

# The Impact of Incarceration on a Person's Relationship with Clothing

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## Abstract

Research has long suggested that individuals use clothing to define and display their identity within society (Davis, 1992; McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988; Roach-Higgins, Eicher and Johnson, 1995; Stone 1962). However, in certain circumstances such as incarceration, individuals are unable to choose clothing that best represents their identity. There are currently an estimated 1.9 million individuals incarcerated in the United States (Sawyer and Wagner, 2024). While 'serving time' in a correctional institution in the United States (U.S.), the incarcerated are required to wear government-issued clothing (Ash, 2010). Contrary to the individuality expressed outside of a correctional institution, clothing that the incarcerated are required to wear represents a "visible embodiment of punishment" (Ash, 2010, p. 155).

This paper reports on the findings of a study to investigate the impact of the incarceration process on a person's relationship with clothing. The research study incorporated a phenomenological, two-part research design, with qualitative thematic analysis of prison blogs written by current and formerly incarcerated individuals and semi-structured, exploratory recall interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals. A total of n=10 blogs were collected and n=15 interviews were conducted. Data collected from the prison blogs and semi-structured interviews were used to answer the research question: How does the incarceration process impact a person's relationship with clothing? Data analysis of both methodologies was conducted concurrently.

Results suggest that incarceration changes a person's relationship with their clothing, both during and after incarceration. These changes include (a) identity exchange and (b) new awareness of choice. Participants indicated that throughout the incarceration process, their perspective of clothing shifted from a societal requirement to a symbol of freedom or punishment.

The information gained from this study may inform future research concerning social conditions and rehabilitation in corrections, including institutional clothing.

**Keywords:** incarceration, identity, institutional clothing, de-humanization, re-humanization, clothing choice

## INTRODUCTION

Researchers have identified clothing as a physical extension of the self, with the power to communicate information about a person (McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988). Clothing is a non-verbal, symbolic tool for communication whose meaning may depend on the wearer's or the viewer's perception (Davis, 1992; Stone, 1962). Individuals use clothing as a way to define and display their identity to the world around them (Roach-Higgins, Eicher and Johnson, 1995). In some circumstances, however, individuals are denied the freedom to choose the clothing that best expresses their self and social identity. One of these circumstances is incarceration in correctional facilities. While 'serving time' in a correctional institution in the United States (U.S.), the incarcerated are required to wear government-issued clothing that distinguishes them from corrections personnel, visitors and other incarcerated individuals (Ash, 2010). Contrary to the individuality expressed outside of a correctional institution, clothing that the incarcerated are required to wear represents a "visible embodiment of punishment" (Ash, 2010, p. 155).

Although there are operational differences between facilities, most correctional environments in the U.S. operate under a stringent, comprehensive set of rules that determine and regulate behavior and are implemented by a system of authority that enforces punishments for individuals who deviate from these rules (Miller, 1958). As a general rule, after becoming incarcerated, individuals are required to surrender all personal property, including clothing, which is replaced with standardized items provided by the institution (Goffman, 1961a).

Just over two million people are incarcerated in the U.S. (Sawyer and Wagner, 2020), and most are required by law to wear government-issued clothing. However, research into this topic has been limited. Current research in the discipline of Criminal Justice and Corrections focuses on notions of law and order, and few studies have investigated first-hand the experiences of the currently and formerly incarcerated. Several studies have examined identity formation throughout the incarceration experience (Rowe, 2011; Solomontos-Kountouri and Hatzitofi, 2016; Toyoki and Brown, 2014; Walters, 2003) but clothing is not part of these experiential studies. Ash's book *Dress Behind Bars* (2010) is the first to provide historical information about institutional clothing in various countries throughout the world, while Smiley and Middlemass (2016) investigated obstacles that the incarcerated face upon reentry into society through the lens of clothing. No studies have holistically explored the impact of incarceration on a person's relationship with their clothing.

The purpose of the current study was to construct an understanding of how

incarceration impacts a person's relationship with their clothing. The investigation utilized online blogs written by current and formerly incarcerated individuals and semi-structured interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals, which were conducted electronically. Due to the emerging nature of this field of study, the author determined that this qualitative approach (Giorgi, 2005; Oaklander, 1992), using the voices of incarcerated people in their own words, would provide a rich and deep narrative for an analysis of the phenomena.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Correctional systems**

A correctional institution is a location where a person, after being rejected by society (Goffman, 1961b; McCorkle and Korn, 1954), must adapt to their role within a new social environment. Goffman's theory of total institutions explains the correctional institution as a type of community. In Goffman's *Asylums* (1961a), a total institution is defined as "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life" (p. xiii). Goffman (1961a) describes how the administration removes an incarcerated person's possessions (including personal clothing), which are then replaced with standardized items provided by the institution.

A correctional institution can be viewed as a society within a society (Levy, 1952). Clemmer (1940; 1958) pioneered the general study of community within prisons, labeled as "prisonization." Prisonization is defined as the process in which the incarcerated adopt "in greater or less degree...the folkways, morés, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary" (p. 299). This definition suggested that an incarcerated person's behavior is shaped by the structural and social characteristics of daily life inside the institution. Walters (2003) argued that prisonization is an incarcerated person's adaptive reaction to make their life easier in the new prison environment, as opposed to an acceptance of structural and social characteristics of daily life while incarcerated.

### **Clothing and incarceration**

Within the concept of prisonization, one way in which the incarcerated adopt the culture of their institution is by detaching themselves from the type of personal clothing worn before incarceration. Upon incarceration, individuals must surrender their civilian clothing associated with their former identity and begin wearing standardized clothing provided by the institution. In one of the first studies about institutional clothing, Ash (2010) combined prisoner interviews, academic reports, and autobiographical accounts to view institutional clothing from around the world through the history of the modern prison. Ash (2010) suggests that prison clothing has been overlooked because it does not fit within mass-market or commercialized fashion, and it possibly

symbolizes the *reverse of fashion*. Although similar to other types of uniforms, Ash (2010) explains that institutional uniforms suggest a denial of personal identity. Uniforms worn while imprisoned are typically imprinted to identify an incarcerated person as government property (Department of Corrections, Inmate, etc.), which embodies societal perspectives and opinions (Smiley and Middlemass, 2016). In addition, clothing that externally labels a person as incarcerated can be used as a form of degradation by authorities, along with removal of the gender identity used before incarceration (Ash, 2010; Whitcomb, 2012).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Based on gaps in the clothing literature on this subject, the decision was made to examine the impact of incarceration on a person's relationship with clothing and the following research question was developed to guide the study: How does the incarceration process impact a person's relationship with clothing?

A review of the literature affirmed the effectiveness of the qualitative method in research on clothing and prisons. Oaklander (1992) stated that the objective of a qualitative study is to discover new information rather than to confirm a hypothesis. For the current study, a phenomenological approach was selected to gain insight into the topic and answer the research question. The objective of a phenomenological approach is to explore the meaning of an experience from the perspective of the person who has lived the experience (Giorgi, 2005). The current study consisted of a two-part design in order to gain a broad array of data: 1) qualitative thematic analysis of personal blogs written by current and formerly incarcerated individuals; and 2) semi-structured exploratory recall interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals.

### **Sample selection and data collection**

**Blog authors.** Primary sources of data from currently incarcerated individuals are difficult to obtain. Some individuals or specific groups are considered high risk or vulnerable and have been called "sensitive topics" (Lee and Renzetti, 1990; Schlosser, 2008). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research considers currently incarcerated persons to be part of a vulnerable population and discourages the inclusion of these participants in research studies. In addition, the State Department of Corrections (DOC) has its own IRB with Federal and DOC policies and regulations that may prevent various research studies. Therefore, the qualitative thematic analysis of online blogs served as a method to collect data from currently incarcerated persons without physically entering a correctional institution.

Gaining access to high-risk groups such as the currently incarcerated presents a unique set of obstacles. To mitigate these challenges, this study explored secondary data in the form of online prison blogs. In order to gain insight into the world of currently incarcerated individuals, Part 1 of this study used self-authored online

narratives commonly known as blogs. A blog is the product of user-generated content and personal webpages (Haferkamp and Kramer, 2008; Turkle, 1995). Blogs allow for a “backstage” view of personal characteristics of a person’s life, making this form of media an attractive data source for researchers in the social sciences (Chenail, 2011). It has been determined that blog posts can be found through simple keyword searches (Cheng et al., 2011; Webb and Wang, 2013). For this study, prison blog websites were identified through the search engine Google. To identify these blogs, search queries such as “prisoner blog,” “inmate blog,” “inmate writing,” and “prisoner writing” were used. Next, the researcher searched for selected keywords including Personalization; Customization; Identity; Clothing; Fashion; and Uniform. The keywords had been used in previous literature and aligned with the goals of this study. Blogs were selected and scanned until no new results appeared from the search queries or keyword search. The researcher reviewed each search result in context and clicked on links in the order in which they appeared.

Blogs allow authors to write about personal experiences, construct meanings from those experiences, and categorize their own narratives (Friedman, 2013; Keller, 2012). Von Benzon (2018) argued that written blogs may reflect the priorities and emotions of participants rather than an accurate account of an experience. In addition, personal blogs could be more refined or provide a less “truthful” evaluation of someone’s experience, which suggests that imaginary information might be communicated online (Bartholomew *et al.*, 2012; Jang and Dworkin, 2014). Hookway (2008) stated that bloggers are mindful of their audience and tend to write for that audience. Although this audience may be real or imagined, the blogger’s goals could include impression management or persuasion (Hookway, 2008). Therefore, the use of prison blogs must be viewed with caution surrounding validity of information.

**Interview subjects.** Interviews have become a frequently used form of qualitative research data collection (Gubrium, 2012). Interviews are an empirical tool to create knowledge (della Porta, 2014) and are used to understand causes and complicated processes in criminal justice research (Lindquist, 2000; Maxfield and Babbie, 2016; Rosenbaum and Lavrakas, 1995; Rowe, 2011; Schutt, 2004; Smiley and Middlemass, 2016; Toyoki and Brown, 2014). Semi-structured interviews direct the conversation to answer the research questions, while allowing open dialogue between the researcher and participant (Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005). Phenomenological researchers have used in-depth conversations and interviews as a method to involve participants in a study (Giorgi, 2005; King, 1994; Morse, 1994; Seidman, 2006; Wertz, 2005). Part 2 of the present phenomenological study was conducted through online individual, audio-recorded exploratory recall semi-structured interviews that used open-ended questions.

In agreement with other phenomenological researchers, the method of purposeful sampling was used to create the participant group for this study (Groenewald, 2004).

Purposeful sampling allowed for the intentional selection and recruitment of participants who have experienced a particular phenomenon (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Sandelowski, 2000). Interview participants were selected with the assistance of a re-entry council or non-profit organization that helps formerly incarcerated individuals to integrate back into society. The researcher emailed representatives from several of these organizations to explain the purpose of this research and requested permission to submit a participant recruitment flyer for distribution among members of the organization. Other participants were recruited through email, or direct message on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, or other social media platforms. To be considered, participants must have been previously incarcerated for any length of time at any correctional institution in the U.S. Per IRB guidelines, all participants were required to be at least 18 years old and could not be currently incarcerated in a correctional institution. To ensure these requirements were met, each potential participant engaged in a telephone screening process. Before participating in this study, subjects were asked to sign a consent form that granted permission for audio recording and any re-identifiable data to be used in future research.

For this study, a total of 15 semi-structured exploratory recall interviews were completed. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and 75 minutes. Participants were asked a series of pre-determined questions based on findings from the literature. These questions were divided into three categories: 1) the participant's relationship with clothing before incarceration; 2) the participant's relationship with clothing during incarceration; and 3) participant's current relationship with clothing. The following questions were used to answer the research question, How does the incarceration process impact a person's relationship with clothing?:

- Tell me about how you dressed prior to incarceration and what was most important to you.
- Tell me about how you dressed while incarcerated and describe the clothing.
- Why do you think you were required to wear this clothing?
- How did it feel to exchange your street clothes for clothes that were chosen for you?
- Tell me about how you dress now that you are a free member of society and why you choose to dress that way.
- Has incarceration impacted your choice of clothing? If so, would you describe the impact?
- Has your clothing helped you reconstruct your identity since release? If so, would you describe how?

Interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded to the Cloud for transcription purposes. Each audio file was reviewed and the transcript was checked for accuracy. Once interviews were transcribed, each participant was asked to provide member checking to ensure the transcription accurately represented their conversation with

the researcher. During member checking, the participant was provided the opportunity to read through the interview transcript and make clarifications as appropriate. Of the 15 interview participants, nine participated in member checking. For confidentiality purposes, participant names were changed to the numerical order in which the interview was conducted.

### **Data analysis**

For this research study, prison blogs and personal interview data were collected and analyzed simultaneously. The study used a descriptive qualitative thematic analysis for both blog and interview data. Thematic analysis uses an open-coding method, meaning that themes develop naturally from the data instead of using predetermined categories which are used to organize and make meaning of the data. In this study, an open-coding method was used to identify common concepts or themes that occurred across both data sets. The qualitative research software NVivo v.11 was used to organize and code data for the thematic analyses.

Personal prison blog posts were identified using keywords and each blog was electronically transferred as a separate PDF file to NVivo for organizational purposes. Monaro *et al.* (2022) and Spiggle (1994) stressed the importance of a researcher's influence in both research and representations when analyzing data. In agreement with this strategy, the researcher read the blog several times and highlighted phrases or sentences that could potentially represent a theme to answer one of the research questions. For example, a blog may have referenced an alteration in clothing. The researcher could interpret this to mean the incarcerated person was attempting to customize their clothing. The words "clothing customization" would be entered as a node, or theme, in NVivo. Each time a reference was made to the customization of clothing in that blog, the phrase was highlighted and identified under the node of "clothing customization." Blog posts that shared similar content were grouped together, then compared to one another to identify related subthemes. Next, the subthemes were grouped into larger categories, which represent broad themes (Hycner, 1985). These themes helped to determine which themes were relevant to the phenomenon of this study (Giorgi, 2009; Hycner 1985; Wertz, 2005). Finally, general categories were determined based upon the themes.

The exploratory recall interviews were analyzed using the holistic-content method. After reading through the data several times, the researcher identified patterns in the data. The data that shared similar characteristics were grouped together into thematic categories. Finally, general categories were determined based on the themes to answer the research questions.

For validation purposes, multiple validity procedures were used to corroborate findings (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). A thematic analysis was conducted for each blog and interview using a triangulation procedure. After ten individual blog posts were

identified, the researcher and two members examined data for observable themes, thereby establishing triangulation for the data. Similarly, after completion of the first three interviews, the researcher and two members examined evidence for themes discovered through the interview process. This strategy for both the blogs and interviews helped to construct an objective justification for each theme (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the results and discussion of the data collected from prison blogs and semi-structured interviews, which were used to answer the research question, How does the incarceration process impact a person’s relationship with their clothing? A total of ten blogs containing the keywords selected for the study were identified from existing prison blog websites, which had been identified through a Google search. Five blog authors were male, four were female, and one was not specified. Two blog authors were incarcerated in each of the following states: Connecticut, Missouri, and Texas. One blog author was incarcerated in each of the following states: Michigan, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. One author did not disclose the state in which they were incarcerated. Nine blog authors were incarcerated at the time in which the blog was written, while one author wrote after release. Table 1 includes descriptive information of the prison blog authors.

**Table 1.** Descriptive information of the prison blog authors

<b>Blog number</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>US state where incarcerated</b>	<b>Name of blog website</b>
1	Female	Missouri	Prison Insight
2	Female	Missouri	Prison Insight
3	unknown	Unknown	Prison Insight
4	Male	Michigan	Prison Writers
5	Male	Pennsylvania	Federal Prison Time
6	Male	North Carolina	Prison Writers
7	Female	Connecticut	Prison Diaries
8	Female	Connecticut	Prison Diaries
9	Male	Texas	Prison Fellowship
10	Male	Texas	Prison Writers

Among the interview participants, there were 12 males and three females. At the time of the interviews, participants’ ages ranged from 25 to 68 years old. Of the 15 participants, five were incarcerated in California, three in North Carolina, and two in New York. Four participants completed their sentence in the following states: Arizona, Idaho, New Jersey, and South Dakota. Finally, one participant was incarcerated several different times in various states. The time since participants had been released ranged from one year to 25 years. The total number of years each participant had been

incarcerated ranged from two years to 32 years. One participant served many years, but the specific number is unknown. Table 2 includes descriptive information of the interview participants.

**Table 2.** Descriptive information of interview participants

Participant number	Gender	Age at interview	US State where incarcerated	Time passed since release
1	Male	45	North Carolina	4 years
2	Female	49	North Carolina	6 years
3	Male	44	North Carolina	7 years
4	Male	31	New York	2 years
5	Female	42	New York	2 years
6	Male	25	Idaho	4 years
7	Male	51	Arizona	25 years
8	Male	46	New Jersey	1 year
9	Male	55	California	18 years
10	Male	58	California	4 years
11	Male	56	California	1 year
12	Male	61	California	11 years
13	Male	66	California	3 years
14	Male	68	Various	19 years
15	Female	36	South Dakota	5 years

The following themes about prison clothing emerged through analysis of the blog and interview data:

- Seeking understanding/rationalization
- Identity removal/exchange
- Conformity
- Changed priorities
- Awareness of choice

The above themes that emerged from the data collected for this study show how a person's relationship with clothing is impacted by the incarceration process. After reviewing the data, two distinctly separate situations emerged, which will be used to organize the themes: The relationship with clothing upon transitioning into incarceration and the relationship with clothing after the incarceration period was finished.

### **Transitioning into the institutional environment**

During the transition into the institutional environment, participants described identity removal and exchange and conformity into the institutional environment. Blog and interview data suggests the desire to understand or rationalize the reasoning behind the requirement for government-issued clothing throughout the transition into the institutional environment. Participants believed that government-issued clothing was

required for reasons such as de-humanization and control and punishment.

Upon transitioning into the institutional environment, several participants noticed an exchange in identity upon exchanging their civilian clothing for government-issued clothing. For example, Interview Participant 4 reported a noticeable transition from civilian to sentenced property of the state through clothing. He explained:

*“So, when you're in Riker's Island, you're not sentenced yet, so technically you're not guilty and you're innocent until proven guilty. So, I think a part of it is you maintain that identity of you being still a civilian, but they take that away from us as soon as you get sentenced. You're no longer a civilian. You become property of New York state.”*

Interview Participant 14 described the process of shedding one identity and exchanging it for another through clothing while incarcerated. He explained, “Part of the clothing that you're required to wear...is to make you feel like you're tagged, like a leper in this society. The identity that you have is your population of who you're incarcerated with.” Likewise, Interview Participant 5 provided a female's perspective. She explained, “These [prison] outfits are not made for women. These outfits are the same exact things that are issued for men...You're a number now...You're all the same. So, I think it's just a dehumanizing thing.”

This population's experience with government-issued clothing was perceived as part of the larger context of incarceration. Several blog authors and interview participants believed that government-issued clothing was a tool for control and punishment. For example, the author of Blog 7 reported, “Apparently, clothes don't just make the man, they also make the inmate. And they make the inmate pliable, quiet, used to having decisions made for them.” Despite being required to wear government-issued clothing day in and day out, several participants highlighted that continuously wearing government-issued clothing was one component of adapting to the overall prison environment. For example, Interview Participant 10 explained:

*“While I've referred to [clothing] as dehumanizing and all that, I didn't run around every day, thinking that. I became immune to it once I got over the fact that I had to wear this, it was just what I got up in the morning, put on and went about my day...initially we complained and then, when it was just how things were, you deal with it and move on.”*

### **Transitioning after release**

Clothing worn throughout the incarceration process led some participants to focus on aspects of clothing of which they had not been aware prior to incarceration. They noticed a change in priorities about certain aspects of their clothing choices after release, such as reduced confidence and prioritizing comfort and fit.

Two participants believed incarceration influenced them to wear clothing that was more understated to help them fit into free society. For example, Interview Participant 15 shared a loss of confidence in clothing choices because of incarceration. She explained:

*“[Before prison] I was very individual. It was important for me not to conform [to society], that was absolutely essential. It was important that I stood out in my own way and made a statement as to who I was. I knew who I was before I got incarcerated.”*

As a result, Interview Participant 15 recalled a shift in her clothing choices after release: “Well, [prison] definitely impacted my [clothing choices]. I’m not as confident and don’t feel as brave to be free or to express my individuality, because I’m afraid to stand out a little more. I don’t want to draw attention to myself.”

Some participants gravitated towards comfortable clothing after release instead of dressing to impress others as they did prior to incarceration. The uncomfortable and ill-fitting clothing worn while incarcerated led participants to choose clothing based on fit and texture after release. For example, three female participants shared a new appreciation for wearing clothing that fit their feminine shape. For example, after release, Interview Participant 2 wanted to wear clothing opposite of the unflattering clothing she wore before and during incarceration. She explained:

*“I noticed after [incarceration] that before [incarceration] I was always wearing baggy shirts and then during [incarceration], I was restricted to whatever clothes [administration] gave me and then, when I came home, I found myself wanting to wear any and everything. All of that had to do with what we were and weren’t allowed to do [in prison]...Now, the new me, my second act, I want to just wear anything. I want to try anything.”*

Serving time in prison eliminates the freedom of choice of the incarcerated. The incarceration experience resulted in some participants’ realization of the importance of choice, especially as it relates to clothing. For example, Interview Participant 1 recalled his feelings when his freedom of choice was restored after release. He explained:

*“[Before incarceration], the most important aspect of my wardrobe would be selection and variety...Once I was released [from prison] and I was able to go in my closet and wear what I wanted to wear, I felt like I got a major part of myself back.”*

Findings indicate that the incarceration process changes a person’s relationship with

their clothing in a variety of ways.

## **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how the incarceration process impacts a person's relationship with their clothing. Using the experiences of the currently incarcerated (most of the blog authors) and the formerly incarcerated (all of the interview participants) as the data sets for the study, the researcher noted that both groups had similar comments about their clothing during incarceration. Even though interview participants varied in time away from incarceration, their memory recall aligned with the narratives of those currently incarcerated. Furthermore, although blog authors were not asked questions by the researcher, the information they chose to disclose in their blogs was reflected by interview participant responses.

The results from this study suggest that incarceration changes a person's relationship with their clothing in multiple ways, both during and after incarceration. These changes include priorities, identity exchange and new awareness of choice. Results align with the concept of prisonization, defined by Clemmer (1940; 1958) as the process in which the incarcerated adopt "in greater or less degree...the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary" (p. 299). For example, blog authors and interview participants shared their distaste for wearing government-issued clothing and believed the clothing was required to prevent escape, rooted in monetary reasons, and further enforce control and punishment. Results from this study also align with Walters (2003), who argued that prisonization is a reaction that results from an incarcerated person's adaptation to their new prison environment. This reaction is based on an attempt at survival and is not an acceptance of daily life while incarcerated (Walters, 2003). Current study data indicate that over time, subjects became familiar with the idea of government-issued clothing, and normalized this clothing during their incarceration, thereby enacting an exchange of external identity to identification with the prison system. Subjects also realized that their options were limited and that government-issued clothing would help them to survive in the prison environment. Furthermore, this clothing was acceptable because subjects were surrounded by other incarcerated persons experiencing the same phenomenon.

Participants indicated that throughout the incarceration process, their perspective of clothing shifted from a societal requirement to a symbol of freedom or punishment. Participants carried this perspective with them even after they left prison. For example, colors that had little to no meaning before incarceration triggered negative episodic memories of time incarcerated after release. Although a participant's physical self was removed from an institutional environment, they could be psychologically transported back to that environment when recalling the clothing worn while incarcerated.

Data obtained from interview participants showed that the experience of incarceration

exposes the importance of clothing comfort. Participants gravitated towards comfortable clothing after release instead of dressing to impress others as they did prior to incarceration. Participants also found that they focused on small details of clothing that they had not otherwise considered. The ill-fitting and uncomfortable clothing worn while incarcerated led participants to choose clothing based on fit and texture after release.

In addition, findings from this study suggest that incarceration marks a shift in level of material satisfaction. Interview participants' clothing choices after release were largely determined by financial stability instead of individual expression. After years of having a limited prison clothing wardrobe, participants had a newfound appreciation for what they have instead of focusing on what they do not have. A major contribution to this new appreciation was the lack of choice while incarcerated. After the freedom of choice was granted to participants upon release, they developed an awareness of choice and realized how much they took for granted before incarceration.

### **Implications**

In early 2021, the Biden administration issued an executive order focused on reforming the US incarceration system (The White House, 2021). The idea of prioritizing rehabilitation in correctional facilities is a key focus of this reform. The findings from this study may aid in the development of best practices that will help this population fully integrate back into their communities upon future release. Results from this study may encourage future discussions about changing institutional clothing. Although this is a highly charged social and political issue, findings from this study suggest that there may be chances to rethink the design of government-issued clothing to have a different impact on the individuals who wear it.

One example might be related to the implementation of unisex clothing in most correctional facilities, which aids in the removal of gender identity associated with individuals prior to incarceration. The negative impact of this clothing was cited by female blog authors and all three female interview participants in this study. Facilities could introduce new ways of addressing gender issues in the incarcerated population.

### **Limitations and recommendations for further research**

The replicability of the results of this study should be filtered through several lenses. Interview participants were recruited through non-profit organizations, via email and social media. This recruitment method limited the interview participant sample to formerly incarcerated individuals with access to technology and connection with organizations and social media services.

According to the literature, the use of blog and interview participant data in this study were acceptable methods of data collection, although they do not represent experiences of all current and formerly incarcerated persons. Correctional institutions

across the U.S. share similarities in various policies and practices, but differences between facilities remain. Therefore, the findings and implications of this study may not be generalizable (Gray, 2009) to experiences shared by all the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated in the U.S. criminal justice system. The information gained from this study, however, may inform future research on a larger scale.

Due to research limitations with currently incarcerated individuals, certain details may have been lost through the recall of experiences of formerly incarcerated interview participants. When studying the experience of incarceration through a phenomenological approach, there is a concern about how any participant distinguishes between their actual experience and communicating a memory of that experience.

This research study contributed new information about the impact of incarceration on the relationship between clothing and identity. To further understand the implications of these results, future studies could address specific themes that emerged from this study, from the viewpoint of incarcerated people, prison officials, procurement personnel and family members. There are behavioral implications that relate to a rehabilitation theory of prisonization. Future studies could investigate how the type of clothing worn while incarcerated causes changes in behavior of those who wear it.

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