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Rethinking Macro-level Theories of Consumption

Research Findings from Nazi Concentration Camps

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This research seeks to inform the developing macromarketing theme of restricted consumer behavior. Nazi concentration camps were selected because they provide an extreme example of external control and constraint. Multidisciplinary scholarship is reviewed, with an emphasis on relevance to the understanding of consumer restrictions. A brief description of the qualitative methodology follows, and the results as thematic categories come next. The thematic categories of *forced dispossession*, *survival strategies*, *reconfiguration of the self*, and *reemerging into society* are used to provide implications for the majority of world citizens who face significant limitations in their lived experiences as consumers. Closing remarks discuss the opportunities such a shift in emphasis may have on the viability of theoretical constructions about consumption.

Keywords: *consumption; Holocaust; restriction*

Introduction

The macromarketing community has concentrated considerable scholarly attention on consumptive quality of life (see Sirgy and Lee [2006] for an excellent example). Much of this research is concerned with inequities that may exist within and between societies, using a human rights framework to embed findings (e.g., Hill, Felice, and Ainscough 2007). Yet the ways in which the larger field of marketing defines and describes the consumer behavior process seems to concentrate on Western consumption opportunities that reveal the complex strategies for navigating abundance to make satisfying exchange decisions (see Rau and Samiee [1981] for a review). The principal theme of this scholarship is that consumers are overwhelmed by the variety of available promotions and alternatives, requiring them to employ an assortment of coping mechanisms to plot a course through the clutter. The concept of *information overload* (Lurie 2004) is used to describe this dilemma, masking the underlying tenet of *opportunity overload*. Thus, the consumer challenge is to make good decisions under the implicit assumption that such transactions are assured.

This unspoken premise of widespread exchange capability within the marketing system to match unlimited opportunity is misguided (Hill 2005). From the ethnographic research of Lewis (1959) to the consumer investigations of Andreasen (1975) to the modeling of vulnerability in the marketplace by Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg (2005), scholars have been challenged to recognize the differences in consumption both within and

between societies. For example, the United Nations' *Human Development Report 2005* (United Nations Development Programme 2005) shows that women have fewer opportunities than men to receive adequate nutrition, health care, and education or to occupy prestigious and higher paying jobs. Furthermore, the report indicates that the wealthiest 20 percent of the world's population has income fifty times greater than the bottom 20 percent, with the poorest 40 percent living on less than two dollars a day.

The authors' research purpose is to provide significant input for redeveloping macro-level theories of consumption. The following section examines extant literature that informs and guides this study based on the concept of restricted consumer behavior (Hill 2001a). Once this perspective has been articulated, the article introduces the research domain, method, and analysis protocol. As the title suggests, Nazi concentration camps were selected as the context because they represent a highly controlled and externally validated extreme case of the phenomenon of consumer restriction. The results come next in the form of interrelated themes that contain verbatim comments from concentration camp prisoners.

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The article closes with implications for incorporating restriction into our thinking about consumers.

Restricted Consumption

The disparate scholarship on restricted consumer behavior has a history that reaches back to the founding of our field as an academic discipline within business (see Hill [2002] for a more complete historical perspective). Sturdivant (1969) was an early pioneer who believed that western media projects an image of consumption that fails to recognize the widespread poverty that exists even among advanced economies such as the United States. In this same vein, Holloway and Cardozo (1969) found that about 36 million Americans were impoverished as of the 1960 census, with an overrepresentation by people of color, single mothers, rural dwellers, and the elderly. Recent investigations show that about 25 percent of the U.S. population is unable to engage adequately the material culture, with almost half of the world's inhabitants considered truly poor (Hill 2001a; United Nations Development Programme 2005).

The reactions of many marketers to this destitution act to exacerbate consumption inequities. The classic U.S. study by Caplovitz (1963) chronicles the ways in which unethical vendors took advantage of impoverished consumers who had few or no alternatives to the high interest rates offered on major appliances. Several studies reveal that such abuses continue to exist, in that inferior products are still matched with above-market prices in poor communities (Bell and Burlin 1993; Grow et al. 2007; Hill, Ramp, and Silver 1998). Andreasen (1975, 1993) suggests that such exchange imbalances are the result of few competitors providing acceptable options for impoverished consumers, limited mobility/transportation barriers keeping poor citizens from alternative shopping venues, and hardly any traditional lending services offering credit at lower costs.

Examination of the impact of restricted consumption on impoverished consumers has revealed a variety of attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. For instance, Lewis (1959) asserts that this environmental paucity causes a culture of poverty, whereby the underprivileged feel alienated from the larger material culture, leading to loss of self-esteem/self-efficacy and poor mental/physical health. More recent investigations within the consumer behavior literature seem to corroborate these outcomes in cases of extreme financial distress (Hill and Stamey 1990; Hill 1991). Caplovitz (1963) suggests that such conditions result in irrationality among buyers, and he used Veblen's (1924) term *conspicuous consumption*

to capture the illogic of selecting more rather than less expensive products to advance one's social status within poverty-stricken neighborhoods.

These findings notwithstanding, other scholars have observed a variety of healthy adaptations to restricted consumption that demonstrate the underlying capacity for resourcefulness by impoverished consumers. In his early work, Andreasen (1975) notes that even excessive debt obligations by the poor are "a result of careful calculations of the consequences of their actions" (p. 40) that seek to maximize their material accumulation. An essential aspect of these acquisition tactics is meeting basic material needs, but they also serve important societal functions, including reintegration of the self and status rejuvenation (Hill and Gaines 2007). Thus, consistent with the work of Goffman (1959, 1961), the poor work against negative monikers associated with their relative poverty such as "homeless person" and "welfare mother," eventually seeking material markers that signal their preferential standing among peers.

While the majority of scholarship on consumption restrictions concentrates on poverty or resource scarcity, other consumer circumstances have been investigated in a similar manner that may be categorized loosely as the study of marketplace vulnerability (see Baker, Gentry, and Ritterburg [2005] for more on this construct). Two recent investigations examined the constrained decision-making context within which illiterate consumers navigate the media messages that bombard their everyday lives as well as the coping mechanisms they employ to create fruitful and satisfying exchange relationships (Adkins and Ozanne 2005; Viswanathan, Rosa, and Harris 2005). Additionally, researchers have looked at other personal limitations/physical challenges that constrict consumers' market access (Baker and Kaufman-Scarborough 2001; Kaufman-Scarborough and Baker 2005).

In a series of studies based on the *Buchenwald Report* (Hackett 1995), Elizabeth Hirschman and Ronald Hill (Hill and Hirschman 1996; Hirschman and Hill 2000) used a consumer behavior template to understand the dynamics within a total-control institution (Goffman 1961). The *Buchenwald Report* was an attempt by Allied forces to provide evidence of the atrocities that were perpetrated by the Nazis in their concentration camps. The authors of these articles explored how World War II prisoners were turned from intelligent human beings into commodities that were easily discarded when no longer useful. Yet even in this dismal situation, the prisoners found ways to reconfigure their individual and group identities through various activities, including consumption. Many of these endeavors are categorized as sources of resistance to their commoditization and include hedonic or

aesthetic experiences such as plays and music, consumption of forbidden books or newspapers, reinstatement of private property and sharing among prisoners, spiritual consumption through attending banned religious ceremonies, private health care services performed outside the purview of the Nazis, and sabotage of war production materials that they were required to assemble (Hirschman and Hill 2000; Hill and Hirschman 1996).

Rather than relying on an integrative text that interprets the experiences of the detainees, the authors' analysis relies on data gleaned from first-person accounts of prisoners' consumptive lives over their entire confinement. Thus, the findings present ways in which prisoners moved from ordinary to restricted consumption, revealing the full range of constraints and coping strategies under the most extreme circumstances. In these camps, people were forced to choose between possessions and the real chance of death—through beatings or executions as a punishment for trading or through the loss of calories (food or energy) that acquiring the possessions entailed. By looking at these consumer behavior constructs in the context of extremity, we can learn more about the nature and boundaries of these phenomena. As Primo Levi (1958/1996, 27), Italian Holocaust survivor, attests, the Nazi concentration camps clearly marked the extreme end of the deprivation continuum:

But consider what value, what meaning, is enclosed in even the smallest of our daily habits, in the hundred possessions which even the poorest beggar owns: a handkerchief, an old letter, the photo of a cherished person. These things are part of us, almost like limbs of our body; nor is it conceivable that we can be deprived of them in our world, for we immediately find others to substitute the old ones, other objects which are ours in the personification and evocation of our memories.

Imagine now a man who is deprived of everyone he loves, and at the same time of his house, his habits, his clothes, in short of everything he possesses: he will be a hollow man, reduced to suffering and needs, forgetful of dignity and restraint, for he who loses all often easily loses himself.

As important as consumption is to macromarketers, some scholars may believe that an analysis of consumer behavior in the camps trivializes the immensity of human suffering, degradation, and death that defined that brutal world. However, the authors' argument suggests otherwise, that this exploration pays tribute to the victims of Nazism. Much has been written about the success or failure of the Nazi endeavor to turn human to animal within the fences of the camps (e.g., Donat 1963; Cohen 1953; Frister 1993/2000). Yet there was heroic resistance

against this process, and consumption and possessions played a critical role in this struggle, helping to explain the importance of consumption even under life-and-death circumstances.

Methodological Considerations

The primary sources of data for this study include memoirs written by survivors (see Table 1), interviews conducted with survivors, auxiliary material collected from Steven Spielberg's (1998) film, *The Last Days*, and photographs of the Auschwitz concentration camp archived by the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., and Yad Vashem, Israel. No systematic approach to the selection of memoirs was used, but an attempt was made to include a roughly equal number of memoirs written by men and women and to cover many countries of origin within Europe. Most of the Holocaust memoir literature was written by people who were in their mid-teens to late twenties at the time of their captivity, and this is the case for the authors of the memoirs analyzed here. Memoirs were not selected because of their mention of trade or possessions. Jewish survivors wrote all of the memoirs included in this analysis (though the survivors varied greatly in their practice of the religion). Jews are widely acknowledged to have suffered the greatest deprivation and mistreatment of all prisoners in the camps (see, for example, Wiernicki 2001).

Seven informants were interviewed at the Descendants of the Shoah conference, a meeting of Holocaust survivors held in Chicago in 2002. All informants were of Jewish heritage. Informants were recruited between sessions and brought to a private interview room where the purpose of the research was described in detail. Consent was obtained for participation and taping of the interviews, which emphasized experience from the first-person point of view (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989). Survivors were asked to talk about the loss of their possessions prior to arriving at the camps and whether there were possessions they tried to keep with them for as long as possible. They were also asked about trading in the camps and whether they had ever engaged in trading.

Auxiliary interview material was also collected from Steven Spielberg's (1998) film, *The Last Days*, in which five Hungarian survivors describe their Holocaust experience. Three additional sources are the Shoah Foundation¹ interviews conducted by trained interviewers with three family members (a father and two aunts) of the first author, all Czech/Hungarian survivors of the Holocaust. Real names are used for memoirists and the survivors

Table 1
Memoirs

Survivor	Memoir Title	Date First Published	Nationality and Gender	Camp
Lucille Eichengreen	<i>From Ashes to Life: My Memories of the Holocaust</i>	1994	German Female	Auschwitz Neuengamme Bergen-Belsen
Judith Magyar Isaacson	<i>Seed of Sarah: Memoirs of a Survivor</i>	1990 (1991) ^a	Hungarian Female	Auschwitz Hessisch-Lichtenau
Primo Levi	<i>Survival in Auschwitz</i> <i>Moments of Reprieve</i>	1958 (1996) 1979 (1995)	Italian Male Polish Female	Auschwitz Bolkenhain
Gerda Weissman Klein	<i>The Drowned and the Saved</i> <i>All But My Life</i>	1986 (1989) 1957 (1995)		Marzdorf Landeshut Grunberg Helmbrechts
Rena Kornreich Gelissen	<i>Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz</i>	1995	Polish Female	Auschwitz Neustadt-Glewe
Filip Müller	<i>Eyewitness Auschwitz</i>	1979 (1999)	Czech Male	Auschwitz Mauthausen
Louis de Wijze	<i>Only My Life: A Survivor's Story</i>	1997	Dutch Male	Westerbrook Auschwitz
Cecilie Klein	<i>Sentence to Live</i>	1988	Czech Female	Auschwitz Nuremburg
Sim Kessel	<i>Hanged at Auschwitz</i>	1970 (2001)	French Male	Drancy Auschwitz Mauthausen Gusen II
Paul Steinberg	<i>Speak You Also: A Survivor's Reckoning</i>	1996 (2000)	French Male	Auschwitz Buchenwald
Elie Wiesel	<i>Night</i>	1960 (1989)	Romanian Male	Auschwitz
Rudolf Vrba	<i>I Escaped from Auschwitz</i>	1963 (2002)	Czech Male	Maidanek Auschwitz
Halina Birenbaum	<i>Hope it the Last to Die: A Coming of Age Under Nazi Terror</i>	1971 (1996)	Polish Female	Maidanek Auschwitz Ravensbrook Neustadt
Joseph Bau	<i>Dear God, Have You Ever Gone Hungry?</i>	1990 (1998)	Polish Male	Plaszow
Hugo Gryn	<i>Chasing Shadows</i>	2000	Czech/Hungarian Male	Auschwitz Lieberose
Dora Aspan Sorell	<i>Tell the Children: Letters to Miriam</i>	1998	Romanian Female	Auschwitz Weisswasser
Sara Nomberg-Prytk	<i>Auschwitz: True Tales From a Grotesque Land</i>	1985	Polish Female	Stutthof Auschwitz
Roman Frister	<i>The Cap: The Price of a Life</i>	1993 (2000)	Polish Male	Plaszow Strarachowice Auschwitz
Zdenka Fantlova	<i>My Lucky Star</i>	2001	Czech Female	Mauthausen Auschwitz Bergen-Belsen

a. Indicates publication of later edition, including English translations.

who appeared in *The Last Days*. Pseudonyms are used for all others. Finally, photographs from *The Auschwitz Album* (Yad Vashem 2002), a collection of photos taken by an SS officer in the spring of 1944, were reviewed. A sample of these photos is provided in Figure 1.

Analysis subjected data to scrutiny that is common to qualitative research (see Hill 2001a, 2001b). The first step involved creating individual understandings of each person's incarceration. This action typically involves summary of the key aspects of experiences using the

Figure 1
Photographs



Sources: Photos 1a-1g are from *The Auschwitz Album* (Yad Vashem 2002), a collection of photos taken in Auschwitz by an SS officer in June 1944. Photo 1h is from the family collection of the first author.

Note: 1a: deportees entering cattle cars with meager possessions; 1b: arrival at Auschwitz—woman at bottom left deposits possessions; 1c: possessions that prisoners were forced to leave behind; 1d: women just after initiation at Auschwitz; 1e: men just after initiation at Auschwitz; 1f: prisoners in uniform sorting newly arrived goods; 1g: women sorting goods in “Canada”; 1h: recently liberated sisters.

language of informants. The second step organized accounts, with an emphasis on contextually based information. For example, a search often occurs looking for underlying rationales behind experiences, beliefs, and actions. The third stage concerned thematic development depicting commonalities across their accounts. The researcher goes back and forth among summaries and explanations seeking areas of agreement and disagreement. The fourth stage required that relationships among themes be examined to develop a gestalt of their consumption environment over time. The true test of any analysis is its ability to tell a comprehensive and understandable reenactment.

This form of discovery is consistent with the protocol presented by Van Mannen (1995), which describes such

personal reflections as storytelling that blurs the line between scientific discovery and subjective literature. As a consequence of our liberation from paradigmatic restrictions, a variety of modes of presentation are appropriate and categorized as “impressionist tales,” “dramatic ethnography,” and “creative nonfiction.” The overriding purpose is to represent the revealed experience of an unfamiliar group to interested third parties in ways that allow them to see, hear, and feel what different consumptive existences are like (Van Mannen 1988). This approach concentrates attention on everyday to critical events involving cultural members that define exchange relationships with others, often using accounts of their words and actions to express subjective meaning (Agar 1995).

Consumer Behavior in Nazi Concentration Camps

The results of this study are several thematic categories that aid our understanding of consumer restrictions: *forced dispossession*, *survival strategies*, *reconfiguration of the self*, and *reemerging into society* recount experiences in the Auschwitz concentration camps from beginning to end. The findings presented may or may not be representative of camp life. Most prisoners did not survive, and memoirists could have different capabilities and backgrounds from those survivors who did not write about their experiences. Nonetheless, circumstances and responses offer a rare opportunity to scrutinize how the inner workings of restriction at the extreme end of the control spectrum played out over time. As appalling as the Buchenwald experience referred to previously was, prisoners had several consumption opportunities that Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz—and many other camps—did not have (e.g., receiving packages from outside). Thus, restrictions on consumption were even more severe.

Forced Dispossession

The term *dispossession* is used in a variety of contexts to describe the giving up or loss of products that still have meaning to their owners/consumers (see Belk 1988). This process is significantly different from the discard of remains after a valued commodity has lost its ability to satisfy and is thrown away or recycled. In most cases of dispossession, there is an element of restriction that is triggered by internal or external forces. A notable exception is voluntary simplicity, whereby consumers seek to simplify their lives through reducing their attachment to and engagement with products and markets (Bekin, Carrigan, and Szmigin 2005). However, in other situations such as failing health or poverty, consumers are compelled to let go of items that continue to have value to them and represent essential parts of their material landscapes (see Hill 1991; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000).

For these Holocaust victims, forced dispossession often began before their camp internment. For example, anti-Jewish labor laws prohibited many adults from remaining in their jobs, causing them to sell or trade valuable commodities to obtain basic goods and services. This loss of possessions was often exacerbated by the resettlement of Jewish citizens from their rightful homes into substandard ghettos. As a result, the majority of their belongings were abandoned, and they selected a limited number of cherished items to remain with them, providing comfort or a sense of their former identities under these terrifying conditions. Clinging to belongings that engender

positive memories of previous lives and relationships during times of instability and change has received much attention in the consumer literature (Hill 1991; Noble and Walker 1997; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988).

The following passages provide an opportunity for prisoners to express these experiences in their own words. In the first sequence, Hugo Gryn (2000, 144) recalls events surrounding his family's evacuation of their original home. His dismay over the rapidity with which they were removed and their inability to gather the things necessary to order their new lives is palpable. Rene Firestone (Spielberg 1998) follows with a description of her last-minute decision to preserve a possession that would connect her to a happier time. The "frivolous" nature of this item causes her to hesitate, but she decides at the final moment that its symbolic nature makes it worthy. The final recounting by Gerda Klein (1957/1995, 131) describes the meaning behind a small sack she kept tied around her neck while she was living in a ghetto. Its connection to a beloved family member makes it priceless.

They took Mummy's earrings and some other bits of jewelry, including two of my own silver cups which I had won at school. . . . Meanwhile, the "commission" started going around the house, taking down pictures and rolling up carpets. . . . Each of us was allowed to take 25 kilos of belongings. . . . At the end of the fifteen minutes we were told to line up outside the house and wait for a lorry that would pick us up.

When we were packing, I wanted to take something that would remind me of the good times. I was very depressed and worried. And so I came across a bathing suit, a bathing suit that my father brought me. On one of his business trips about three years earlier my father came home and he always brought us something, my sister and myself. And of course we always asked, "What did you bring?" And he opened this box, and out of the box came this most beautiful bathing suit. It had a shiny patent finish, a print of multi-colored flowers. And then in the afternoon when I heard the soldiers' boots coming up the stairs, I ran back and I put this bathing suit under my dress and that's how I left.

Every jingle, every laugh brought back a picture of my brother to me. Arthur painting, a green stain on his thumb; Arthur skiing over the brilliant snow, his navy blue sweater showing his powerful muscles. . . . I fumbled for the little sack that I wore around my neck under my blouse. I opened it and looked at the piece of broken glass that we had gathered from the ruins of the temple. Arthur, Arthur. . . .

Eventually these Holocaust survivors were deported to the camps under the ruse that they were being resettled and allowed to live and work together as families (see

Figure 1, photographs 1a–1c). As part of this deception, they were encouraged by the Nazis to bring a suitcase filled with their remaining belongings, and they were transported long distances sealed in cattle cars without adequate food or water. At the end of their journeys, they were greeted by shouting guards, snarling dogs, bright lights, and barbed-wire fences. None were allowed to remove their possessions from the train, so their total remaining property was limited to the clothing they wore, items placed in their pockets, and any other objects hidden in the lining of their garments or shoes. Unfortunately, even these precious articles were taken away when the prisoners were told to strip prior to shaving and delousing, completing their forced dispossession.

The next series of vignettes reveal the disorientation experienced by many victims as they were processed by their captors. Gabriel (interviewee)² describes the initial shock from being commanded to undress and place his clothing in a pile. Only later did it become clear that he would never see them again. Rene Firestone (Spielberg 1998) suffers similar distress as she removes her valued bathing suit for the last time. Memories of better times while wearing this item cascade through her unsettled mind as a way of coping with these horrific conditions. A few of these prisoners realized that their possessions would be taken and used the little time available to rob the Nazis of their ill-gotten plunder. Rena Gelissen (1995, 61) shows her defiance in the face of this impossible situation and destroys one of her last belongings so that no one could rob her of the positive memories associated with it.

We were told to take off all our clothes and put it in a little pile in front of us and we were standing there naked . . . And little did I know that that pile of clothing that I put down on that ground would be the last connection to my life as I knew it before.

And I remember I got undressed with the rest of them and there I was in the bathing suit, standing in the bathing suit . . . I kept remembering how I walked around the swimming pool and how the boys were whistling at me, and my friends were so jealous.

I looked at the watch I am wearing . . . You cannot have my memories! You cannot have anything of mine! Driving it into the mud with my heel, dirtying my precious white felt boots, I smashed it into a thousand pieces.

These initial indignities were not complete until every aspect of their former selves was removed (see Figure 1, photographs 1d-1f). Nothing on or about their person was considered sacred or beyond the grasp of their subjugators. Their naked bodies were on display, and they

were required to give up everything on their persons, including the hair on their heads. The final act of humiliation during introduction to camp life was the assignment of numbers to replace their names for identification purposes. Most inmates endured a painful tattooing process in which such new identities were branded on their bodies as a constant reminder of their status as less than human. The physical discomfort was matched with growing psychological agony that their ability to control any aspect of their current or future existences was gone and mere survival was now their primary focus.

Once again, the thoughts and words of these Holocaust survivors provide the best descriptions of their circumstances. Debbie (interviewee)³ demonstrates the wide range of emotions experienced as her hair is shaved. She and her sister laugh while simultaneously feeling horrible during and after their hair is shorn from their heads. Primo Levi (1986/1989, 119) aptly explains the underlying meaning for him of the numbers tattooed on his arm. They represent the destruction of his personhood and sense of self and reveal his fate as a disposable commodity. The last two segments are from Lucille Eichengreen (1994, 98) and Victor Frankl (1963, 22), respectively. Both camp survivors reflect on the completeness of the humiliation that was perpetrated on them as well as their inability to foresee an end to their misery that did not involve death.

After they shaved my hair, and I looked at my sister, who looked like a little boy, and we couldn't help but laughing because she looked so funny, probably I looked funny, too. It was a terrible feeling—I had really very, very nice long hair—when you feel on your naked shoulder the hair falling, but you didn't see yourself.

Its symbolic meaning was clear to everyone: this is an indelible mark, you will never leave here; this is the mark with which slaves are branded and cattle sent to the slaughter, and that is what you have become.

There was nothing left of our personal belongings or of our former selves. I saw myself as an animal and realized that I would probably not leave Auschwitz alive.

While we were waiting for the shower, our nakedness was brought home to us: we really had nothing now except our bare bodies—even minus hair; all we possessed, literally, was our nakedness. What else remained for us as a material link to our former lives?

Survival Strategies

The impact of these appalling tactics on informants/memoirists was the *mortification of their selves*, a

process that is common within total-control institutions such as prisons, psychiatric hospitals, gulags, and concentration camps (Goffman 1961). In this particular controlling environment, Holocaust victims' private and public identities were destroyed through loss of possessions, assignment of numbers, removal of clothing and extended periods of nudity, sheering of body hair and disinfecting, and issuance/wearing of undifferentiated uniforms (also see Hill and Hirschman 1996). The dehumanizing and degrading effects of this camp initiation served two primary purposes—subjugation of prisoners to decrease the likelihood of organized rebellion and empowerment of guards so that widespread brutality would become commonplace (Goldhagen 1997; Sabini and Silver 1982).

Once their introduction to the camp was completed, prisoners were assigned to inadequate living quarters that contained shared bunks of hard wood, making restful sleep nearly impossible. They also were assigned to work details ranging from light administrative duties (a rarity for Jewish inmates) to hard labor such as ditch digging or moving heavy objects such as stones or bags of cement from sunup to sundown. Their food allotments varied according to availability, but they generally consisted of imitation coffee in the mornings and a bowl of watery soup and a piece of bread in the evenings. Exacerbating these already impossible conditions were clothing unsuitable for work or weather, random beatings around the clock, and rampant disease along with infestations of lice.

As a result of these dreadful circumstances, many Holocaust victims concentrated their efforts on continued existence. Like previous studies of restricted consumer behavior involving homeless persons who eventually gave up worldly possessions, these survivors radically transformed the meanings associated with available goods and services (Hill 1991; Hill and Stamey 1990). For example, primitive garments that provided any integrity against the elements and footwear that was devoid of bare spots and could be securely fastened were prized by their owners. Even more essential were foodstuffs that previously would have been viewed as inedible or grotesque that were now hoarded and consumed with relish. Roman Frister (1993/2000, 324) shows how unlikely items were transformed into clothing, while Elie Wiesel (1980, 50) reveals the extent of change in his palate after adjusting to camp life.

In a tool shed, left unattended by some Russian prisoners of war who were working on renovation, I came across some empty cement sacks . . . By making holes for my head and arms, I could get it to fit me like a woolen undershirt. I put the sack on beneath my striped uniform,

tied my pants with the rope that served me as a belt, and returned to the work floor with measured strides.

I now took little interest in anything except my daily plate of soup and my crust of stale bread. Bread, soup—these were my whole life. I was a body. Perhaps less than that even; a starved stomach. The stomach alone was aware of the passage of time.

Inadequate quality and quantity of such possessions were provided by their captors, leading to a variety of acquisition strategies such as scavenging, fashioning, and trading to increase the probability of survival. Most of these tactics were strictly forbidden, punishable by death of the involved parties. Yet these Holocaust victims understood early on that adherence to camp rules would likely result in their rapid demise. Thus, markets for necessities as well as tradable items developed that were consistent with findings from World War II prisoner of war camps and underground prison economies (see Radford 1945; Szykman and Hill 1993). Such trade was termed *organizing* by prisoners, and the currency of exchange was bread. Comments that follow are from Sim Kessel (1970/2001, 101), Joseph Bau (1990/1998, 140), and Primo Levi (1958/1996, 39), respectively, and demonstrate the intensity of the camp marketplace.

At Auschwitz as at Mauthausen, at Buchenwald as at Nenengamme, the prisoners learned myriad ways and means to increase their diet.

Our world revolved around the ersatz bread; it became a medium of exchange on the black market near the latrine and the accepted currency for any purchase. It was also given to us as wages for hard work.

Bread is our only money; in the few minutes which have elapsed between its distribution and consumption, the block resounds with claims, quarrels, and scuffles. It is the creditors of yesterday who are claiming payment in the brief moment in which the debtor is solvent.

This organizing also included stealing from the Nazis in their factories and other workplaces and trading these items for food, clothing, and favors. There was a constant influx of goods into Auschwitz in the form of precious belongings from new arrivals. The prisoners responsible for unloading these possessions often took the opportunity to pilfer small but valuable items and hide them in their uniforms. The remainder of this plunder was taken to an area referred to as *Canada* (“the land of plenty”), where it was sorted and packaged for shipment to Germany to serve ongoing war interests (see Figure 1, photograph 1g). At the height of its operations, more than two thousand detainees worked in Canada, and smuggling confiscated

goods, while punishable by death, was common practice. Halina Birenbaum (1971/1996, 140) provides an excellent and in-depth chronicle of her activities to support her own along with the continued existence of others.

Anyone on whom was found the smallest trifle was beaten terribly, her hair cut off, and she was immediately thrown out of the labor gang. We trembled with agitation during these searches. Even so, everyone smuggled things back into camp. . . . After all, the prisoners in camp were dying of hunger and cold. . . . How then was it possible to come back empty-handed from Canada? . . . I would bring back pieces of scented soap or fine pieces of silken underwear in shoes that were too big, for they did not make us take our shoes off during the check. We smuggled gloves, blouses, underwear on our stomachs, under the coarse striped camp chemise. I hid pieces of bread, cake, bacon under my own clothing as I held it during the searches, and returned with a beating heart thus loaded to my friends Celina and Polusia, who waited for me uneasily and impatiently right by the camp gate. Fortunately, the SS did not catch me a single time.

Reconfiguration of the Self

The unsanctioned market economy within total-control institutions such as concentration camps is described by Goffman (1961) as a *secondary adjustment*, which not only allows greater consumption opportunities but also allows for the expression of individuality and the stratification of inmates. Hill and Gaines (2007) provide an explanation for the desire to gain status relative to similarly situated peers as fighting against a deviant label that is imposed by outside sources (see Goffman 1959). Degrading environments cause some persons to shun these designations and to engage in activities that distinguish themselves from the negative common identity (Hill and Stamey 1990). Sometimes, these changes are caused by emotional reactions to the circumstances that entrap them; other times, they are spawned by a renewed understanding of the fundamental building blocks of their original self-concepts, empowering them to adopt new attitudes and behaviors.

The bottom of the status hierarchy within Auschwitz was the *Muselmanner*, which was camp jargon for the walking dead. Most Holocaust victims with this designation were beaten down and withdrawn, and they seemed to welcome death as an end to their miseries. The next step up was *ordinary prisoners*, who coped with the drudgery and hardships of camp life, but they had no special access to goods or higher status detainees. Over time, if they continued to survive, they tended to advance within the status hierarchy and become *privileged prisoners* (or they regressed due to prolonged deprivation, disease, or

beatings and turned into *Muselmanner*). This more fortunate and senior strata of inmates had developed connections with the most influential prisoners, received assignments to lighter work details, had greater and more reliable access to goods, and/or were able to organize (trade) more effectively.

The next set of passages gives credence to the value of status within the prisoner community. For instance, Louis de Wijze (1997, 46) discusses the importance of his position on an Auschwitz soccer team for his access to a network of influential prisoners. These connections allowed him to transfer to a safer and more "affluent" environment. Paul Steinberg (1996/2000, 88) recounts his gift-giving behavior toward an elite detainee or *kapo*, who was given authority over other inmates and represented the camp aristocracy. His actions with regard to this individual clearly were designed to create a reciprocal relationship. Finally, Rudolf Vrba (1963/2002, 184) describes the clothing that he wore in his new and elevated occupation of assistant registrar, which catapulted him into a privileged status. He was then allowed to dress in ways that would have resulted in swift punishment as a lower level prisoner.

Herbert Bucholtz, whom we had given a hard time as the left defender of the Red Triangles [the political prisoners' team], came over to me immediately after we showered. "You were great," he said. "I'll have a chat tonight to see if we can get you into a better unit." And so he had it done.

I visited the Lageraltester [senior kapo]; I told him that I had received a little parcel and that since I owed him a great deal, I wished to share my windfall with him. I was perfectly aware that I was behaving like a whore, and at the same time, I felt like a tamer of wild beasts entering the tiger's cage armed with a chair and a slab of gamy meat. I stroked the lion's whiskers. . . . That proved to be the most profitable investment I ever made in my life, paying splendid dividends.

I jumped almost into the Savile Row class [the aristocracy]. Instead of my zebra trousers, I wore a pair of riding breeches, superbly tailored by a Polish prisoner. My riding boots would have done justice to a cavalry officer and, though I was not allowed to discard my striped tunic, I saw that it was neatly cut. I was, perhaps, a little overdressed for my lowly rank, but circumstances soon remedied that [through promotion to registrar].

These Holocaust victims sought ways to express their individuality as well as their group status. Once again, Hill and Gaines (2007) present a series of themes that show the process of self-restoration involves the ability to clarify and express one's identity as a worthwhile person. However, the necessary consumer commodities are

unavailable in such resource-restricted environments, so people must rely on whatever is accessible locally. Within the camps, Lucielle Eichengreen (1994, 105) bemoans the loss of her long hair that had positioned her as an attractive female, causing her to risk her life for a head scarf. Debbie (interviewee)⁴ expresses her incredulity at the use of precious calories to enhance personal appearance rather than to alleviate hunger. Louis de Wijze (1997, 45) writes about the way his soccer uniform made him feel fully human, even if for a short period of time. Finally, Paul Steinberg (1996/2000, 133) relays that he traded food for improvement in appearance.

I still wished for something to cover my bald head, but not because of the cold wind or driving rain. It was, of all things, vanity. I thought of my once long shiny brown hair and wondered if vanity was still possible. . . . I spotted a long, dirty piece of cloth in splashy shades of rust red and olive green. . . . We had been warned with threats of beatings or death not to take anything. Was my vanity really worth the risk? . . . I had no answers but knew I would take it and risk whatever punishment followed.

I can tell you things that were just unbelievable. I remember women—we were young, we were in our early twenties—and there were women who were in their forties and fifties. . . . We got a little piece of margarine and instead of eating it, they put it on their faces—you know, moisturizer!

Filled with pride, I entered the field with my teammates. It had been a great feeling to substitute the squeaky-clean, colorful soccer attire and real leather shoes for the smelly prison clothes adorned with the hated number. For the first time in a long while I had not felt like a number, an animal in a herd.

I'm correctly outfitted in well-tailored pajamas. My striped cap, of which I'm rather proud, cost me five liters of evening soup. Here, clothes make the man.

Another method used to exert their individuality and sense of identity was to control some portion of their existence. Research within the consumer behavior field suggests that such strategies are common inside total-control institutions and may be viewed as acts of rebellion designed to express free will (Hill 1991; Ozanne, Hill, and Wright 1998). To this end, Roman Frister (1993/2000, 323) conducts grooming rituals in the camp that provide a symbolic degree of freedom. The routines themselves are less important than their internal meaning to him. In a dire example, Gerda Klein (1957/1995, 179) tells about her fear of being forced into prostitution and how it led to her purchase of poison so that she would not have to succumb to such degradation. The last comment

from Rena Gelissen (1995, 149) describes trading of food for a salve that allows her to serve needs of others as a sign of her previous compassionate self.

I had a daily regime of my own to counter the one imposed on me and I was almost insanely strict about observing it. The rules I made were the links that bound me to my own humanity. I knew that if even one of them snapped, all the others would weaken to the breaking point. The icy water I splashed over my naked torso from the faucet-less pipe told me I was still my own master. It froze my blood and warmed my soul. As long as I felt the sting of the cold, I knew I could prevail.

I wanted the poison. I had no money but still had the diamond and pearl pendant. . . . I kissed it quickly remembering how well it had looked on Mama's throat. . . . After some haggling, I surrendered the pendant for two tiny, white flat packets. . . . We folded them in cotton padding and inserted them in our shoe linings.

She snatches it from my hand, hiding it quickly in her dress. . . . She disappears into the night. I do not feel virtuous or good about myself. I feel used and hungry, but I also know that I will never look back and regret trying to help my cousin's wife. There is little we can avoid in Birkenau, but trying to act with a little bit of dignity helps me, reminds me of home.

Reemerging into Society

Consumer behavior scholars and other social scientists have wrestled with the materialistic aspects of consumption, yielding several dichotomies such as instrumental versus terminal materialism (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Fournier and Richins 1991), instrumental versus symbolic materialism (Kilbourne 1991), and intrinsic versus extrinsic consumption (Holbrook 1999). One facet of such distinctions is that some types of consumption are more functional than others, with an underlying preference for such purposeful actions (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Yet there is little evidence to suggest that these motivations can be separated operationally or that pure forms actually exist (Fournier and Richins 1991). In the end, their overlapping and/or combined impact may best capture the complex interplay of needs and desires among most consumers.

Nonetheless, a surprising amount of the searching for and utilization of goods within the camps was motivated by self-enhancement or the need to feel human rather than for pure survival. In fact, consistent with (but for different reasons) the juvenile delinquents studied by Ozanne, Hill, and Wright (1998), prisoners often took great risks to their emotional and physical health to obtain possessions that signaled an elevated status to

themselves and others. This finding supports Belk's (1988) original thesis that the loss of valued commodities lessens the self, which can only be restored through acquisition of acceptable alternatives. Under his theory of the extended self, belongings announce *who I am*. We find that in a context of extreme restriction, belongings proclaim *that I am*. Our findings involving dispossession, survival, and reconfiguration reveal the enormous energy expended by survivors to resurrect the dignity that was taken from them.

These Holocaust victims' return to society may provide the most telling example of the symbolic and extrinsic nature of goods. The transformation from work animal to their former personhood required shedding their life as prisoner and embracing a more positive future. Part of this process of healing involved letting go of possessions that served an important purpose during their incarcerations but no longer held value. Another component of their recovery entailed removal of the clothing and other public emblems of their status as inmates (see Figure 1, photograph 1h). Additionally, restoration demanded taking on new items that signaled to the individual and the external world that the reemerging of self-identity had begun.

Once more, the words of the memoirists/interviewees articulate this perspective in a compelling fashion. The first vignette is from Gerda Klein (1957/1995, 217) and shows that she finally discarded the poison that was safeguarded by her to ensure that she would never be forced into prostitution. Gerda also examines the photographs she was able to maintain throughout her internment, beginning the emotional journey on the road to selfhood. The next segment is a portion of a letter to her fiancé in which Agnes (interviewee)⁵ metaphorically describes the feelings she experiences after liberation. The removal of her uniform and its replacement with a more becoming outfit helps bring her back to the world of the nonprisoner. Last, Louis de Wijze (1997, 175) dons the military dress of a high-ranking Nazi officer following abandonment of the camp, but he replaces these garments with civilian clothing after an image of self-as-inmate intrudes.

Only one thought remained. With my wet hand I reached for my ski boots, took the left one and reached under the lining. There was the dirty shapeless package containing the pictures I wanted to save. I pulled the pictures out and laid them on a dry towel beside the tub. And the other packet—the poison I had bought in Gruenberg—I gratefully let go to the fire.

I'm writing to you relieved and happy as the sun has broken through the clouds and we've been liberated. I'm wearing a new dress instead of the coarse grey one, nice high-heeled shoes instead of the clumsy wooden ones and I'm going around smiling.

When I open the closet, it is full of a variety of clothing. A beautiful gala uniform, all clean and freshly ironed, catches my eye. The surgeon apparently had a high military position. I take the hanger with the uniform out of the closet and hold it in front of me. I have a strong urge that I cannot suppress. I take some clean socks, underwear, shirt, shiny shoes, and the military cap and start to dress.

Minutes later I am staring at a complete metamorphosis in a large mirror inside the door. There stands an arrogant-looking German, chin in the air, straight-backed, cap nonchalantly tilted on his head.

I take off my cap. A skinny head with short stubbles of hair on top appears. The image of the arrogant Kraut vanishes and the look of a victim, the camp prisoner returns: hollow eyes, still pale and scurvy skin, powerless. Embarrassed, I put the uniform back in the closet and take out some well-fitting civilian clothes.

Discussion and Implications

Summary of Findings

The authors' investigation of the lives of Holocaust survivors within the Nazi concentration camp system was designed to expand on the developing perspective of restricted consumer behavior. The first theme of forced dispossession shows that individuals are made to give up their material possessions prior to their complete usage. This process begins slowly and continues until they are completely integrated into the camps. At some point, prisoners suffer not only the loss of things but also of their identities and human dignity. Their mortification of the self was exacerbated by the paucity of goods and services at their disposal, requiring that they dress, eat, and sleep in ways that were unthinkable prior to their incarcerations. Such an environment required ingenuity of survival strategies to acquire enough basic commodities.

The secondary adjustment of the underground marketplace provided greater consumption opportunities as well as the expression of individuality and group status. This reconfiguration of the self also allowed inmates to rebel against the deviant label forced on them and to befriend others with access to a wider variety of goods and services. A fortunate few survivors were liberated as the Nazis eventually were defeated, and they expended great energy reemerging into society. Their transition required the shedding of items that once served a useful purpose but no longer were necessary. The markers of their confinement, such as uniforms, also were discarded so that they could resurrect their previous selves. Taking on the trappings of normalcy through the wearing of civilian clothing and other symbols of freedom supported their transformation.

While the authors' investigation focused on a context of extreme deprivation, consumption under severe restriction

is not limited to this historical event and represents an ongoing struggle for most citizens of the world (United Nations Development Programme 2005). Other recent examples that have resulted in major modifications in consumer quality of life include the victims of Hurricane Katrina in the U.S. Gulf states and tsunami survivors who lost everything as well as subsistence farmers living in North Korea, refugees in Darfur, and the millions in extreme poverty in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. For these members of the human race—and more—restrictions play a central role that is of real significance.

Macromarketing Considerations

In a volume of the annual United Nations publication *Human Development Report 1997* (United Nations Development Programme 1997), the Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (along with others) examined the literature and research on consumption and global poverty (see Sen [1999] for more on his work). Several quality-of-life measures were advanced, and a new approach, termed the Human Poverty Index, was presented for the first time. This construct marked a strategic turn away from focus on relative affluence to concentration on relative deprivation. A review of the citations representing the conceptual foundations of his position reveals a reliance on economic and political theory, along with usage of sociological and anthropological sources. The marketing subfield of consumer behavior may have been neglected because our tradition of exploration has largely ignored poor citizens, potentially signaling the need to expand our conventional models of consumptive processes.

To broaden our disciplinary horizons, the results of this investigation are used to inform currently accepted models of consumption, which begin with felt need aroused by physiological, psychological, and/or sociological causes (Arnould, Price, and Zinkhan 2002). Such feelings reach a critical point and trigger the search for satisfaction. An underlying premise is that goods and services selected to meet these needs are freely chosen, used, and discarded at our individual discretion. Under conditions of forced dispossession, however, consumers are required by uncontrollable factors to constrain the quantity and quality of their material possessions, and many of their former belongings are removed prior to full utilization. Thus, they reenter the marketplace prematurely and without the positive outlook for satisfaction that our conceptualizations assume.

Accordingly, emotional reactions to and consequences of felt need under restricted consumer behavior are distinct from the affect described in our traditional models. Buyers who have the luxury to control and manage their material

landscapes are able to connect with the marketplace in positive and emotionally fulfilling ways (see Bloch 1995). Those consumers whose transactions are characterized by restriction experience little control over their material worlds and suffer from a loss of self-esteem due to dispossession and a lack of self-efficacy in the marketplace. Their circumstances are inhibited, in that they are without many items that hold significant instrumental and symbolic value to them. The future often is just as bleak, given they are unable to create exchange relationships that allow them to acquire replacements of equal or higher value.

Felt need often leads to search for and acquisition of acceptable goods or services that will return the body and mind back to or beyond the status quo. As noted previously, one of the negative consequences of search is information overload (Keller and Staelin 1987), which results from unending persuasion attempts as well as the proliferation of alternatives in competitive industries. The basis for this argument is that the supply side of transactions is necessary and sufficient to the understanding of consumption-oriented activities by consumer scholars. Thus, the capacity to look for and acquire products is posited to be without significant limits, ignoring the majority of the world's peoples who suffer from economic, physical, emotional, and political constraints.

Restricted consumption informs our orientation toward the selection process as well. While an excess of choices typify our image of the buyer/seller condition, restricted consumer behavior is defined as a lack of access by traditional means to this abundance. As a consequence, individuals are required to seek alternative ways of creating suitable exchanges that are outside of our theoretical conceptions of acquisition (Hill and Stamey 1990). Furthermore, such consumers may modify their beliefs about acceptable products since it is necessary to substitute what is perceived as worthless or contemptible under ideal conditions as within the set of appropriate options. As such, marketing messages that concentrate on specific wants and the differentiated products designed to meet them may be irrelevant to those with the greatest needs.

Yet restricted consumer behavior does not preclude the search for and acquisition of goods and services that signal personal worth as well as group status (Hill 2001a). While survival may loom large for consumers who experience the kinds of constraint described in this investigation, some are able to reconfigure portions of their identities by maintaining a single item of their original belongings tied to a better past life or by obtaining novel items that enhanced their sense of self. Once again, our current models imply unbridled access to possessions after purchase without oversight from external sources in most cases. However, restricted consumption may require

that consumers keep treasured items from public view and consume them in fleeting private moments.

Consistent with more typical marketing environments, some subset of sought-after goods and services attained by consumers facing serious restrictions must serve needs beyond mere utility. The close connection between who we are and what we consume has been clearly established, including under circumstances of great distress (Belk 1988). In point of fact, forced dispossession and its concomitant negative impact on one's sense of self may increase the importance of possessions with the capability of restoring some semblance of dignity. While public consumption may be a necessary ingredient, their acquisition may subject consumers to a variety of hazards that in the extreme includes possible death. Nonetheless, getting and consuming allows individuals to exert the human yearning to control their material landscapes.

Under fortunate circumstances, some segment of individuals who face restricted consumer behavior may be able to reenter the marketplace in ways that are consistent with our conventional models (see Thøgersen 2005). The small number of survivors chronicled in this study is an example of a lucky few who endured deprivation long enough to see the end of their external constraints. Other possibilities include refugees who must flee persecutors in their home countries and are allowed to start new lives elsewhere. As time passes and they and their families are allowed to integrate more fully into society, their opportunities to participate in the material culture increases.

To make the transition back into consumption without restriction, once-constrained consumers may jettison items that served a variety of essential purposes during times of material distress but now only act as reminders of earlier miseries or markers of previously denigrated status. However, a paucity of precious belongings that remained with them during their ordeal may represent transition objects that now aid the process of reintegration within the larger society. From photographs to jewelry to other mementos of past lives, these possessions often bridge the gap between previous (better) existences and their new (more positive) identities (Hill 1991). Of course, other goods and services must be purchased or otherwise acquired before the conversion is complete. Many of these items are designed to signal the restoration of human dignity.

Concluding Remarks

The macromarketing community, through its journal, conference, and other scholarly efforts, can take a leadership role in moving the discipline to more realistic models of

consumption that use or modify the themes articulated here. Our interest in and publication of articles that examine marketing ethics and distributive justice, global policy and the environment, marketing and development, marketing history, and quality of life uniquely position our subfield at the forefront of the debate on heterogeneity and hegemony within and across marketing systems around the world. We no longer teach, write, and profess that (macro)marketing is what the textbooks say (Layton and Grossbart 2006) but instead are now able to focus more attention on the pervasive and nuanced ways that marketing systems impact and are impacted by a revised set of Four Ps: politics, poverty, perversion, and persecution.

The field of macromarketing has made significant progress on these fronts with much more to come. The work of Shultz (1997) epitomizes advances in this new paradigm, revealing how political systems under great stress may cause macromarketing systems to subjugate citizens and result in greater impoverishment than under ordinary circumstances. Much more needs to be done to bring together the nuanced influences that arise when politics, religion, and economics combine to redefine the social order, empowering some citizens in favor of others. One of our primary scholarly objectives is to serve humanity by incorporating these important human concerns into our intellectual conversations (see Monieson 1988). Their formal incorporation in consumption models advocated in this research is needed now more than ever.

Previous macro- and policy-oriented research may serve to inform this new model. Restricted consumption comes in unlimited varieties that have quality-of-life results (Sirgy and Lee 2006). One list of sources includes other human beings, such as Nazi persecution of European Jews; ecological disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes, and hurricanes (Mittelstaedt 2007); economic upheavals epitomized by the Great Depression (Hill, Hirschman, and Bauman 1997); and a number of other personal circumstances with impoverishment playing an important role (Andreasen 1975). Of course, dispossession may not require external force, and our revised perspective should incorporate additional rationales such as voluntary simplicity (Bekin, Carrigan, and Szmigin 2005), gift giving (Sherry, McGrath, and Levy 1993), and a host of life transitions (see Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg 2005).

Notes

1. Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation (<http://www.vhf.org>).

2. Gabriel, Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, videotaped interview by Lisa Timoner, October 16, 1995, Miami, Florida.

3. Debbie, Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, videotaped interview by Marjory Katz, April 25, 1995, Miami, Florida.
4. Ibid.
5. Agnes, Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, videotaped interview, 1995, Budapest, Hungary.

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