,

the men are more refined in their judgments and perceive criminal behavior, sentences, and resulting punishments as distinctly different. In the first matter, they come to view previous behaviors as the end result of poor decision making by them as relatively young men. As a consequence, they realize over time that they ended up in prison because of actions that were originally under their control. However, recognizing their culpability and feeling a sense of remorse is not the same as believing that their punishments, and resulting lack of volition, are necessary or even fair. In fact, the men see tacit acceptance of guilt but disagreement over length and nature of their confinements and restrictions as a natural and important distinction in prison.

Thus, acknowledging responsibility for actions that got them there in the first place does not necessarily mean that they agree with consumption restrictions during incarceration. On one level, the men view punishments as unfair and representative of a socially-sanctioned servitude that benefits the prison-industrial complex rather than the men or larger society (Haney 2006).

> [*Interviewer*] He stated that he felt prison was nothing but a legalized form of modern day slavery. He felt that some people do belong in prison, but a majority of them don't. He felt that a lot of sentencing guidelines were unfair and specifically aimed at minorities, especially the powder [versus] crack cocaine laws. More than anything he felt that the entire legal system needed to be overhauled because of so many discrepancies, injustices and unfairness.

On another level, they recognize that ramifications of sentences and working conditions also negatively impact and victimize families and communities (Skyes 1958). Men in the system face internal conflict between one's identity (and accompanying role) as a prison inmate and the responsibility to provide for a family in the outside world. As expressed in the next quote, we found that the men often struggle with guilt that accompanies the mistakes of former selves.

> [*Interviewee*] "Some of the frustration is caused by the suffering you've caused your family by your incarceration, not being there when you're needed, for your children, wife, nieces, nephews, grandchildren. When you reflect on your life you see that, if you would've made different choices, your life would've been a whole lot different therefore the suffering you've caused wouldn't exist. Also, the fact that the sentence that I serve, a life sentence, means that I'll never get out of prison. Therefore I'll never be in a position to make amends."

Additionally, rules and tactics by prison employees increase physical and emotional isolation of the men. It begins on entry when new inmates are told that MSPG is a dangerous place and that they should avoid contact with people around them. This initial sense of a lack of connection is exacerbated by severe restrictions placed on the natural sharing of possessions with friends and family, who come less often and limit other forms of exchange like writing letters over time. Further, since services and goods such as electronic or Internet-based connections are unavailable and cell phones are prohibited, the ease of interaction provided by technology is not at their disposal. Thus, men eventually become isolated and may seek a place of refuge, early on avoiding perceived negative influences of prison life by ignoring their surroundings in favor of the company of their minds.

The next two sets of remarks reveal how initial orientation to life inside MSPG can lead to self-imposed isolation out of safety concerns, and how other-imposed isolation by prison staff causes visitations and sharing of products and possessions by family and friends to be more difficult than necessary due to regulations and poor treatment, respectively.

> [*Co-researcher*] Rookies [are] immediately indoctrinated into believing that prisoners are liars, manipulators, dangerous, always out to get over in some way. This is done by

seminars, videos, displaying of weapons and ancient stories of mass hysterias (riots, officer murders, stabbings, etc.).

[*Interviewer*] MSPG has taken advantage of these policies to maximize isolation. He (interviewee) feels that the underlying motive for this condition is increased control. Asked to cite specifics, he mentioned abolition of family day visits (once per year events during which family members were allowed to bring "goodies" in and visit under a more relaxed atmosphere), skyrocketing long distance telephone charges, the decrease in free postage from 10 letters to 8 per month (funding for free postage is taken from the inmate welfare fund, which is paid for through commissary purchases – our money, not taxpayer's), paperwork requirements which discourage visiting, and rude treatment of family and friends who visit. He feels that these factors, taken as a whole, are arbitrary and capricious impediments which serve to deny an inmate needed contact with the outside world.

Isolation is not always a function of prison mandates, but can also develop from a goal of self-preservation by particular individuals. As detailed in the quote below and consistent with Hirschman and Hill (2000), we found resistance on the part of some men to avoid being "like everyone else." Expressed here is need for the individual to maintain a self-concept consistent with that of the functioning society in the outside world, and not that of the criminal nature that permeates interactions and exchanges in the prison environment. He, and inmates like him, use separation from their immediate communities as a long-term strategy to maintain and stabilize their sense of self, despite the potential benefits of the milieu that surrounds them.

[*Co-researcher*] My journey through the travails of incarceration includes an assiduous, stubborn avoidance of negative influences. I do my utmost not to assimilate the mannerisms

> or speech patterns which might, either now or later, serve to identify me as a "con." This brand of concerted detachment finds definition in the fact that, although there are many whom I can greet and speak with cordially, my friends are few. Even these are regarded with a certain pessimism rooted in the "survival imperative," and I will not hesitate to distance myself from anyone who reveals himself as a threat to my capacity for remaining "me." Harsh? Uncompromising? Dissociative? You betcha! But, mine is a mode of conduct which, I'm convinced, will best mitigate the impact of this experience.

Despite the tendency by some to withdrawal almost entirely from fellow inmates within the prison, men also cope with the permanency of their environment by embracing other men as the only realistic option to sharing among family and friends. Like with Skyes (1958), such men realize that needs for exchange of emotional support and physical contact also are essential, and build alternative, trusting relationships that sustain them during the many difficult circumstances that they encounter on a daily basis. These connections are illustrated in the remarks below.

> [*Co-researcher*] One of the most prevailing thoughts under these circumstances when it comes to the physical is sexual. But you have other needs that are physical that express intimacy [like] handshakes, embraces. These things show love where love is needed. Under the circumstances of prison your physical needs are restricted. This in turn forces you to compensate to make do. What this in turn does, it allows you to hold on to your dignity.

Most germane, loss of control over fundamental aspects of consumption options that the men regularly face is attributed to the perceived lack of respect for personhood and subsequent restrictions. While hopelessness is a possible psychological reaction noted previously, many men also eventually expend enormous energy seeking to regain their humanness. Accordingly, while they are powerless to change the prison system and its focus on punishment-through-restriction,

they are able to find ways of sustaining some inkling of hope for a better future by "rejecting the rejector" (Skyes 1958, p. 287). A common route is through religion, which is experienced or consumed in multiple forms and diverse faiths, and from inside and outside the institution. The men eventually recognize the need to evolve how they view and respond to the world. Such personal development requires openness to different perspectives on their existences as the first set of comments suggests. A turn towards religion and its mores may serve as the basis of such change as the second set of comments indicates.

> [*Co-researcher*] I know that if these men can shift their attitudes and mindsets it will go a long way in helping them to make the necessary changes needed to change their circumstances. I read somewhere that "thoughts become things," and "the mind transforms destinies." So with this being said change first must come from within before without.

> [*Interviewer*] Of course, he felt that involvement with his congregation was a beneficial element for personal growth for those who embraced [religious] doctrine sincerely, and judging by his capacity for deeper concerns I'm inclined to agree that religion is a force for personal improvement for some. Certainly, judging by this [person's] acceptance among the majority of the population, he has found peace.

In addition to religion, another way to improve sense of self is by educational services and advancement, which can be part of formal programs such as GED training or informally through alignments with educated men who went to extreme measures to gain access to degree programs. Such learning not only brings new skills, it also simultaneously teaches new ways of understanding themselves and their lives. The men typically had poor experiences during the later years of previous schooling, so it takes much courage as well as tenacity to enter into and

complete the few available education programs. Thus, efforts and successes are experienced as particularly rewarding (see Viswanathan, Sridharan, Gau, and Ritchie 2009 for another context).

> [*Interviewee*] "I didn't know how to read and write when I entered the system, so I enrolled in school. With the help of a friend I met in prison, I was able to obtain my G.E.D. in 2.5 years. I then went further by taking college courses. I became a literacy tutor and later was certified as a Literacy Instructor. Tutoring made me feel good about myself. I felt like I was part of the solution and not the problem."
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> [*Interviewer*] The last thing he mentioned was self-worth. He feels this is important to him and achieves this through work, how he carries himself and education… He is currently enrolled in a collegiate theology program that the chapel offers.

Consumption Consequences and Behaviors

Consumption under severe restriction that negates personhood results in a number of self- and other-destructive, as well as empowering, consumer behaviors. For example, Ozanne, Hill, and Wright (1998) found that young men from poverty communities have limited opportunities to purchase needed or desired commodities and used property crimes to gain necessary resources to conspicuously consume while thumbing their noses at the larger material society. However, they eventually were caught and faced incarceration and loss of important connections to the outside world. Viswanathan, Rosa, and Ruth (2010) reveal amazing resilience and adaptability to new shopping strategies by poor Indian women so as to improve exchange relationships with the marketplace. However, their quality of life can only advance so far relative to the affluence that exists in more developed nations. Thus, despite important research on impoverishment, most scholarship has placed less emphasis on consumption *responses* to restrictive circumstances

(Botti et al. 2008). We find here that the men respond to the restrictive environment by molding consumption behaviors in two ways; (1) succumbing to intensity of their surroundings through increased consumption of drugs, alcohol, and unhealthful foods as a form of self-medication, and (2) embracing opportunities and leadership roles to develop illicit marketing systems that mirror their previous street lives.

Adjusting to a life focused on depersonalization and severe restriction often drives the men to engage in consumption behaviors that provide short-term relief but have long-term negative repercussions. An illustration is the use of alcohol and street drugs consistent with previous existences. There are a number of ways that these substances are either produced or acquired in MSPG, with distribution through jail-house "merchants" and "stores" that surface as entrepreneurial ventures on each of the blocks (more discussion provided later). Access to illicit substances is viewed by the men as detrimental, enabling extended detachment from realities of their lives and continuously influencing cognitions, feelings, and actions for weeks, months, or years, inevitably reducing their focus on more developmental activities and positive coping strategies. The men not only seek respite in illegal products, but they also escape through legal foods - widely referred to as "junk" due to low nutritional value – which are used to create a sense of temporary calm despite the full realization of eventual harm to overall mental and physical health.

The following verbatim remarks demonstrate how the aperture of the men is widened about consumption possibilities as they become increasingly aware of alternative sources of goods and services. They also reveal perceptions of why certain substances are used to self-medicate despite health difficulties.

[*Co-researcher*] The bottom line is: A prisoner's needs, wants or wishes are attainable only with respect to what he knows is possible within a particular set of constraints under which he is confined.

[*Co-researcher*] Junk food is addictive. Jail is boring and stressful, and boredom, stress, and the lack of right foods to eat compel some people to self-medicate through eating junk. Empty calories and simple sugars seem to accommodate moods, however temporarily. To imply or ask that a person should go "cold turkey" and stop buying addictive foods is like asking a heroin addict to stop using dope instantly. It can lead to withdrawals and other adverse effects, e.g. diabetic coma.

The men quickly come to understand that the formal system of exchange, from public provision of goods and services to the commissary, is primarily responsive to needs of third parties such as guards, politicians, voters, and suppliers, without much emphasis on needs and desires of the incarcerated men, similar to experiences of the ethnic minority studied by Bone, Christensen, and Williams (2014). Such failure to meet the men's ongoing consumption desires leads, over time, to rejection of the formal exchange system and use of an underground informal economy operated by these incarcerated men. Part of the problem is a lack of quality and variety across venues (as expressed above), but an additional difficulty is the inability to earn sufficient incomes at formal jobs that pay between 19 and 42 cents an hour for five hours a day, five days a week employment. A well-known outcome is an underground, thriving marketplace that yields a wide range of informal jobs and accommodates needs that include services like hair-cutting and basic medical care, and goods such as unavailable foods or larger quantities of items for storage that are disallowed by the prison system. Certain men become proficient at obtaining various

materials and ingredients to ply their trades as merchants, and open their cells at different times to operate as storefronts. Products such as cigarettes still are employed as a medium of exchange, but other goods also function in a similar capacity.

Thus, one reason for development of illicit markets is supply of better products at lower prices and at more convenient times and places than available through the formal prison system. The next two comments demonstrate tensions around the use of formal versus alternative market venues. The rationale surrounding the selection of one versus the other suggests lack of choice is consistent with the restriction orientation of this study (Botti et al. 2008).

> [*Interviewee*] "If it wasn't for the guys hustling the food on the side I would starve in here depending on administration to satisfy my needs. Commissary sells a bunch of junk food that will cause a whole lot of medical problems. I have enough of those problems already. However, I'm still forced to buy from commissary in order to supplement food."

> [*Interviewer*] Since we can only buy one [item] at a time from commissary [one must be turned in to get a new one], he buys as many as he can on the black market. For this and other reasons (all purchasing related) he keeps tobacco handy despite not being a smoker. He also buys food in bulk from kitchen workers – oatmeal, peanut butter. This is a cheap way to keep his stomach filled when what is served is insufficient.

The artistic creativity and entrepreneurial inventiveness of the men come alive in this alternative marketplace, allowing for the development of new skills from cooking to drawing to "lawyering." Few of the basic ingredients or component parts necessary to make these items or perform these services are readily available, and the men must go to great lengths to provide quality goods that attract continuing flows of customers (see first set of remarks below). While

the dominant reason for such provision is raising personal supplies of capital, it also serves to foster community cohesion and development (see second set of remarks below).

> [*Interviewer*] Now he must be resourceful. “Who would’ve ever thought,” he says, “that putting two pieces of metal hooked to a plugged extension cord in water would heat up.” It’s contrary to everything he was taught growing up. “The tools we use in here,” he says, “are nuts.” Little pieces of scrap he would throw out on the street are now screwdrivers. He created an AC in his cell by placing a bag of ice in back of his mini fan bought from the commissary.

> [*Co-researcher*] Many of the men learn their roles as men by providing a helpful hand or giving their fellow prisoner some aid or assistance. This can be the development many missed. Men in any community are always helping and constantly improving the conditions that surround them. There does not seem to be any difference in that drive to live as men. I might add this has a very important impact on the men’s health, emotional, and spiritual needs. When men are compelled to function in a world that alleviates their responsibility and creates new objectives, it removes some or most of the real purposes men are designed to do.

At its core, the men are able to articulate that the licit exchange system was part of the control-and-contain tactics of the prison that ultimately work to restrict consumption (see similar patterns in Skyes 1958). Seeking need fulfillment within the illicit exchange system was one way to exert personhood and maintain an inherent self-concept consistent with what they believe it means to be human. Though the men face a lack of variety and authority to do more than just release some pressure associated with subjugation, they manage to find solace in ability to

pursue innovative and entrepreneurial ventures beyond the strict dictates of the traditional prison system.

Conclusions and Implications

Theoretical insights

This investigation provides a rare glimpse into a total control institution that seeks to depersonalize and commoditize men under its charge, in part, through restricted choices and consumption. Our study opened with a brief examination of the limited research on restrictions to consumption, leading to a discussion of dehumanization and commoditization in total control institutions. This developing perspective suggests new avenues for public policy research that resulted in extensive ethnographic study, which yields three themes based on perspectives of incarcerated men rather than an external view of their situations (see Figure 2 for a summary). Thematic interpretations show that dehumanizing and commoditizing treatment of the men is consistent with prior research by Sykes (1958), yet goes beyond existing marketing research in such rare contexts (Klein and Hill 2008), revealing nuanced understandings of behavioral and psychological outcomes of consumption under severe restriction, as well as attempts by the men to negotiate and regain a sense of humanness. Conclusions that emanate from these findings have specific and broader implications for marketing and public policy theory than uncovered previously.

Theoretical contributions follow naturally from our thematic analyses. The first theme in Figure 1 involves depersonalization, which captures dehumanizing and commoditizing processes that the men were subject to by the prison system. Related discussions in the consumer literature have occurred previously with regard to the homeless, who must navigate the social welfare

system (Hill 1991) or intersect with the larger society (Hill and Stamey 1990). However, neither of these contexts explicitly confronts how depersonalization manifests or is intimately related to consumption decision making. The limited work on the Holocaust in our literature (e.g., Klein and Hill 2008) does directly confront how both processes manifest, but it relies entirely on third-party accounts of these events that were gathered for different purposes. The next research step in this area could look at how depersonalization and commodification vary across situations and impact feeling states and consumption in senior living facilities, hospitals, university housing, and a host of places that restrict consumption yet have a financial stake in residency. In such cases, researchers are likely to find that the levels of depersonalization and commodification vary, leading to differences in how real or perceived restrictions on choices and consumption impact people and their sense of humanness.

Nonetheless, recent conceptual work suggests that depersonalizing consumers and acting on them as if they are commodities to be exploited for individual gain may be widespread in the larger field of marketing in both its theory and practice (Hill and Martin 2014). Several reasons are given for this perspective, including use of certain language like “targeting” and “exploiting” (Rindfleisch 1996) that suggest the metaphor of consumers as *other*, and a dearth of interest on the part of marketers for most of the world’s population that lacks traditional resources (Martin and Hill 2012). In both cases, metrics such as “customer lifetime value” appear to be operative and drive strategies and tactics from the other side of the exchange equation (Rust, Lemon, and Zeithaml 2004). While this perspective may be consonant with our capitalistic philosophies of economic systems, it may have the unintended consequence of creating a psychological distance that keeps marketers from caring about or understanding roles products play in consumers’ lives.

The second theme deals directly with consumption consequences that provide relief from prison life and its assault on humanness. The marketing and public policy literature has moved in several directions on this topic, and some of the most influential and broad-reaching research is under the rubric of materialism (e.g., Chaplin and John 2007). This work posited a wide range of negative emotional and behavioral consequences of living in a material world like anxiety and depression (see Schor 2004), drug and alcohol use (Williams et al. 2000), and lack of empathy or generosity (Kasser 2002). Despite its importance to the marketing field and its contributions to theory, few of these investigations examined how impoverished material environments operate similarly or differently from affluent marketplaces, or how potential or manifest consequences of a lack of options plays out (Chaplin, Hill, and John 2014 is an exception). Thus, our findings of negative short-term outcomes of masking current realities and the return to previous ways of exchange relationships that mirror pre-incarceration consumption and social identities is an important step in learning how material lives function when restriction is the norm.

The final theme is psychological responses to depersonalization and commodification, focusing on coping reactions by the men. There has been a stream of research by Luce (1998) and her colleagues (Drolet and Luce 2004; Luce, Payne, and Bettman 1999) that looks at negative emotional reactions to consumer decision-making and various coping strategies. In some ways, this investigation is an extension in that it moves away from contexts where choices are relatively plentiful to situations of extreme restriction of consumption options consistent with the subsistence marketplaces literature (Viswanathan et al. 2010; Viswanathan et al. 2009). As a consequence, coping skills deviate from strategies associated with navigating exchanges involving too much information and too many choices (Marcus and Schwartz 2010), to ways of seeking solace under conditions of too little concern and too few options (Hill and Gaines 2007).

The lack of ability to maneuver within this material environment as described by Luce leads to increasing levels of negativity that keep the men on a heightened sense of alert and stress. The resulting coping processes of blaming self along with others for their predicaments and/or lack of choice, isolating themselves or bonding with others who face the same circumstances, and desiring higher ground by looking to advance humanness through new consumption avenues lead to several alternative ways of achieving need satisfaction.

Clearly, these distinctions are based on comparisons between an extreme situation and more typical consumption experiences. As a consequence, several potentially interesting issues arise that suggest comparative research across different restrictive contexts. For instance, how do consumer reactions differ according to the types of restriction (i.e., temporary versus permanent) in combination with product importance (i.e., moderate versus high)? What possible roles may/ do depersonalization and commoditization play, and can someone be "partially" commoditized or depersonalized in a particular situation across a fixed domain of needs and desires? Extreme circumstances have been used before in marketing literature to frame consumption, especially severe impoverishment (Hill 1991; Hill and Stamey 1990). What these investigations found is that extraordinary conditions may provide a rich foundation upon which to build novel ways of understanding building blocks and outcomes of people's material lives (also see Viswanathan et al. 2010). In our situation, the men were able to layer thoughts, feelings, and actions of the prison population over the complex mosaic of institutional restrictions that limits free choice, reduces human dignity, and leads to varied coping strategies.

The previous discussion suggests a set of circumstances under which participatory action research seems especially suitable for public policy investigations. When individuals are faced with insurmountable forces that impose restrictions on consumption behaviors that are pervasive,

they are likely to endure an abrogation of their sense of humanness. This situation has a marked commoditizing effect on individuals under restriction that emanates from others who enforce various constraints and sanctions to gain compliance. As a person moves from outside to inside other-imposed control situations, s/he may suffer from a variety of negative reactions associated with dehumanization. While s/he also uses diverse coping strategies that help regain some sense of autonomy/dignity, nothing close to full recovery of personhood is likely. Thus, participatory action research, and a focus on emancipatory practice that helps individuals identify and act upon unequal power relations and resource allocations, is especially appropriate.

To follow dictates of action research as described by Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008), this project sought to ensure that evaluation criteria were given appropriate consideration. In their article, they provide four ways to evaluate quality of our research: outcome validity, democratic validity, catalytic validity, and dialogical validity. Outcome validity involves ability of research findings to impact what others do. Democratic is the extent to which our work considers varied beliefs and opinions of important stakeholders. Catalytic concerns extent to which our research goes beyond narrow disciplinary walls to impact parties with overlapping interests. Dialogical asks that critical dialogue occur to advance public discourse. Each of these criteria is served in overlapping ways. For instance, the men were able to expand modeling of consumer behavior processes through widespread discussions and interviews with the entire population of men. Their meetings with governmental and commissary stakeholders allowed them to understand different perspectives as well as seek to have their messages enter the public domain. Finally, conversations continued with external stakeholders across political and ideological divides.

Policy Implications for Prison Reform

As noted earlier, there has been very limited research in the marketing and public policy literature on total control institutions (see Cornwell and Gabel 1996 for an exception). This fact is surprising given the recent emphasis on incarceration as a public health issue that negatively impacts poor urban communities of color (Moore and Elkavich 2008). Such work suggests that even mandated medical care for prisoners is substandard, as is rehabilitation that fails to help people such as the men at Gramercy enter the 21st century workforce. As a result, many of the 2.4 million people locked up in the United States (with more than half in state institutions such as MSPG) are left to languish behind bars, and a majority portion are eventually released back into their communities with serious mental and physical health problems as well as limited job skills (*Economist* 2014). Our research supports these conclusions from the perspective of the men who acted in the roles of co-researchers and interviewees.

There are clear constitutional issues that remain historically unresolved, especially related to the Eighth and Thirteenth Amendments to the Constitution. The Eighth reveals that "cruel and unusual punishment" may not be inflicted on the citizenry without regard to crimes committed or the individuals involved in the commission of said crimes. Additionally, the thirteenth recognizes that both "slavery and involuntary servitude" cannot be imposed on citizens *unless* a person "has been duly convicted of a crime." Taken together, they provide conflicting dictates as to what can happen to a person who wears the moniker "criminal." For example, recent Supreme Court cases have deemed life imprisonment cruel and unusual for offenders who were convicted as youths, but the capacity to subject them to forced labor at menial jobs with payments of a few cents per hour is somehow legitimized. The societal rationale likely is what Sykes (1958, p. 286) called "a

deliberate, moral rejection of the criminal by the free community," resulting in deprivation and frustration "in the extreme" (p. 285) across all important categories of goods and services.

These dilemmas seem particularly problematic when broad societal inequities are taken into consideration (Haney 2006). Virtually all men at Gramercy who acted as co-researchers were raised in impoverished communities and dysfunctional homes. Many were abandoned or left home voluntarily because of abuse inflicted on them as young teenagers, and they ended up on the streets as part of gangs or the larger juvenile subculture (see Ozanne et al. 1998). Their eventual recognition of differences between their upbringings and more fortunate others did not operate as a ready excuse for aberrant behavior, but it helped them understand their subsequent confusion of values and poor choices. Of course, the result is a loss of normal liberties that often comes with imprisonment (Conrad 1982), but that possibility did little to dissuade them from any crimes committed (See Dupre 2007 for more on the failure of possible punishment as deterrent). As a consequence, people such as the Gramercy men come to believe that their punishments are simply vengeful retribution "under the hypocritical guise of reformation" (Skyes 1958, p.288).

Thus, prisons have, both historically and to the present time, developed policies and practices that have crossed the line between inflicting pain for legitimate purposes and harming criminals just to impose endless suffering (Haney 2006). The experiences of the men in this research are testimony to this historical end result, as is the enormous investment in the 21st century in a vast system of incarceration that warehouses citizens without any or limited resource commitment to their future opportunities or resurrection as valued human beings. This leaves such prisoners with little or no option for the survival of their sense of self other than "rejecting" their "rejectors" and seeking their own forms of self-enhancement as noted in this investigation (Sykes 1958). Any portion of this renewal requires an understanding of differences between

negative and positive freedoms (Dupre 2007). Negative freedoms require movement away from external constraints, which is impossible in prison life. However, positive freedoms are empowerment that one seeks regardless of external circumstances, which are consonant with our findings.

While it is beyond the scope of this journal to examine all facets of prison transformation, some principal issues currently under discussion are informed by this investigation. For instance, Lehrer (2013) describes how incarceration can evolve to emphasize more effective punishment, improve circumstances within prisons, and create new perspectives of ex-offenders to advance society. Additionally, he frames his ideas within the classic model of prison systems, which include rationales for confinement of deterrence, incapacitation, retribution, and rehabilitation. Deterrence requires making prison life onerous enough to dissuade most criminal behavior, incapacitation demands that inmates are separated from the larger citizenry, retribution shows that people must suffer for disadvantaging others, and rehabilitation suggests organizing prison time so that individuals are able to reenter society in ways that minimize the likelihood of their return. As a whole, they reveal consistencies and inconsistencies in goals and practices that are examined by this investigation.

The issue of more effective punishment considers all four of the stated precepts. From the perspectives of the men, their time at Gramercy clearly is arduous, keeps them away from most people outside the prison walls, and serves as a form of retribution that is seen as beyond even the most heinous crimes. They are subject to dehumanizing treatment that places them as a cog in the prison industrial complex that does little more than use their raw skills. The removal of virtually all former possessions that are replaced with standard issue belongings, along with an identifying number instead of their names, strips incarcerated individuals of former identities

without regard for an acceptable alternative (see Ozanne et al. 1998 for a different path). The impact of these processes is negative emotional states like hopelessness and behavioral coping styles that include poor eating habits and drug use as well as frequenting illicit marketplaces. Thus, punishment is effective in the sense that it removes the former self and its associated possessions and status priorities but it fails to replace it with a socially-acceptable substitute.

Improvement of life within prisons seems antithetical to deterrence and retribution but may serve to enhance rehabilitation. The men at Gramercy seem to grasp the idea that life behind bars is not, and should not, be designed to meet or exceed their previous consumption lives. Yet such approaches are viewed as mostly punishing for the purpose of punishing rather than serving a return to society. In fact, one of the central findings of this research is that the men are eager to find ways to enrich their lives that go beyond accumulation of material items. Much of their search for goods and services is for a baseline of products that Martin and Hill (2012) refer to as consumption adequacy of enough to allow them to seek higher-order fulfillment. Regrettably, there are many barriers to lower-level satisfaction and a deficiency in ways of seeking education and training that position the men for employment outside the total control institution. Movement forward requires access to basic commodities in an unsatisfying living environment that provides little possibility for a better future inside or upon release.

The final reform is changing societal impressions of former inmates, something that requires more than the "tough on crime" rhetoric of politicians. To create new perspectives of incarcerated men and women, more needs to be done beyond the media imagery of prison life that either glamorizes such detention (e.g., movies like *Longest Yard*) or highlights the many wrongdoings to men and women (e.g., movie *Shawshank Redemption* and the television series *Orange Is the New Black*). The men in this study were resigned to their punishments but at the

same time disgruntled by its extent and duration. Some of this discontent is a natural byproduct of deterrence and retribution that is beyond our expertise to judge. However, the lack of concern for and treatment of their mental and physical health problems seems to violate human rights as defined in the literature as consumption adequacy (Martin and Hill 2012). Furthermore, release back into society with substandard health and inadequate skills are more likely to result in recidivism and verification of prejudices and stereotypes among the general population.

Closing Remarks

The importance of total control institutions as an important marketing and public policy area is difficult to deny. Consider that the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that Americans alone spend about $50 billion on the prison system, and the U.S. has the largest population of inmates in the world (Lehrer 2013). This money is spent to meet the four objectives discussed in the last subsection, but the burgeoning state and national financial demands and the budget tradeoffs among important investments (e.g., in the state where Gramercy resides, state allocations for prisons in about $2 billion while the largest city school district is several hundred million dollars in the red) strongly suggest efficient use of funding. In order to shift emphases to reformation instead of retribution, other constituencies outside the prison system need to be enlightened. For example, more legislators and private citizens should be allowed to meet people like the men at Gramercy so that they might put a human face on the men and women they discuss and describe as “other.” Businesses might also play a role, allowing them to compete for commissary dollars rather than giving one provider the entire business and leave it beholding to prison administrators and politicians instead of consumers of their products. At the very least, meeting the basic needs for sustaining life of food and healthcare along with skill development

that supports job options within and outside these institutions may better serve the long-run interests of society.

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TABLE 1

AN EXAMPLE OF WRITTEN MATERIALS PROVIDED BY THE MEN

Lord what was I thinking?
Or was I thinking at all?
A Man-child suffering from malady
caught vulnerable and unaware
by the pulse of the city strip.
It beat with a steady rhythm,
a vibration invasion
that penetrated deep within my soul.
Like a moth I was entranced, drawn to the synthetic glow
that corrupted the nighttime skies.
My young eyes were blinded by the glitter of jewels
that rested upon dark flesh
like stars sparkling against the backdrop of space.
Walking billboards of fashion designers
advertising self-esteem
was just the medication I needed
to cure this malaise of self-hatred.
Am I good now?
Or am I feeling the effects of the "Feel Good?"
The codeine, the pills, the alcohol, the weed.
A young man who flew too close to the sun
determined to follow a path to nowhere.

An African American in his late 30s serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

TABLE 2

EVOLUTION OF RESEARCH ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

	Phase 1	**Phase 2**	**Phase 3**
Dominant Theme	Practicing research	Conducting research	Presenting research
Researcher Role	Teacher	Facilitator	Consultant
Co-contributor Role	Student	Researcher	Advocate
Capacity Development	Language and self-analysis skills	Interviewing and thematic analysis skills	Organization, writing, and presentation skills
Data Collection	Individual models of consumption and exchange	Team, block, and institutional consumption and exchange models; Development of Case-Based Themes	Internal and external constituency feedback
Opportunities for Progress	Individual development	Collective engagement	Empowerment
Obstacles to Progress	Need for trust	Lack of skills	Access to power brokers
Hoped-for Outcomes	Intimate, long-term relationships	Professional skill development	Confidence and relationship skills

FIGURE 1

PERSPECTIVE OF THE PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX
(prisonabolition.org)

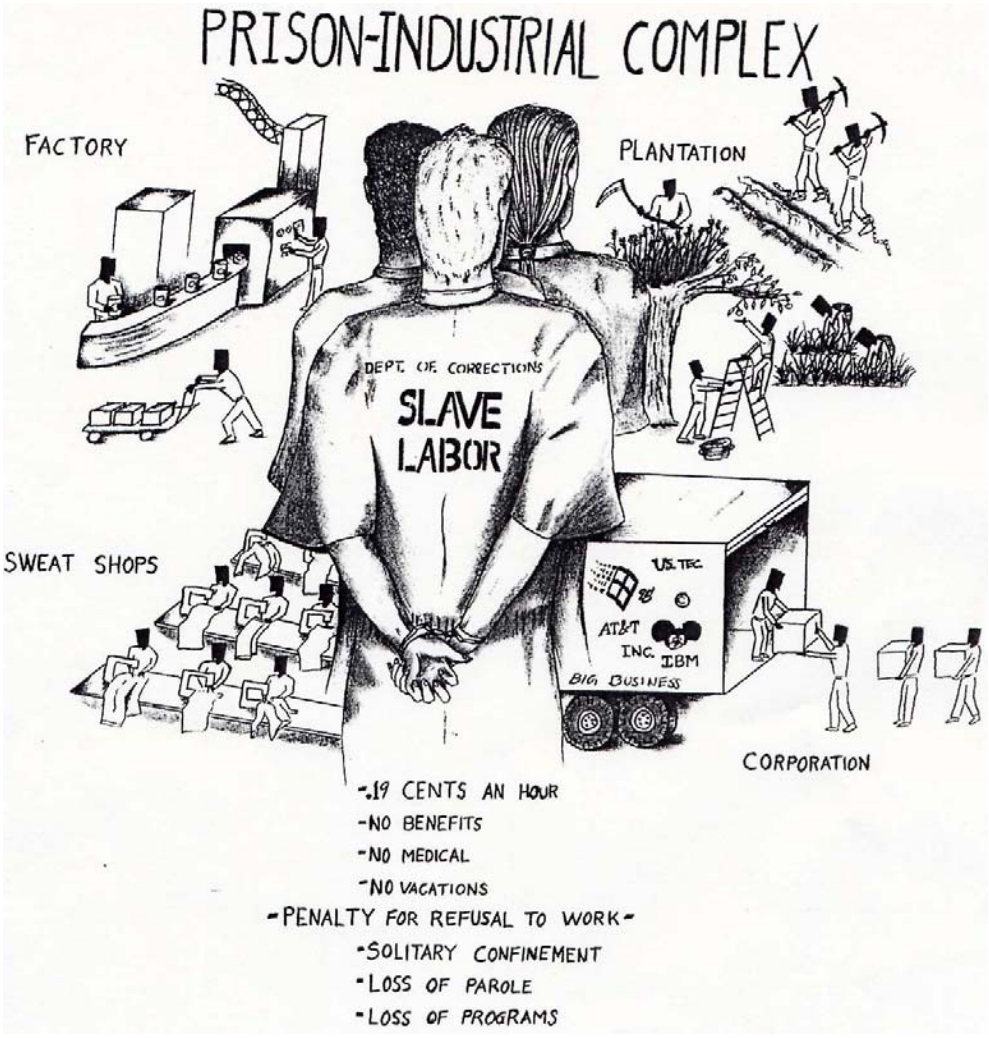

FIGURE 2

REPRESENTATION OF THEMES