JUMPSUIT TO BUTTON-DOWN: CLOTHING USED AS RESISTANCE IN PRISONER REENTRY

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Abstract: *There is a vast body of literature across academic disciplines on prisoner reentry, yet little is known about how men and women use clothing as a form of resistance and personal embodiment of politics to negotiate the reentry process. Drawing on ethnographic data from a two-year interdisciplinary project in Newark, New Jersey, we present "outsider-within status" and the notion of transformative resistance to examine how former prisoners reentering societyuse clothing to disguise the mark of prison, conceal their felon status, and reshape their public persona with the goal of becoming an accepted member of the community. By conceptualizing how men and women construct their wardrobe as a form of embodied politics to negotiate reentry and resist the label felon, we offer three contributions to the field of critical criminology by: pushing against the orthodox identity of "felon," which is inherently criminal; focusing on the culture of resistance that arises during reentry; andoffering a perspective of reentry that embodies personal politics.*

Key Words: *Prisoner reentry, clothing, critical criminology, personal politics*

INTRODUCTION

"I'm in drug court, you know, where you go in front of the judge every few weeks, tell 'em what they want to hear, pee in a cup, and then get some relief [reduction in stipulations]. When I go [to drug court], I make sure I look my best, you know, braids neat, in my church clothes, so they can see I look good." When interacting with officials, Mandy took great pains to make purposeful decisions in her appearance; she used clothing and hair style to conform to the expectations of the judge, prosecutor, drug court evaluators, social workers, and her probation officer. By dressing for her audience, Mandy chose a specific communicative strategy to resist her stigmatized identity as a former drug using convicted felon who is a black singlemother. Mandy engaged in what Goffman (1959) calls impression management, the act of dressing in a style that takes into consideration the audience; but more than just negotiating drug court, Mandy was resisting the pejorative labels used by strangers to inflict negative meaning upon her body in an effort to marginalize and condemn her (Allen, 2002). By choosing conventional attire and engaging in societal norms, Mandy was able to shape the perception of others and meet their expectations, which was to her advantage while navigating the reentry process.

Mandy's experience is not unique: National estimates indicate that somewhere between 650,000 and 760,000 adults are released from state and federal prisons each year (U.S. Justice

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Department, 2013). Consequently, for thousands of men and women reentering society and negotiating criminal justice institutions, such as drug court, parole or probation,and the label felon, these arecommon occurrences. However, their clothing practices as personal politics are underrepresented in theacademic literature because after serving time in prison the way in which an individual reenters society using clothing as resistance cannot be wholly captured by a single dimension such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, sexual identity or social capital, which means reentry stories about clothing do not fall neatly into mainstream discourses. Therefore, to understand the nature of clothing we examine attire from a conceptual foundation, and then theorize how clothing is a qualitatively unique form of resistance.

In order to demonstrate how individual felons challenge the negative and oppressive interlocking societal, situational and negative characterizations foisted upon them, we review critical and convict criminology theory and how it challenges orthodox ideas about crime and punishment. Next, we explore the connections between prisoner reentry and the role of clothing (Smiley & Middlemass, Forthcoming) to then consider different forms and acts of resistance such as communicative strategies and practices in the everyday (Scott, 2013); how to negotiate stigma (Endelstein & Ryan, 2013); and the use of tactics that contest dominant social and political discourses (Richardson, 2013). Lastly, within the context of critical and convict criminology, and based on our observations from an ethnographic study in Newark, New Jersey, we theorize how former prisonerschallenge the opposing institutional and social constraints placed upon them as a marginalized group through a critical assessment of how clothing is used as a form of resistance to reenter society. We illustrate how former prisoners' clothing choices defies socially laden words, acts as a counter offensive against the criminal label felon, repels societal expectations of who is "deviant," and operates as a shield to withstand and resist the challenges of reentering society in an attempt to *not* go back to prison. The principles and examples developed in this article serve to advance and contribute convict and critical criminology.

THEORY: CONVICT CRIMINOLOGY AS CRITICAL CRIMINOLOGY

Since the 1970s, the field of critical criminology has become influential in how we study crime and justice, and encompasses several different perspectives about the penal chain, corrections, crime causation, punishment and its relationship to societal mores, and how the rules of criminal law are used to control poor people, minority communities and have-nots (Sykes, 1974). In particular, critical criminology explores how gender, race and socio-economic/ class dynamics influence the pathology of a system that brands individuals as felons to then impose oppressive rules to enforce differential power/knowledge upon certain bodies within and without the state's structures (see Foucault, 1977). The multitude of issues concerning crime and punishment, and pertaining to social justice,have dividedcritical criminology into different theoretical orientations, including radical criminology (DeKeseredy, 2011); critical feminism (Davis, 2003; Chesney-Lind and Morash, 2013); queer criminology (Ball, 2014; Woods, 2014); critical race theory and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Potter, 2013); postmodernism and postmodern criminology (Schneider, 2004; Milovanovic, 1997); liberal and cultural criminology (Ferrell, 2013; Campbell, 2013); and convict criminology (Richards, 2013; Richards, *et al.*, 2012; Richards and Ross, 2001). Critical criminologists offer a diverse

set of perspectives designed to understand the source of harm, and then expose and criticize structural inequalities, conditions and impediments embedded in the criminal justice system, and challenge how the system breeds conflict and power differentials, is socially, economically and politically unjust and oppressive, reinforces patriarchy by undermining the lived experiences of women, and subjugates racial minorities and women (Hillyard, *et al.,* 2004).

"Bodies are not neutral;" rather, they are quintessentially interdisciplinary and inhabit different and at times incompatible social spaces (Allegranti, 2011, 487). From a feminist perspective, the body is viewed as a contested site, and the interweaving layers of personal choices, social positions, politics, and the intersecting characteristics of race and ethnicity, sexuality, and religion allows for, in the Foucauldian sense, an understanding of gendered dynamic power relationships, how women view the world, but also how the world views women (see Gilligan, 1982; hooks, 1989). Because bodies are sites for political decisions and social interactions, bodies are engaged in multiple discourses and practices that society attempts to regulate and govern (Butler, 2004; Foucault, 1977, 1978). The personal melds with the public, and the complex process of "being" becomes the personal embodiment of politics, which automatically has implications for how one moves through society. In other words, the "personal is political" (Hanisch, 1970; Lorde, 1984). Black feminists explainthe body has a public dimension, and how it is constituted based on social phenomenon that makes one's body not their own (Butler, 2004). Similarly, former prisoners who find themselves walking a city'sstreets after years of confinement develop distinct views about the contradictions between the hegemonic powers of the state and its ideologies (Richardson, 2013; See Hill Collins, 1990). The obvious contradiction is the criminal label *felon* that integrates a permanent power strategy used by the state upon criminal bodies; when former prisoners are released by the state to reenter the community, the continued use of the label felon outside of the criminal justice system makes their bodies not their own, so an essential part of reentry is to reclaim their body from the state.

When reentering society, each former prisoner makes a distinct effort to represent themselves by taking back control over their own body. Convict criminology theoryunambiguously centers the voices of men and women into the analysis to ensure that those who have experienced the harm of the criminal justice system and who have experienced post-confinement by returning to the community represent the reality of prison, the day-to-day actualities of confinement, and the negative consequences of returning to the community as a felon and former prisoner (Richards, *et al.*, 2012). By taking into consideration the relationship between institutional structures, individual characteristics and the larger political-social environment (Griffiths, Yule & Gartner, 2011) and moving beyond the boundaries of legalistic definitions of crime, convict criminologists rely on the methods of direct observation, face-to-face interviews, ethnography, and retrospective analysis of lived experiences to understand how defendants, prisoners and former prisoners experience the criminal justice system (Lenza, 2011; Richards, 2013; Richards & Ross, 2001). Convict criminology uses the voices of experience to critique how the system creates racist sexist outcomes, and oppresses poor people through neoliberalism and neocolonialism (Michalowski, 1996); such an approach explicitly and implicitly critiques most studies on prison and prisoner reentry as being abstract in nature, removed from reality, based on

secondary and/or outdated data sources (Richards, *et al.,* 2012) or which glosses over the horrors of prison to create a sanitized version of what men and women experience living in cages (Richards, 2013; DeVeaux, 2013).

Prisoners and former prisoners, as marginalized groups,are able to produce their own power and knowledge (see Hill Collins, 1990; Foucault, 1977), butbecause they are situated in a subordinated position, their race, status and gendered experiences are often obscured by politics (see Crenshaw, 1991)while state penal practices are designed to prevent them from becoming legitimate actors in society (McLaughlin, 2010).Participants in the latter group, when reentering society, were interested in reshaping the image forced upon them by the state and negating behaviors learned in prison. The challenge, however, was crafting an image that resisted a system that presupposes failure with re-arrest, conviction and imprisonment (Grattet, et al., 2009; Langan & Levin, 2002), which becomes a political statement of significance about who is accepted and rejected by society.

Participants' goal was to resist the negativity ingrained in the label felon, diminish the distinctions that separate felons from non-felons, challenge the notion of what it means to be a felon, and disguise their status from the viewing public through clothing. Participants' voices illustrate the realities of reentering society and how attire resists institutional and social constraints placed upon their bodies. Clothing becomes a communication strategy to engage with and make sense of the world, which meant deciding which clothes to wear in particular social and cultural settings. Therefore, the presentation of self is different for former prisoners labeled as felon;because bodies are not neutral, clothing is used as a form of resistance that is applicable to female and male felons' experiences reentering society.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CLOTHES & REENTRY

Dress is a universal human behavior, and provides two basic functions for humans; as a modifier of body processes or image, and as a medium for communication (Roach-Higgens and Eicher, 1992). Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) define "dress" as the total arrangement of outwardly material objects that are added to the body to modify, supplement or shape the body. Modifications include color (e.g. cosmetics, sun tanning or tattooing), shape (e.g. dieting and exercising), smell (e.g. perfumes, deodorants), and altering texture (e.g. teeth straightening). Body supplements can include additions like jewelry, glasses, scarfs, hats, bags, and a wide range of accessories. Body modifications and supplements can be permanent (e.g. dental work like bridges or dentures) or temporary (e.g. perfume). Thus, the way someone dresses can change how the body looks, feels, smells, tastes and sounds (e.g. tapping of high heels). The sociology of clothing is relevant to understand reentry and the presentation and management of self as former prisoners negotiate new social contexts because attire holds so much power in everyday interactions and impression management (see Crane and Bovone, 2006; Goffman, 1959).

The vast body of research on impression management and status attainment demonstrates that observers make quick judgements and inferences about others' competence, status, aptitude, and intelligence based on observable and visible signals and social markers, such as clothing and appearance, attitude and verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Dubois *et al.* 2012; Ambady and Rosenthal 1993; see Bellezza *et al.,* 2014). It is well established in the social psychological

literature that clothing influences people (see Cialdini, 1984). Personal dress styles and clothing choices effect the impressions of others in every social contact and exchange, influences different social interactions, and impacts how other people regard the wearer in matters of treatment, politeness and the type of service that is offered (see Sebastian, *et al.,* 2008). But, how someone dresses also influences the impressions formed by others, including degree of credibility, integrity, authority, and trustworthiness (O'Neal and Lapitsky, 1991), offers clues about the person wearing a particular style or type of clothing, and serves as a social cue or short cut to identify the person's status, group membership, occupation, and legitimacy of belonging. Styles of dress and choices of attire, Molloy (1988) argues, have an effect on the attitudes and behaviors of people viewing the wearer, including how they are treated: "Suits are associated with authority, with position, with power" (41). Clothing is a way to create an acceptable appearance that validates one's relationship and acceptance within society and the community, and as a way to resist the label felon by making visual the ability to fulfill societal expectations in everyday interactions.

Clothes matter, but for individuals incarcerated in prison they do not have the right or ability to choose their attire. Prisoners have their bodies subjugated to a host of indignities, including being forced to wear a prison uniform that embodies a person's status as captive (Ash, 2010), and prison uniforms represent the "power of the penal establishment to bodily punish miscreants" (Ash, 2010, 3), which means that those who are incarcerated are dressed by the state. Prison attireliterally incarcerates the wearer within the material issued by the state, whichreinforces the state's ability and power to punish criminals (Foucault, 1977; DeVeaux, 2013).By forcing all prisoners to wear the same uniform made of rough course fabric, the prison uniform becomes a political statement that separates prisoners from guards, strips prisoners of their individuality, and controls them by reducing each one to an interchangeable identity. While incarcerated, a prisoners' identity is further removedand deleted because they are deprived of the right to create individual styles, denied a choice of clothing for purposes of self-expression, and are forbidden from using embellishments (e.g. accessories and jewelry).

While incarcerated, the inability to express oneself through the development of an individual clothing style, combined with the fact that most former prisoners have limited social capital and lack a wardrobe upon returning to society, means that men and women newly home must locate and secure weather appropriate clothing. However, obtaining clothing is one of many challengesformer prisoners encounter while reentering society after serving time in prison (see Patterson, 2013; Pettus-Davis, *et al.,* 2015). Excepting Smiley and Middlemass (Forthcoming), post-prison clothing options, how former prisoners' access clothing, and the choices they make about which clothes they wear upon reentering society is largely ignoredwithin the larger scholarship on reentry. Yet, the inability to put together a basic wardrobe that fits, is clean, and is weather appropriate isone of the mostfundamentaland pressing unmet needs; the difficulty in securing proper fitting clothing has a persistent negative effect upon those returning to society. An appropriate and wearable wardrobe is imperative for returning prisoners who are relearning how to interact with society, looking for a job, attending drug court or meeting with a probation or parole officer, and taking on a host of new tasks and responsibilities.

THE CULTURE OF RESISTANCE

Resistance embodies the notion of power: Foucault declared that "where there is power, there is resistance" (1978, 95); inspired by Foucault (1977, 1978, 1980) and Abu-Lughod (1990), we turn Foucault's statement around contending that "where there is resistance, there is power" to examine the everyday use of clothing by former prisoners as a means to challenge and resist dominant ideologies that only highlight the negative to instead show how resistance can be a form of power (see Abu-Lughod, 1990). Resistance, and the language of resistance, reflects the realities that groups must negotiate and challenge hegemonic ideologies and existing power relations in order to transform the system (see Bloom, 2013). In many instances, resistance is a struggle to end oppressive systems to achieve social justice or other aims of equality by challenging the status quo and the reproduction of power. Political resistance is seen as a lasting movement against political oppression, but also can take the form of resisting social domination or systems that characterize a particular social group. Foucault describes political power as a "continuation of war by other means" (Foucault, 1980, 90) and argues that resistance takes the form of confronting existing power-relations.

Power constrains subjects, but within societal constraints, individuals are able to resist in everyday occurrences, negotiate public spaces, and contest the dominant power through their individual decisions. Drawing upon Goffman's notion of impression management, examples include how one chooses to wear or adorn their hair (Kuumba & Femi, 1998); how stigmatized religious groups make their religion visible on a daily basis by wearing religious clothing, such as the Burqa, kippa (the religious cap worn by Jewish men), kufi (the religious cap worn by Muslim men) and hijab (Endelstein & Ryan, 2013); and how Black women negotiate their identity to cross borders in predominantly white environments (Scott, 2013). In each example, identifiable groups are responding to inequities and powerful societal structures of sexism and racism to resist and challenge pejorative stereotypes and cultural and societal hegemonic practices imposed by larger society. Public forms of resistance produce meaning that is connected to identity, negotiation and social space in an effort to resist dominant discourses (Richardson, 2013), and clothing and attire is an everyday communicative style that makes what is visible recognizable while giving the wearer the ability to hide what cannot be recognized or should not be viewed by the larger public (Honneth, 2007).

Former prisoners returning to the community feel alienated from society, and want to hide their past and the stigma of a felony. Implicitly, participants understood that it was best to keep their past hidden, because what remains hidden and the degree of visibility that the hidden is displayed are interpreted differently by individuals through their own political or social perspective, which may be different from the actors' point of view (Jonker & Amiraux, 2006; Endelstein & Ryan, 2013). When participants were unable to acquire a new wardrobe, their lack of access to clothing exacerbates their feelings of stigmatization; clothing became a visual demarcation line (Smiley & Middlemass, Forthcoming). For those participants able to acquire clothing, despite being labeled felon by the hegemonic state, were not passive objects to the system's power; rather, participants used clothing to resist the label felon and the dominant methods of control to act in a conscious manner to reconfigure their relationship with and in society. Clothing is an active way to contest the government's effort to delegitimize and control them, but also is a means to challenge the social and political construction of what a felon is and is not.

A wardrobe of fitted clothes that are weather appropriate can create a consistent pattern of resistance to the everyday, and can give former prisoners agency to negotiate social situations and legitimize their right to enter and occupy public spaces. Despite control mechanisms that may block their access, resistance through clothing becomes a way to negotiate institutional and societal structures, becomes an alternative method to the language of criminality, validates social interactions, and improves one's self-confidence by organizing a social identity that does not emphasize the label felon, and can positively influence the minds of individuals' former prisoners encounter in the public sphere. For participants, resistance is not about disrupting or toppling the state's domain and power; rather, resistance through clothing is a "stabilizing identity" (see Bloom, 2013, 220)that giveseach participant the time to make sense of society and reduce the disorder and rejection that some returning to the community experience on a daily basis. Through first-hand narratives of men and women reentering society, we illustrate how clothing providesthe means and ability for former prisoners to act within society and engage in cooperative and interactive relationships that resists the past.

We theorize that participants'clothing and choice of attire are explicit forms of resistance that provides a sense of individual power by turning "what was" into "what is." For participants, clothing broke down some of the fixed boundaries that separatethem from non-felons, allowingthem to negotiate public spaces, overcome the oppressive nature of the criminal justice system, and perform in a manner that is acceptable to societal norms. Our approach supports convict criminology's theoretical perspective of locating the lived experiences and voices of former prisoners, who are more than their felony conviction, at the center of analysis.

CREATING RESISTANCE: THE USE OF CLOTHING WHILE REENTERING SOCIETY

In an attempt to construct a better understanding of how clothing is a form of resistance in the everyday, we conducted extensive fieldwork at a single reentry organization in Newark, N.J.; utilizing exploratory ethnography, unstructured observations, and interview data, we hypothesize about the emergence of clothing as resistance to develop an integrative perspective about reentering society to theorize how participants used clothing as a technique to socially construct resistance (see Bloom, 2013). Based on our participant-observations of what and how participants wore clothes, how they appeared in relationship to other participants, and on what participants said about their attire and clothing choices, two themes of resistance directly related to clothing emerged from our field work, conventional clothes and alternative attire. Grounded in the context of reentry and the effective execution of reentry expectations, and based on these two notions of clothing type, we theorize how participants engage in two forms of resistance.

Participants wearing conventional clothing wanted to be viewed as proper by mainstream viewers and choose to wear suitable attire that fit within the dominant cultural norms of society. By consciously attempting to shed their former self, participants resisted their past by engaging in a form of resistance that defied who they used to be by conforming to societal standards about who they wanted to become. On the other hand, participants who engaged in wearing alternative attire used adornments and made style choices that didnot fit neatly into established norms of mainstream dress. Participants in this latter group based their clothing choices on an aspiration to be accepted by peers outside of the reentry community, and were dressing

themselves in attire that was deemed acceptable for specific social settings and interactions.Nonconformity, under certain conditions, can be beneficial and bolster a particular form of acceptance and status by observers (see Bellezza *et al.,* 2014).

Participants had already violated the formal and informal rules of society and social norms; as convicted felons, they had been rejected and punished by society and sanctioned for their criminal behavior, so the context in which they are assimilating is not simply looking for social acceptance, rather, participants have to cover a great distance to establish one's place back in society. Appropriate clothing is essential to the reentry process and can be transformative (Smiley and Middlemass, Forthcoming) because the ability to alter one's appearance to convey a particular identity has both social and political implications. Clothing provides a multi-faceted illustration about how the wearer views themselves, what the wearer wants to communicate to potential viewers, and how the wearer wants to be treated by other actors in society. These conscious and sometimes unconscious forms of expression via clothing are important to recognize as part of the reintegration process as participants, largely on their own, had to undertake re-crafting their image upon returning to society after being incarcerated.

As noted above, where there is power, there is resistance, which suggests that resistance is common and always present; emerging from this exploration, we reimagine resistance asa range of different clothing tools and styles of dress that operates as a stabilizing force for those returning to the community after being incarcerated. Resistance in this sense is a social construct (Gal, 1995; Prasad & Prasad, 1998), and although the traditional view of resistance is a dislocating event or disturbance (Bloom, 2013), we illustrate that clothing can construct a new truth about one's social condition, break down the boundaries that society erects between felons and non-felons, and increase the social distance from prison while decreasing the social distance with the community through the personal politics of clothing choices. In all instances, people dress to impress, but they also dress to be liked and accepted; humans have a fundamental need to belong, and in order to belong it is necessary to conform to in-group behaviors and rules of interaction and engagement (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004) andto avoid negative social sanctions and public disapproval (Levine, 1989).We believe that when former prisoners conform to a chosen in-group it is not because one believes what the group is doing is "right," but rather an inherent need to survive their new social settings; in prison, they learned to adopt behavior to survive, and in the same way,we argue, participants adopt behaviors as necessity to fit in and avoid being dismissed. For former prisoners, clothing is of central importance for the process of reintegration;by expressly not looking like a gangsta, prisoner, or criminal, participants clothing choices are politically and personally important tools required to negotiate reentry, contest the label of felon and orchestrate a paradigm shift in how they are viewed by society.

One last point before turning to examples of conventional clothes and alternative attire is that clothing performance is deeply impacted by social ecology and the context with which one resides;certain clothing patterns, behaviors, and styles are emphasized in many social settings and regarded as important decorum by the people that move in and out of certainenvironments. For example, in a boardroom, people expect themselves and others to wear business attire, such as a two-piece suit (and tie for men); anything less than suitable business attire would be deemed inappropriate by many viewers, whereasspending an afternoon

at the movies, men and women can choose to wear a range of less formal outfits and there is not just one acceptable clothing choice. This same rationale can be applied to the clothing choices and styles that former prisoners choose to wear upon reentering the community; however, as they navigate different social settings, they must be cognizant of the message they are communicating based on the style of clothing they choose to wear. The goal of the clothing they choose needs to be acceptable to the setting and social system of behaviors, and impart a non-criminal message, but challenges arise as men and women have to re-learn what they knew about clothing styles and attire prior to being incarcerated in order to adapt to the society they are reentering.

CONVENTIONAL CLOTHING

Adopting conventional clothing styles is a way to resist and overcome the hurdles and challenges one faces while reentering, and the organization where we conducted our field work helped clients adopt this viewpoint based on an emphasis on respectability politics regarding the modes of behavior that the organization expected everyone to adopt. The rules of dress and decorum within the arena of prisoner reentry are entrenched in the politics of respectability, which is when a marginalized group attempts to police its own members and enforce mainstream values, behaviors and norms in an effort to conform to the rules about appropriate and acceptable clothing and dress styles set by the dominant group in society (Duneier, 1992). The formula behind the rules is focused on helping former prisoners reenter and acclimate to the norms and expectations of society, and to seamlessly transition from prison to the community.

Upon entering the main office where we conducted our research, a large sign dictates the appropriate clothing behaviors, such as having shoes tied properly and wearing a belt, and also listed are the types of attire and adornments deemed inappropriate. The "no list" indicated that hats, du-rags, and sagging pants were *not* to be worn inside the office. In addition to clothing norms, there were rules of deportment, including not using foul language and sitting properly (e.g. no slouching or sleeping); when spending time at the office, anyone wearing a hat was immediately reprimanded and told to remove that particular article of clothing; exceptions were made only for religious attire, such as a kufi or hijab. The major objective behind the rules was to get men and women to think of their behavior in light of securing gainful and legal employment.

While conventional clothing choices are seen as mainstream and acceptable norms of behavior, we found that the enforcement of the rules energized some clients utilizing the reentry office. The rules galvanized them to adopt a standard form of dress style by wearing clothing that were commonly seen in an office setting; men wore two-piece suits and women wore skirt-suits or pant suits. The wearing of formal business attire, such as blazers, formal slacks, button-down collar shirts, and hard-soled dress shoes, became an empowering theme for the few lucky participants who were able to secure one of the few jobs at the reentry organization specifically designed for them: Working the front desk, which was a coveted position because it allowed the person out of the halfway house five days a week and for longer periods of time. The front-desk person was responsible for answering the phone, greeting visitors, and maintaining the information pamphlets and handouts that were available for clients with differing needs and interests. The culture of the reentry organization made the front-desk position an

important tool to enforce mainstream behavior; anyone who secured the position took it very seriously, and adopted the norms of dress and speech that were part of the organizational culture.

The first noticeable change of anyone who was appointed to the front desk was their clothing. Men wore suits with ties and dress shoes and women wore pant suits or sweater sets with a skirt. One person who held this position said, "I wear this suit because I want people coming in that door to know this is a place of business and to be professional about it. If they want to come here, they have to know to leave that street mess outside." The second noticeable change was their vernacular and use of language, which was observed when answering the phone or greeting visitors. When answering the phone, the person would respond to each caller with a professional greeting using a calm welcoming voice, and upon arrival, visitors and clients were welcomed and asked, "How can I help you?" in an inviting manner. Lastly, the men and women who sat at the front-desk took the volunteer job seriously, and took pride in how thereception area looked; when not busy answering the phones or greeting visitors, they could be seen tidying up their desk, making sure pamphlets and other paper materials were organized neatly in appropriate piles or emptying the trash bins. Their professional demeanor while wearing conventional clothes was a way to resist their former status as prisoner and current label of felon.

Many participants had never engaged in wearing a formal style of dress prior to incarceration. Many men were embarrassed because they did not know how to tie a tie and for women they did not know how to walk inbusiness appropriate heels. However, when they accomplished these skills, we observed visible signs of empowerment and personal pride, which became a source of resistance against their felony conviction and allowed them to engage in the personal politics of respectability. We also witnessed a shift in demeanor and attitude amongst the participants that wore conventional clothing.

As men and women shifted from the state issued prison uniform to a more conventional style, we began to see their confidence levels increase and heard them talk in more positive tones about their daily attempts to reenter society; for some, it was a metamorphosis as their personal disposition about life changed alongside their new wardrobe. For instance, participants who previously were disengaged during group meetings began to unfold their arms, become attentive, and share their feelings and opinions with the entire group. We theorize that this change in perspective and attitude was due to a renewed desire and effort to be apart of society rather than to be viewed as a deviant member of society. The message they conveyed was "I matter."

In addition to a personal shift to accompany the wearing of conventional clothing, theirclothing choice also became a vitally important way in which men and women established productive relationships with society, including with reentry staff, parole or probation officers, the courts, and other officials. By demonstrating to those who held positions of power within the reentry process, participants engaged in a form of resistance that rejected the stereotypes about criminals and felons, and created a counter-myth about who they were and who they wanted to be in the future. By dispelling the idea that former prisoners cannot change their appearance, attitude, and lives, they increase their likelihood of reentering society successfully. As one man engaged in wearing conventional clothing that hid the mark of prison presented

himself in a manner that was polite and respectful said, "I want to be more than just a statistic." Alongside his standard clothing choices, this simple phrase became an indication of his resistance to being continuously labeled "thug," "criminal,"and "felon." Participants able to mask these labels behind their clothing and attire choices presented a physical appearance that was a visible form of resistance to the social bias and disapproval connected to the negative labels.

The conscious effort to remove the prison look and adopta conventional clothing style is essential to re-engage with society after serving time in prison, but it also emphasizes how clothing is an important tool to resist the past, engage and interact with othersin a respectablemanner, and demonstrate personal growth. For participants who purposely choose to change their appearance, we saw evidence of a change in their personality and disposition, too, which also changed how others in positions of power viewed them. By dressing in a particular style, men and women were actively engaging in forms of resistance to stereotypes, myths, and ideologies.

ALTERNATIVE STYLES

Unlike conventional modes of dress, we observed participants who wanted to shed their prison experience through alternative forms of expression, which was much more about establishing one's identity in contrast to the dominant society's rules about social acceptability. Participants engaged in alternative styles were attempting to counteract and respond to the participants wearing conventional forms of dress. By wearing alternate forms of clothing, some participants were resisting societal rules; we theorize that after servingtime in prison, former prisoners want to consciously and unconsciously resist anyone dictating what they had to wear.

Some of the participants in this study who dressed in alternative forms of expression, we propose, did so in conscious ways to try and either re-gain a sense of their former self or build a new identity that fit their current lifestyle or comfort level. In some cases, men were very hesitant to wear a suit because of the way it made them look or becauseit made them feel uncomfortable. One man explained, "wearing a tight collar and a tie feels like it is choking me, I been choked by the system the past twelve years, I want to breath and be comfortable."

For participants seeking an alternative way to differentiate themselves were also asserting their sense of autonomy and independence. By wearing urban street clothes, such as fitted baseball caps, oversized polo collared shirts, designer blue jeans, and Nike sneakers, participants placed less emphasis on dominant business attire and instead placed more value on how their peers viewed them in the urban ecological system they found themselves. Part of the reentry process is acquiring knowledge about the community to understand how things work; for many participants, they had not been in Newark for more than a decade, so gaining ecological knowledge about the city depended on their ability to engage and communicate with individuals in this community. Knowledge acquisition, we argue, can be facilitated through the use of alternative styles of dress that provides a sense of place for those who have not been physically connected to the community for a number of years. Choosing to wear alternative dress styles contributes to a sense of wellbeing that linked participants to their former community, conforms to the norms of the street, and moreover, decreases the space between felon and non-felon.

We theorize that for the male and female participants that engaged in what we are calling alternative attire did so because they wanted to belong, and to belong it was necessary to take into consideration the groups' prospective of how they were viewed. Belonging is an essential part of being human, and after spending time in prison, participants wanted to choose what social norms they adopted to fit in and gain approval from their chosen peers. Wearing modern urban street clothing style plays an important role in developing community ties and establishing relationships with members of the broader community, which is an informative and innovative form of resistance because it rejects both the prison look as well as the politics of respectability espoused by the culture and norms of the reentry organization.

Refusing to oblige the dominant mainstream standards of beauty and clothing style, some participants purposely transformed their appearance into a younger version of themselves by wearing the same type of clothing they wore prior to being incarcerated. We found that this was the case particularly for older men (60+) as a way to resist dominant culture expectations of who they were and who they wanted to be: One man said, "they [family] want me to dress like a grandpa, they want me to look old and wear old man clothing. I don't feel old, I feel young, I feel good, and I feel free." By consistently wearing Adidas and Nike track suits, with white sneakers and white t-shirts, this particular participant did not want to be told what he had to wear, and choosing his own style of dress was a form of resistance to societal expectations of someone his age. We speculate that for older men who had served more than a decade in prison, they wanted to feel the age they were prior to being incarcerated; although they could not go back in time, they could at least dress in a manner that reminded them of a time when they were free.

Other participants expressed similar feelings and rationales about not wanting to conform to certain styles of dress nor wear particular clothes because of the image they were trying to convey to their peers. For many of the men, this dealt with potential romantic relationships. The feeling of not looking "right" or not "fitting-in" was important to their sense of manhood and reestablishing themselves on the dating scene after years of incarceration. One young woman exclaimed, "I don't want no man who is in a business suit, I like guys with swagger." The men understood this to mean that clothing style and attire choices were important to attract the opposite sex; by looking attractive to the opposite sex was a way to resist and counter the years spent in the same-sex environment of prison.

Choosing to wear an alternative style of dress came from a conscious and unconscious effort to resist the prison culture of clothing, and although not all of the participants wore clothing with a particular agenda, in one case, the participant actively chose to wear grey sweat suits, which in many ways resembled the regulated clothing provided by the Department of Corrections (DOC). However, in a fashion twist, he did not wear no-name grey sweats; rather, he took pride in the fact that his grey sweat suit was Ralph Lauren POLO and it was obviously expensive based on the cut and quality of the material. While he never indicated precisely why he choose to wear a style of clothing that appeared to be a DOC issued outfit, we theorize that he was simultaneously rejecting a conventional mode of dress and his prison identity by wearing high-priced but unpretentious clothes that displayed his command to secure social and financial capital. Despite choosing to wear clothes that upon first look appeared to be "prison issued" but upon closer examination were far superior, he was resisting the prison's

power to subjugate him to wear uncomfortable and roughly made state issued prison uniforms. Although subtle to casual observers, amongst the returning population, this was an effective way to lay out his status, communicate his wealth, and display his ability to build a coveted and understated wardrobe that would not bring about the attention of parole.

Participants also displayed a sense of resistance through their knowledge of how the Black body has historically been dominated and politicized. One older male client said, "Wearing a suit doesn't make you any less Black. Do you think George Zimmerman would not have killed Trayvon [Martin] if he were wearing a suit? You will always be a nigger in their [dominant/ White society] eyes." In the same light, formerly incarcerated women wanted to engage in beauty practices that made them feel pretty and feel feminine. After serving time in prison, female participants engaged in visible forms of body modifications as a form of rebellion to the prison's rules against the use of beauty products and cosmetics. In female prisons, women are denied beauty products, cleansers, moisturizers, and make-up, and while living in a halfway house these items canbe deemed as contraband; despite the potential sanctions, some of the participants obtained make-up and skin creams, and used themwhile at the reentry organization. One woman said, "I'm a woman and want to feel like one. I don't want to be seen as ugly or that I'm not trying to take care of myself. I mean is wearing some lipstick really a crime?" For many women, in order to feel feminine, accessing make-up upon reentering society was a priority, but make-up was also a way to highlight their physical features while resisting the same bland appearance they experienced in prison.

Other forms of body modifications adopted by participants who were drawn to alternative attire and adornmentsincluded tattoos andhairstyles. Althoughnot clothing, these fall into the domain of creating an alternative style that resists and defies the rules of prison.For some participants, getting a tattoo after being released from prison was a deliberate way to resettheir life; a female participant came to the reentry organization one day displaying a newly inked tattoo on her forearm. For her, that new tattoo operated as a constant reminder of her ability to grow beyond the prison's walls and beyond her current status.Like tattoos, hairstyles can also be an act of resistance to prison and mainstream society. Wearing dreadlocks, which is associated with reggae music and the Rastafarian movement, is depicted as a form of hairstyle that criminals wear in some forms of popular media, and as an unconventional hairstyle, it is a form of resistance to mainstream Eurocentric hairstyles.

Religious attire and adornments that cover one's hair are a prominent form of resistance to a life lived in prison. Many of the men identified as Muslim, andupon reentering society it was important for their own religious identity and status in the community to wear a kufi and sport a traditional Muslim beard. Inside prison, men are often not allowed to wear a kufi. Women prisoners experience similar treatment with regards to wearing a hijab while incarcerated; therefore, upon reentry to the community, Muslim women wear a hijab as an important role in reestablishing their sense of self and reinserting themselves back into their religious community. Wearing certain religious items is not only a sacred obligation, but it is also a style that resists dominant Christian beliefs and challenges western standards of beauty. The image of a Muslimman wearing a kufi or a Muslim woman wearing a hijab holds both social and political statements, but also brings the potential of stigmatization in the post-9/11 era of anti-Islamic sentiments in the United States.

CONCLUSION

The trend of prisoner reentry is rapidly changing: In July 2015, President Obama commuted the sentences of forty-six federal inmates serving long prison terms, and national politics is undergoing a seismic bipartisan shift away from the use of long prison sentences.In this rapidly changing environment, there will be an increase in the number of former prisoners being released from prison to reenter the community; this change requires both a critical understanding of important issues for those being released as well as new policies that guarantee former prisoners are able to responsiblyreenter the community. Part of that conversation, we argue, must include understanding how clothes are accessed and their relationship to reentry.

Through our theoretical analysis, we have shown how men and women view clothing as an integral part of their reentry narrative and how the use of clothing is a personal and intrinsic way in which former prisoners can create their own identity outside of prison.The participants who purposely choose to wear conventional clothes wanted to be a part of mainstream society and to integrate themselves into the broader community in an effort to resist societal negativity and challenge themselves to avoid being marginalized.By conforming to conventional notions of dress, these participants resisted the label felon, and repelled attempts by those in power to reject them; such resistance is indicative of how they wanted to live their life moving forward. On the other hand, we find that some participantscrave a sense of individualism, which can emerge by wearing alternative styles of dressthat embraces their own uniqueness while rejecting the labels imposed by mainstream society and rebuffing the rules of prison.

It is important to recognize that both types of dress are forms of socially constructed resistanceagainst the conception of "criminal" and the label felon. We believe that the development of reentry policies that guarantee access to appropriate clothing for newly released prisoners is vital to ensure their ability to reenter successfully. Additionally, this research opens up a conversation about how clothing acts as both a physical and visible change to one's body, and also howclothing can alter one's disposition, mental outlook, demeanor, and attitude. Regardless,if participants wore conventional clothes or adopted alternativeattire, the common denominator we witnessed was a positive shift in how men and women carried themselves while abandoning the behaviors learned in prison, but this was only because most of the participants had access to clothingof their own choosing. As one woman said about a new wardrobe: "It's like I'm a clean slate and I can start over." Clothing has the ability to be both transformative and revolutionary, and reentryprograms need to create opportunities to access a range of clothing items so that men and women coming home can begin the hard journey of reentering.

Our theoretical analysis of clothing as resistance embodies difference by taking into consideration how former prisoners mold their body image to signal their new status and position in society.By providing accounts of men and women's clothing choices while reentering society, we broaden the scope of previous work on reentry. Our purpose goes beyond description to show how an analysis of clothes contributes to the field of critical criminology by pushing against the orthodox identity of "felon" and pointing towards the culture of resistance and the embodiment of personal politics. In other words, clothing choices are political, whether conscious or not; we know the "personal is political" (Hanisch, 1970; The Combahee River

Collective, 1978/1995; Lorde, 1984) in how men and women reentering society use clothing to transform their status and position in the community.

Our analysis furthers our understanding of how felons' physical appearance challenges the tendency to view them as criminals or passive agents; instead, we demonstrate that they are active agents, which has implications for the increased use of critical criminology to enrich the reentry literature by shifting attention to the lived experiences of felons through their clothing choices. In other words, clothing conceptualizes one's reentry into society that strips their subordinate position as prisoner to transform into freemen and freewomen.

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