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Issues, Challenges, and Future Directions

CHAPTER 3

The Conditions of Confinement in Restrictive Housing

Holly Foster, Ph.D.

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**U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
810 Seventh St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20531**

Loretta E. Lynch

Attorney General

Karol V. Mason

Assistant Attorney General

Nancy Rodriguez, Ph.D.

Director, National Institute of Justice

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CHAPTER 3

The Conditions of Confinement in Restrictive Housing

Holly Foster, Ph.D.
Texas A&M University

Restrictive Housing: Purpose, Terms, and Report Objectives

Restrictive housing practices are used in American correctional institutions to manage and contain perceived threats to the safety of inmates and staff, and to keep order in the facility. The process involves segregating some inmates from the general prisoner population under specific circumstances, including violence and disruption (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016). Other than general overviews, however, little systematic and comparative information is available on the conditions of confinement involved in restrictive housing. This report will cover the following conditions of confinement: (1) physical and temporal dimensions, (2) incentives and disciplinary sanctions used, (3) social circumstances (e.g., family contacts), (4) psychological conditions, and (5) service provision (e.g., medical and educational services for prisoners). The absence of information about confinement conditions means that practitioners and researchers lack solid data on which aspects are especially influential on prisoners in both the short term and over time. More study of this topic would provide practitioners and researchers with systematic knowledge of how the conditions work to affect prisoner adaptation. This knowledge may assist practitioners in reducing the harmful effects that prisoners may incur from

living in these conditions. This report provides a synthesis of extant research on the conditions of confinement in restrictive housing to identify the current limitations of the practice and point to ways to address them.

Court decisions (e.g., *Madrid v. Gomez*; Simon, 2014) indicate that restrictive housing conditions are unconstitutional for mentally ill inmates. Systematic reviews are needed of the conditions that inmates face under different forms of restrictive housing over time. Some descriptive information on current conditions in restrictive housing is found in the U.S. Department of Justice's recent (2016) review, *Report and Recommendations Concerning the Use of Restrictive Housing*, and other key reports (Liman Program/Association of State Correctional Administrators [ASCA], 2015; New York Civil Liberties Union [NYCLU], 2015). Yet, missing from the literature is systematic research on how prisoners experience the conditions described. Such information would better inform the knowledge base regarding the levels and types of stress that prisoners face.

More detailed information is needed on the specific conditions that inmates face when placed in restrictive housing and the degree to which these conditions are similar or vary across its various forms. There are three major types of restrictive housing practices that reflect different correctional intentions (Shalev, 2009, p. 2) and that may involve both similarities and differences. Punitive segregation is used to discipline prisoner misconduct, usually for a period following a disciplinary hearing. Protective segregation (and custody) is used to house and separate vulnerable prisoners from the general population for their own protection. Administrative segregation is imposed for managerial reasons. It separates inmates who are deemed to be high risk from the general prison population — often for long periods (e.g., perceived gang members, members of security threat groups) (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 1). Additionally, supermaximum or “supermax” facilities are those designed to hold prisoners in long-term restrictive housing (Shalev, 2009, p. 9). When implemented for these three categories, restrictive housing reduces interaction with other inmates, limits programming opportunities, and restricts an inmate’s privileges (Beck, 2015). Myriad terms are used to describe these conditions; this report will use “restrictive housing” to refer to all of them. However, the terms in the study’s source documents will be used when referring to specific research studies when necessary.

To further synthesize and critique the extant research on conditions of confinement in restrictive housing, this white paper adopts Simon’s (2014) explanation for the rising rates of incarceration in the United States from the 1970s to approximately 2009 (Garland, 2001; Clear & Frost, 2013). It also evaluates the practice through qualitative research, involving analyses of subjective data such as personal stories, and quantitative research, in which numerical data are analyzed. As Simon indicates, the qualitative story of mass incarceration is revealed through an analysis of major court decisions, with the quantitative story revealed through statistical trends and patterns. The qualitative

story may also be investigated through interviews with and observations of those in restrictive housing. The quantitative story, however, requires testing hypotheses and relationships among variables gathered through data collection. Criminological and sociological theories should guide the understanding of both the qualitative and quantitative information about restrictive housing. For the qualitative story, there is a need to list and describe the commonalities and the different experiences faced by various groups in restrictive housing, including those of overrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups, and often overlooked female and transgender prisoners. For the quantitative story, comparative designs are needed to more fully understand the frustrations and deprivations faced by those living in prison and the types and levels of “pains of imprisonment” that arise over time Sykes (1958/2007). Moving beyond description, a more empirically based, quantitative approach guided by theory would show how the pains of imprisonment affect prisoner outcomes, and adaptations for those living in restrictive housing (Agnew, 2001, 2006; Pearlin, Menaghan, Leiberman, & Mullan, 1981; Sykes, 1958/2007).

With very limited information available on restrictive housing conditions, this paper will draw on findings from several key reports on the topic (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015; NYCLU, 2012). These sources illuminate the conditions in restrictive housing; they also highlight the need for more information about these conditions and the repercussions they may have for inmates. For example, the most systematic resource on conditions of administrative segregation is the data gathered from correctional administrators by Yale University’s Liman Program and the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA). Although the Liman Program/ASCA study is an important source of information, it does not include prisoners’ experiences of the conditions of confinement in restrictive housing that may be gleaned through the qualitative and quantitative approaches proposed here.

The report further identifies a need for research to explore gender differences and similarities pertaining to inmates’ experiences of restrictive housing. Arguments are emerging about the need for gender-responsive programming in the criminal justice system (Covington & Bloom, 2006), although not yet in the realm of restrictive housing. Literature indicates that restrictive housing conditions were established to house “dangerous men” (Simon, 2014). However, within the limited information about restrictive housing, even less is known about how women experience these conditions. A lack of systematic attention to gender perpetuates the tendency to overlook the needs of female offenders in programming decisions, as criminal justice services are usually designed with the needs of men in mind (Covington & Bloom, 2006). This report uses data regarding female inmates in administrative segregation made available for analysis by the Liman Program, but not published elsewhere, alongside published information about the majority of those individuals living in these conditions — men (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015). A descriptive look at the conditions of restrictive housing for female prisoners suggests further research is needed, in particular,

to develop the gendered qualitative stories of restrictive housing. This focus on gender also leads to further consideration of other elements of social location (e.g., race and ethnicity) that may shape experience.

Trends and Patterns in Restrictive Housing

Part of the quantitative story surrounding restrictive housing is revealed by a description of trends and patterns regarding who tends to experience them, which links further back to trends in mass incarceration. As the National Research Council report (2014) documents, increases in incarceration rates in the United States are the result of policy changes, such as the War on Drugs, and changes from indeterminate to determinate sentencing practices constituting more punitive approaches to criminal justice. With these policy changes came a concomitant rise in the use of restrictive housing beginning in the 1980s. Shalev (2009) reports that all forms of prisoner segregation increased in the 1990s. Between 1995 and 2000, in particular, the number of prisoners who were isolated from the general prison population rose by 40 percent (p. 2). The most recent estimates indicate that approximately 80,000 to 100,000 people are confined in isolated conditions in U.S. prisons (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 3). Estimates across American jurisdictions report that the percentage of the custodial population confined in restrictive housing ranges from 2.1 percent to 14.2 percent (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 15). Furthermore, using data gathered from inmates as part of the National Inmate Survey (NIS), roughly 10 percent of all prison inmates and 5 percent of all jail inmates have spent 30 or more days in restrictive housing (Beck, 2015).

The survey also found race and ethnic disparities among the inmates who experience restrictive housing conditions. Black prison inmates were more likely than white and Latino prison inmates to have spent time in restrictive housing. Furthermore, inmates with lower education levels (i.e., without a high school diploma), young inmates, and lesbian, gay, and bisexual inmates were more likely to have spent time in restrictive housing than were more educated, older, and heterosexual inmates (Beck, 2015, p. 4). However, the NIS data show no difference in the percentage of each gender having spent time in restrictive housing (Beck, 2015, p. 4).

Further descriptive statistical information on inmates placed in administrative segregation is available by prisoner gender, race, and ethnicity and reflects broader demographic trends in mass imprisonment. For example, the data show that administrative segregation is more commonly used with male prisoners (7.5 percent) than female prisoners (0.1 percent) (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 17). The median estimates for female prisoners held in administrative segregation is less than 1 percent, although in one jurisdiction, a high of 6.4 percent of the female custodial population is held in these conditions (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 20).

The use of administrative segregation also varies by race and ethnicity. Research shows higher percentages of black and Latino men in administrative segregation than in the general population of prisons across responding jurisdictions (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 30). Furthermore, black women are overrepresented in administrative segregation compared to the general female custodial population (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 36).

The NIS data also reveal criminal justice status and history among inmates held in restrictive housing compared to other inmates. Those in restrictive housing are more likely to have been sent to prison for a violent offense than for other offenses (Beck, 2015, p. 5). Inmates in restrictive housing are also more likely to have been arrested more than once and to have had prior incarcerations as juveniles (Beck, 2015, p. 5).

The use of restrictive housing not only increased in prevalence alongside mass incarceration, but it also became increasingly severe with increased technological surveillance and more extreme facilities (Shalev, 2009), including the development and growth of supermax security prisons involving extended periods of isolation. In the 1980s, there were few supermax facilities other than those in the two founding locations — Marion, Illinois, and Florence, Arizona. However, as of 2005, as many as 44 states had these facilities (Shalev, 2009; Simon, 2014; Mears, 2005), with roughly 25,000 people held in supermax security conditions (Mears, 2013). Mears (2013) and Western (2007) link the policy context of mass incarceration with the increase of these facilities.

During this period, states also moved away from rehabilitative ideals in prison programming and toward “total incapacitation,” which emphasizes sending people to prison to prevent crime rather than using other approaches (Haney, 2003; Simon, 2014). Simon argues that the rise of the supermax prison helped to legitimize mass incarceration, with an emphasis on locking away “dangerous men” (2014, p. 52).

Despite the considerable variation in the types of restrictive housing used in federal and state correctional systems across America, they share some common features (Haney, 2009; Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 1). This report next provides a synthesis of what is currently known about the conditions of confinement in restrictive housing facilities, as well as an assessment of the limitations of extant knowledge. Academic books, journal articles, and comprehensive reports by research institutes constitute the basis of the information for this review. Furthermore, because information continues to emerge on proposed changes in restrictive housing practices in some states (e.g., California, New York), newspaper coverage is also used to update information on the conditions of confinement.

How Can Theory Be Used To Understand Restrictive Housing Conditions?

Theory is a powerful tool for guiding research, but it could also be used by practitioners as an integrative framework in working with restrictive housing practices. Theory may assist in considering the substantive meaning of the conditions of confinement in restrictive housing. Furthermore, since theoretical propositions can be tested through data analysis, they can, therefore, be found by evidence to be false, which occurs when empirical results do not support the theorized relationships (Bernard, Snipes, & Gerould, 2010). When theories are not supported empirically, they can be refined and subjected to further testing. However, if certain theoretical propositions are consistently supported by data, practitioners can be confident in the robustness of those results — providing a compelling rationale for decision-making with scarce resources. Furthermore, theory may provide a framework for how things work in the short and long term, with practical implications for when and why to adopt or curtail specific programs and practices.

One such theoretical tool for further synthesizing information on the conditions of confinement in restrictive housing is provided by the focus on stressors faced in prison, as highlighted by Robert Agnew's general strain theory (GST) (2001; 2006) for understanding how strains (or stresses) are associated with criminal behavior. Recent directions in GST apply this framework to understanding criminal justice settings (Blevins, Listwan, Cullen, & Johnson, 2010; Delisi, 2011; Agnew & Delisi, 2012), but not (so far) to the conditions of restrictive housing. Theorizing the connections between restrictive housing conditions and GST is one objective of this report.

Further theoretical insights are provided by classic research conducted more generally in prisons by Sykes (1958/2007) in his conceptualization of the "pains of imprisonment." GST attends to the implications of stressors and strains or events and conditions that are disliked (Agnew, 2006, p. 4). Among myriad strains that individuals generally face in prison, two are the most prominent: being treated in an aversive manner and losing something of value (Agnew, 2006). Prisoners in restrictive housing experience loss of privileges and extreme isolation resulting in a lack of meaningful human contact (Smith, 2006) — both of which qualify as strains or pains of imprisonment. In fact, a recent book develops the use of isolation as a contemporary "pain of mass imprisonment" (Fleury-Steiner & Longazel, 2014, emphasis added). However, further research is needed to understand the specific types of strains experienced by those in restrictive housing as well as their totality.

Sykes' (1958/2007) classic research in a men's maximum-security prison identified five primary pains of imprisonment: (1) the deprivation of liberty, which includes restricted freedom of movement and isolation from friends, family, and relatives (p. 65); (2) the deprivation of goods and services; (3) the

frustration of sexual desire (originally described in terms of lack of access to heterosexual relationships); (4) the deprivation of autonomy or the restricted ability to make choices (p. 73); and (5) the deprivation of security, where the prisoner may need to fight for safety and possessions. Insight into the contemporary pains of imprisonment for prisoners in the United States will be enhanced by considering the more extreme circumstances of restrictive housing.

Moreover, consideration of the pains of imprisonment in restrictive housing would best include comparisons to the general prison population. Although the conditions of confinement in restrictive housing differ from the circumstances in which general population prisoners are held, both entail pains of imprisonment. The recent report by the National Research Council (2014) includes an overview of conditions of confinement in prisons as environments tasked with maintaining order and safety, as well as meeting punishment and reformation goals. Conditions of confinement include a range of stressors, such as “material deprivations; restricted movement and liberty; a lack of meaningful activity; a nearly total absence of personal privacy; and high levels of interpersonal uncertainty, danger, and fear” (p. 174).

Stressors encountered in prison, and those experienced prior to prison, can lead to mental health problems, according to criminal justice models of importation (taking into account pre-prison influences and experiences) and deprivation (taking into account influences and experiences encountered in prison) (Goodstein and Wright, 1989). Both importation strains (stressors experienced prior to prison) and deprivation strains (stressors experienced in prison) influence an inmate’s adjustment to prison, according to criminal justice models and the framework of GST (Agnew, 2006; Foster, 2012). The importance of further research into deprivation strains is described below.

General strain theory also includes a key role for *coping resources* that may offset the influences of strains on antisocial behavior (Agnew, 2006; Pearlin et al., 1981). Accordingly, although prisoners in the general population are subject to stressors and strains, they also have access to some mitigating factors that may include sharing a cell; having some contact with other prisoners in particular areas at designated times; and being offered some degree of vocational, educational, and therapeutic programs (Shalev, 2009). Furthermore, classic sociological research on prisoners reveals the importance of social interactions with other inmates in mitigating the pains of imprisonment, particularly when prisoners take on specific social roles and develop interpersonal relationships to contribute to the social order in men’s and women’s prisons (Clemmer, 1940/1965; Giallombardo, 1966; Heffernan, 1972; Sykes, 1958/2007). These early findings suggest that efforts to increase prisoner coping resources in restrictive housing may lead to more orderly settings as well, by offsetting the pains of imprisonment. Little is known about inmate and institutional coping resources available to prisoners held in restrictive housing conditions. Contemporary studies of imprisoned men describe how prison gangs have become a means of achieving

order in prisons (Skarbek, 2014). Yet, exploring other means of establishing order by fostering coping resources, even in extreme circumstances, may be more conducive to inmate and staff well-being according to GST premises.

Furthermore, confinement conditions within restrictive housing vary, from less to more restrictive and harsh circumstances regarding the severity of isolation, amount of deprivation, number of restrictions, and degree of degradation (Haney, 2009; National Research Council, 2014). During the development and growth of supermax prisons in the mid-1980s, a continuum from lesser to harsher and more restrictive conditions developed, with the harshest conditions incorporating intense social isolation and control (Browne, Cambier, and Agha, 2011, p. 47). A synthesis of what is known about the conditions of confinement in restrictive housing will begin to describe some of the pains of imprisonment in these circumstances and provide a basis for future comparative research.

In addition to using GST and the pains of imprisonment framework, another theoretical tool for understanding restrictive housing is provided by examining critical sociological perspectives focused on the body (Foucault, 1977; Wacquant, 2004). These perspectives draw attention to “embodied experience,” which acknowledges that extreme restrictions enacted over the body, such as those used in restrictive housing, also have a direct effect on prisoners’ cognitive and emotional health. A connection with more critical sociological perspectives provides a basis for interpreting how the pains of imprisonment may vary by social location (e.g., across demographic groups). This perspective underpins a call for more information on prisoners’ experiences in restrictive housing to bring about more just and humane policies and practices. It will also provide insight into potentially diverse experiences within restrictive housing. This direction of research will begin to fill some of the missing aspects of the qualitative story surrounding restrictive housing.

Synthesis and Critique of Evidence on Restrictive Housing Conditions

Data on the conditions of confinement in restrictive housing are generally lacking and are mostly embedded within broader reports and articles, rather than being the focus of empirical inquiry. For example, extant resources include some detailed observational information on conditions in supermax facilities (e.g., Shalev, 2009); however, these findings are often descriptive in nature. The most nationally informative and recent data on restricted housing conditions are available for conditions in administrative segregation, specifically, where comparative, survey-based information has been gathered across jurisdictions (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015). These data were gathered through surveys administered to correctional officials in 46 responding jurisdictions across the United States. That report, *Time-In-Cell: The ASCA-Liman 2014 National Survey of Administrative Segregation in Prison*, follows a systematic review of policies

covering the conditions of confinement in administrative segregation, which was also conducted by the Liman Program (2013). Key findings of the Liman Program/ASCA data are synthesized here to provide a rare glimpse into extant conditions. New information also will be gleaned from data made available by the Liman Program/ASCA on the 10 jurisdictions that reported information on administrative segregation conditions for women: Delaware, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, South Carolina, Texas, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

The Liman Program/ASCA data pertain to institutionally reported information, but they also contain some sparse information from prisoners themselves.

The prisoner-reported data tend to be based on convenience samples, which are samples composed of participants who are accessible but not randomly or representatively selected. One key report is based on communication with 100 prisoners who served time in punitive segregation in New York (NYCLU, 2015). However, it is limited to men's experiences, as 99 percent of the prisoners in punitive segregation, or "extreme isolation," in New York state are male.

Some sparse qualitative research is also available, the most prominent being Rhodes' (2004) work with incarcerated men. The only available qualitative research on the restrictive housing of incarcerated women is embedded in a larger (but older) study of a women's prison in California (Owen, 1998). Information about women in restrictive housing was included as an aside and was not the purpose of the study. Qualitative research may involve smaller numbers of cases, but it yields more nuanced information to add to the knowledge base.

One question that has not been addressed — but should be — is to what degree are there similarities and differences across genders? In the Liman Program/ASCA data, 26 jurisdictions across the United States answered a general question about whether facilities have different staffing, programming, or privileges in administrative segregation for women and men, which elicited qualitative, text-based responses.¹ Most correctional administrators indicated that there was no difference in the conditions for men and women in administrative segregation. Among the responses that support this point, the following were selected as examples:

- Alaska: "Administrative Segregation policy and procedure applies to both male and female prisoners, without variance."
- Connecticut: "There are not any notable differences between how the males and females are confined or managed."

¹ The questionnaire item reads, "If your system also houses female inmates in administrative segregation, please describe any differences in the facilities, staffing, programming, privileges, or other aspects of confinement that differ from what you have described above" (Liman Program, 2015, Appendix C (Section III): http://www.law.yale.edu/system/files/area/center/liman/document/liman-asca_adseg_appendix_c.pdf.

- Florida: “No differences — same as males.”
- Nebraska: “We have the same policies and physical layout for restrictive housing at the men’s and women’s facilities.”

Yet, other qualitative responses suggest that there are some differences in conditions for men and women in administrative segregation:

- Utah: “Restrictive housing is similar to the males. One major difference is the step-down process, which is not as extensive or structured. Programming is about the same.”
- Nevada: “There is only [one] institution that houses female inmates for administrative segregation. Limited housing and there is no other institution that the inmate can be transferred to.”

Therefore, the qualitative data suggest that similarities exist across genders, but they also indicate some differences that seem to pertain to women’s smaller numbers in administrative segregation conditions.

Physical and Temporal Dimensions

Supermax conditions also vary, but there are some commonalities of space that adhere to legal standards requiring that cells measure 70-80 square feet (Shalev, 2009). In California, Pelican Bay State Prison’s Secure Housing Unit (built in 1989) has cells that measure 7.6 feet by 11.6 feet, with some cells facing concrete walls (Goode, 2015). Arrigo and Bullock (2008) further explain that secure housing units tend to be small cells (6 feet x 8 feet), with solid steel doors (p. 624). Pizarro and Narag (2008) synthesize the literature on supermax conditions, indicating that inmates tend to be held in 7- by 12-foot cells, often without windows.

Double-celling can also occur in restrictive housing conditions (NYCLU, 2015, p. 34). Some inmates have a “bunkie” or cellmate in these small spaces, which can lead to tension and has the potential for violence (p. 34, endnote 115). The NYCLU report describes cellmates sharing “roughly 100 square feet — about the size of a parking space — that includes a toilet, open shower stall, writing platform, and bunk beds” (p. 35). A key issue, according to prisoners in these confined conditions, is the lack of privacy. This finding points to how the physical dimensions of restrictive housing cells may well constitute deprivation strains.

Regarding time-in-cell, a common feature of restrictive housing includes the “physical isolation of individuals in which they are confined in their cells for around twenty-three hours each day (typically twenty-two to twenty-four hours)” (Smith, 2006, p. 448). Jurisdictions report that most men in administrative segregation spend 23 hours per weekday in their cells. In roughly

half of the jurisdictions, prisoners spend 23 hours per weekend day in their cells, as well (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 37).

Reporting jurisdictions state that prisoners can stay in administrative segregation for less than 90 days but that stays can range up to three or more years (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 28). In supermax facilities, this means long-term isolation for indeterminate terms (Haney, 2003); however, legal settlements in California and New York have called for ending the use of indeterminate stays in restrictive housing (Canon, 2015; Schwirtz & Winerip, 2015).

Some sources indicate that the cells in restrictive housing units lack windows and are often illuminated by artificial light 24 hours per day, where “prisoners have no means of controlling the brightness or dimness of their units” (Arrigio & Bruce, 2008, p. 625). Conditions can include isolation cells that have no windows, as at Pelican Bay (Lovett, 2015). Some supermax units have skylights in the hallways (Shalev, 2009). Most jurisdictions indicate that both men and women in administrative segregation have access to natural light (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 39), and two-thirds of jurisdictions for men report that prisoners can control their in-cell lights (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 39). Sixty percent of jurisdictions report that female inmates can control in-cell lighting. However, these results do not address the quality or duration of inmates’ exposure to light, which is part of inmates’ sensory experiences — their embodied experience of restrictive housing.

Other physical conditions of restrictive housing include air conditioning and noise levels. Among both men and women in administrative segregation, most jurisdictions report having air conditioning (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 39), although whether it is functioning is an open question. Some literature about noise suggests an “eerie silence” in supermax conditions (Shalev, 2009), while other reports indicate uncontrollable noise levels, with prisoners banging their fists against cell doors and yelling. Descriptive reports of prisoner frustration and yelling are also indicated by Owen (1998) for women in secure housing (p. 163). Additionally, the NYCLU (2015) report describes the noise conditions in the recreation pen as catcalls, “guys screaming like crazy people” (2015, p. 39), and pens filled with men “yelling and screaming about nothing” (p. 39).

Another physical concern is access to showers in restrictive housing. In most supermax conditions, both male and female inmates leave their cells for showers approximately three times per week (Pizarro & Narag, 2008), although some reported less-frequent showering (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 43).

Physical conditions may also encompass recreation and exercise provisions. Under supermax conditions, prisoners exercise alone, with no recreational equipment, in a cage or concrete exercise yard outdoors for one hour per day (Shalev, 2009). Sometimes, the exercise yard is indoors with an open, barred top. Prisoners describe the exercise “pen” as being surrounded by concrete walls or heavy metal grating that obstructs their view of the sky (NYCLU, 2015, p. 39).

The vast majority of jurisdictions report that men's administrative segregation facilities have outdoor exercise areas and that 60 percent have indoor exercise areas (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 41). For women, 90 percent of the 10 reporting jurisdictions indicate that outdoor exercise facilities are available, while 50 percent report indoor exercise facilities.

Some jurisdictions report similar access to group exercise activities among men (37 percent) (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 42) and women (40 percent). Roughly 20 percent of jurisdictions reporting on conditions for men in administrative segregation indicate that inmates can receive more hours of exercise as they progress through a step-down classification system (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 41). For men, most jurisdictions report a median of five hours of exercise per week. Among reporting jurisdictions for women, hours allotted for exercise range from three to 10 hours per week, with the median similar to that estimated for men — about five hours per week. The Liman Program/ASCA report indicates that group exercise tends to be offered as part of the final stages of a step-down classification system in administrative segregation conditions (2015, p. 42). Inmates in administrative segregation in general can skip their exercise periods. They can also be denied exercise privileges due to inclement weather, as punishment for rule violations, and if they are considered a threat to security.

Meals also constitute part of the physical conditions of confinement in supermax custody. Inmates eat meals in their cells (Pizarro & Narag, 2008), their food often passed through slots in the door (Browne et al., 2011).

Furthermore, inmates in restrictive housing are generally permitted no physical contact. The touch of another human being tends to happen only when correctional officers place handcuffs and other restraints on inmates, such as shackling them at the waist or placing them in leg irons (Browne et al., 2011). This finding speaks to the distinctive feature that human contact is generally lacking for prisoners held in restrictive housing (Smith, 2006). For example, in supermax conditions, inmates may experience cell extractions (the forceful removal of a prisoner from a cell) (Pizarro & Narag, 2008). Extractions are employed when inmates cover the glass windows of their cell doors or refuse to come out of their cells. Other physical conditions of confinement include four-point restraint, which can include strapping an inmate to a bed. When inmates become violent or refuse to follow orders, guards can place them in special cells that have no amenities — including no beds or toilets. Food delivery and other services can also be denied (Pizarro & Narag, 2008, p. 26).

Finally, technology and surveillance are part of the physical conditions that inmates in restrictive housing face (Shalev, 2009). Supermax units include surveillance by video cameras pointed at cells and intercom systems in the recreational yard, for example, to reduce contact between prisoners and staff.

Descriptive information indicates that at Pelican Bay, not only do doors open and close electronically but corrections officers speak to inmates through intercoms (Goode, 2015).

Limitations and Recommendations

The data show that the physical conditions in restrictive housing are consistent with guiding standards. However, there is little information about what these conditions mean for prisoners, how conditions are experienced, and how these conditions affect prisoners' adaptation to prison life, including well-being and antisocial behavior. Systematic research is needed on prisoners' embodied experiences in restrictive housing, which must be generated with in-depth approaches filling in the qualitative story of what it is like to live in restrictive housing. For example, the present literature notes that the cells are small. However, it is not known how a small cell with a view of a concrete wall, or no windows, or a steel door combine to affect those who live in them. Prisons help ameliorate the constraints of small, general-population cells with out-of-cell time, recreation, and other programming (National Research Council, 2014). These mitigating factors, or coping resources, are generally not available in restrictive housing, where, for example, out-of-cell time is greatly limited. A key recommendation for future research is that prisoners who have experienced restrictive housing should be asked directly and systematically about their experiences of these physical conditions. Although the descriptive data on the physical conditions in administrative segregation show similarities among men and women, little is known about their respective experiences of these conditions.

Totality Versus Separate Strains

Each of these conditions alone may induce deprivation strain, but considering the totality of physical deprivations that inmates encounter in restrictive housing may be especially important in making an overall assessment. The National Research Council report describes some of the conditions in restrictive housing under the title, "extreme conditions of confinement" (p. 178). However, how the totality of these conditions is experienced by inmates and how they may together constitute extreme conditions is lost when research focuses on each specific dimension separately. New surveys of inmates are needed to systematically measure these deprivations to provide an overall index of the deprivation strains that inmates encounter. This effort would be similar to the research conducted on "cumulative burden," the total stress load faced in general community population samples (Turner, Wheaton, & Lloyd, 1994). Such a research direction will yield comparative, empirical assessments of how stressful various conditions of restrictive housing are for prisoners. Comparisons could then be made across prisoner groups, such as comparing men's and women's experiences.

Control of the Body and Coping Resources

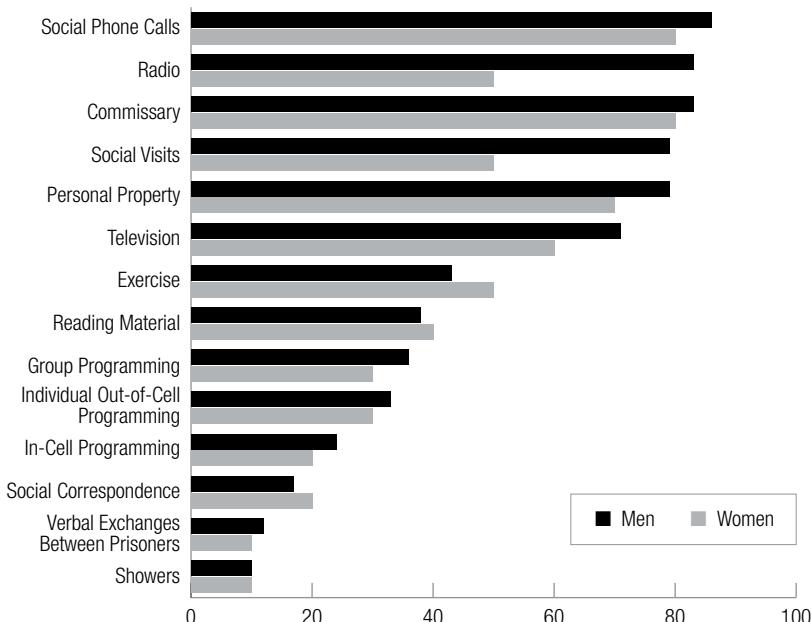
Sociological theory is informative in underlining that the body is, ultimately, the site at which the physical conditions of restrictive housing are experienced (Foucault, 1977; Wacquant, 2004). As Haney observes, “in most of these units in the United States prisoners cannot come out of their cells without being cinched up in elaborate ways — handcuffs, leg irons, restraint chains and the like” (2009, p. 19). This perspective draws attention to the aspects of restrictive housing that control prisoners’ bodies through the cell conditions imposed and use of restraints. Coates’ (2015) recent work on being a black male in America, *Between the World and Me*, sensitizes audiences to pay attention to race and the body. His work, along with reports on demographic trends in restrictive housing (Beck, 2015), suggests that it is especially important to acknowledge that the restrictive physical conditions of confinement are disproportionately experienced by black bodies. Inequities are seen not only in the demographic patterns of restrictive housing but also through inquiry into prisoners’ embodied experience. The lack of qualitative research on this topic obscures this key point, as well as what it means for the well-being of racial and ethnic minority groups.

According to GST, coping resources can offset strains and stressors — which have been described as the pains of imprisonment in restrictive housing (Agnew, 2001; 2006; Pearlin et al., 1981; Sykes, 1958/2007). While touring a men’s prison, the author of this paper observed a prisoner in restrictive housing shadow boxing in his cell through a small window in its steel door. He was creatively passing his time in restrictive housing with extremely limited resources at his disposal. This boxing example and the throwing of bodily substances (Rhodes, 2004) demonstrate that prisoners may also use their bodies to act out some degree of resistance. More information is needed on institutional efforts that try to help prisoners cope with restrictive housing conditions and how prisoners themselves cope with these conditions — if at all.

Routines, Sanctions, and Incentives

Regarding the sanctions used in restrictive housing, NYCLU describes a “culture of deprivation,” where deprivation orders may be imposed for seven days, but there is no cap on the amount on the total time such orders can span (2015, p. 37). However, the Liman Program/ASCA’s (2015) systematic overview of the use of both sanctions and incentives in administrative segregation provides more specific information and also includes some data about women (Figure 1). The most common sanctions include limiting inmates’ social telephone calls, time spent listening to the radio, commissary privileges, social visits, possession of personal property, and exercise time. Sanctions are also imposed that limit reading material, group programming, individual out-of-cell programming, in-cell programming, social correspondence, verbal exchanges between prisoners, and showers. Taken together, the data most often show that the sanctions used

Figure 1. Percentage of Jurisdictions Reporting Activities as Disciplinary Sanctions Among Men and Women.

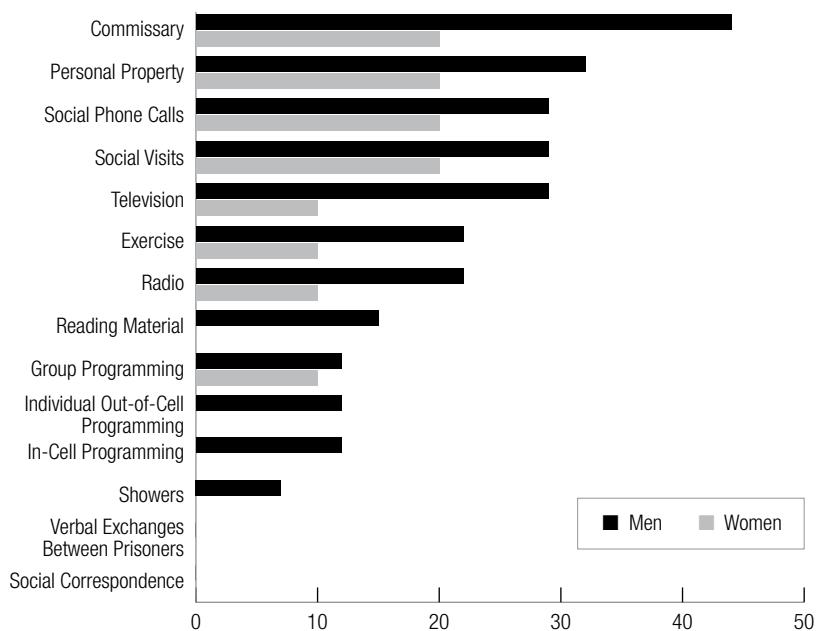


Sources: Data on men ($n = 43$) from Liman Program/ASCA (2015, p. 50); data on women ($n = 10$) made available by Liman Program/ASCA.

are similar across gender. However, data also indicate that some sanctions (e.g., regarding social visits) are experienced more often by men than women in administrative segregation.

More details about how sanctions are implemented are embedded in the literature, including those that affect recreation and food. In New York state, when prisoners first arrive in secure housing units, they must wear handcuffs secured to a waist chain during recreation (NYCLU, 2015, p. 38). Prisoners find that these restraints severely limit exercise options within the already confined conditions of a recreational cage. After 30 days, if they do not have a disciplinary infraction, prisoners may go to the recreation cage without the restraints. Of course, this privilege can be revoked if the inmate incurs a disciplinary infraction. Food restrictions also constitute sanctions for disciplinary infractions in restrictive housing (NYCLU, 2015). In New York, there is a recent recommendation to eliminate “nutraloaf,” a dry, flavorless, 1,100 calorie product sometimes given to inmates as a sanction in place of the standard meal (McKinley, 2015; *The Economist*, 2015). Prisoners also report mealtime “drive-bys,” during which a correctional officer passes their cells without delivering food. Other

Figure 2. Percentage of Jurisdictions Reporting Activities as Incentives Among Men and Women.



Sources: Data on men ($n = 41$) from Liman Program/ASCA (2015, p. 50); data on women ($n = 10$) made available by Liman Program.

descriptive information from prisoners reveals that a tray may be delivered with a cover, as is shown on security cameras, but with no food under the cover (NYCLU, 2015, p. 39).

The Liman Program/ASCA data (2015) also provide an overview of the incentives that are available in administrative segregation across jurisdictions (Figure 2). The most common incentives are access to the commissary, personal property allowed in cell, and social telephone calls and visits. A comparative assessment by gender on the use of incentives in administrative segregation shows that fewer programs offer incentives to female inmates than do programs for men.

Limitations and Recommendations

Some of the descriptive information about sanctions is derived from convenience samples; more systematic data are available on administrative segregation. However, more systematic data are still needed pertaining to sanctions and

incentives used across the various living conditions in restrictive housing and gender similarities and differences in their use. The quantitative, descriptive results tend to show similarities in the provision of sanctions and incentives to women and men. This finding is in keeping with the qualitative data reported by the responding administrators in jurisdictions involved in the Liman Program/ASCA report. However, the quantitative data also support other findings that there are some differences. Specifically, this report finds that more sanctions are used with men than with women in administrative segregation, and fewer incentives to illicit good behavior are provided to women. Further comparative inquiry would increase the knowledge base regarding how gender, as one example of social location, shapes inmates' experiences with the conditions of confinement in restrictive housing. More information on this topic is needed to better understand and address prisoners' embodied experiences of restrictive housing.

Social Conditions of Confinement

Social relationships in prison include those with family members, staff, and other inmates, but restrictive housing precludes most of these social contacts. For example, Browne and colleagues (2011) reported that family visits are reduced, or may be completely prohibited, for a year or more. They further note that when family visits are allowed, they are conducted by speaker or telephone through a thick glass window, with no opportunity for human touch (Browne et al., 2011, p. 47). In some facilities, visits even occur over closed-circuit television (Arrigo & Bullock, 2008, p. 625).

The Liman Program/ASCA report and data (2015) indicate that all reporting jurisdictions permit social visits for both men and women. The jurisdictions also reported that 20 percent of women's visits are contact visits, but no jurisdictions reported contact visits for men. The research indicates that, for prisoners in restrictive housing units, approximately 5 percent of visits to male prisoners occur only via video. No facilities reported restricting female inmates to video-only visits; however, a combination of contact, non-contact, and video are used for women (10 percent) and men (7 percent). Whether these patterns have differential meanings to inmates by gender is unknown.

Both male and female inmates in administrative segregation are allowed social telephone calls (in addition to calls for legal or religious purposes) (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015). The vast majority of these telephone calls are monitored, as are calls by general population prisoners. However, it may be important to consider the influence of such monitoring as part of the totality of other circumstances and restraints that inmates face in restrictive housing.

Limitations and Recommendations

Research is needed on the social effects of solitary confinement on families in the community. Prisoners' perceptions that their families are also affected by

their incarceration may add to the pains of imprisonment they experience. The issue is relevant to practitioners, in that it may be a heretofore unacknowledged form of strain for prisoners in restrictive housing. Investigating this area would contribute to research on the collateral consequences of incarceration or “spillover effects” (Comfort, 2007). Literature pertaining to incarcerated men indicates that female spouses and partners are deeply affected by their loved ones’ circumstances (Comfort, 2007; Wildeman, Schnittker, & Turney, 2012). There is a notable lack of information about how a family fares while a family member is in restrictive housing (Smith, 2006, p. 497). The recent NYCLU report (2015, p. 28) indicates that families also suffer when prisoners are sent to restrictive confinement. More systematic research designs would yield further insight. Drawing on GST (Agnew, 2006), given the severity of conditions in restrictive housing, it would seem that the effects of having a loved one in these conditions may be even more acute for families on the outside; however, only comparative research would shed light on that issue.

Social conditions in restrictive housing also include contacts with other prisoners and staff. Those in restrictive housing tend to be excluded from normal prison programming, routines, and collective activities, greatly reducing social interaction (Haney, 2003). Although prisoners can yell to those in the next cell or pass notes, and must interact with guards, Haney argues that these personal exchanges do not constitute normal social interaction. Smith (2006) goes on to pinpoint harm in solitary confinement: “The central harmful feature is that it reduces meaningful social contact to an absolute minimum: a level of social and psychological stimulus that many individuals will experience as insufficient to remain reasonably healthy and well-functioning” (p. 503). More information about how prisoners experience the social conditions of restrictive housing — or the lack of them — would illuminate whether the conditions of confinement used in supermax facilities today are serving society’s best interests over the long term.

Furthermore, little information on staff-inmate interactions has been gathered in a systematic fashion. Given the constraints of restrictive housing, some inmate-to-staff communication in restrictive housing occurs through their bodies, in the form of cutting, suicide attempts, and throwing bodily substances (Rhodes, 2004). Inmate contact with prison staff also occurs in the course of routine activities in restrictive housing, such as being escorted to the exercise yard or the toilet, or through brief encounters when meals are delivered to the cell door (Smith, 2006, p. 448). Ethnographies that expand on staff-inmate interactions are extremely rare in the literature. However, they are needed given that staff-inmate interactions constitute part of the social conditions of confinement.

Gender Similarities or Differences?

The Liman Program/ASCA data provide further survey-based information on gender and the degree of communication among prisoners. All jurisdictions

report that male and female prisoners can talk with one another, but the quality of those contacts is not revealed by the findings. The data show that more men than women are allowed to talk via group programming, but it is not clear whether that is due to more restrictions on women or less group programming for women. The data also indicate that more women than men talk during recreation-yard activities; therefore, qualitative differences may exist by gender in how social contacts occur in prison.

Some insight about women in restrictive conditions, and their social contacts, is embedded in a broader view of Owen's (1998) work in California. Her research includes conditions in the prison's general population and shows that women form "play families" as part of their social relations. A family member's stay in restrictive housing conditions affects her prison family. Owen's descriptive research suggests that women find it painful to be cut off from play-family relationships in the prison, wondering, for example, if partners on the inside will wait for them while they are in restrictive housing (Owen, 1998, pp.134-137). This research then suggests that perceived impact on within-prison ties is a pain of imprisonment for women in restrictive housing. These play- or pseudo-family ties can also lead to time in secure housing (e.g., as punishment for violence against a partner). This insight raises new questions about how women experience restrictive housing when it separates them from their in-prison partner or other in-prison family members. However, more updated research is needed on both men's and women's social relationships in prison.

Although Owen's (1998) qualitative research on women includes only a few cases of those in restrictive housing, it also raises some questions about staff-prisoner relationships. As part of her overall study, Owen interviewed some staff and prisoners in restrictive housing. One striking finding comes from the comments of a prison guard about the degree of perceived physical threat from the prisoners. The guard reports that "[t]here is no danger for staff in here, not even in the Seg unit. The danger in here is getting manipulated" (Owen, 1998, p. 165). This perception contrasts with the extremes of supermax conditions that focus on constraining "dangerous men" (Simon, 2014). However, in a visit to a restrictive housing component in a women's prison, the author found that staff were highly concerned about perceived threats to their safety and that of visitors. Visitors were given protective vests to wear and instructed to not walk too close to the cells (which had steel bars) to prevent being spit upon. The message conveyed throughout the visit was that these were "dangerous women." This message conflicts with the prison guard's perception in Owen's research. Therefore, more research is needed to clarify how both women and men are perceived as threats to prison functioning and the reasons they are placed in restrictive housing.

Psychological Conditions

Even with variations in the conditions of confinement, Smith states that “the overall conclusion must be that solitary confinement — regardless of specific conditions and regardless of time and place — causes serious health problems for a number of inmates” (2006, p. 503). It is estimated that about 45 percent of supermax prisoners suffer from psychosocial impairments (Lovell, 2008). Another study shows that two-thirds or more of those in supermax conditions suffer from psychological and emotional trauma, and the psychopathological effects of isolation (Haney, 2003). Furthermore, a recent review of extant literature by the National Research Council (2014) states that “the overwhelming majority of studies document the painful and potentially damaging nature of long-term prison isolation. Occasional studies have found little or no harm ... [h]owever numerous methodological concerns have been expressed that limit any straightforward interpretation of these counterintuitive results” (pp.186-187).

Haney and Lynch's review from 1997 discusses some studies that found no adverse psychological effects of restricted housing and suggest that this is a problematic conclusion of some early literature. Smith (2006) reviews this research as well, mentioning, in particular, some studies on sensory deprivation that found no negative effects. His review notes that this research was based on a voluntary sample of college students in an experimental setting for 10 days or less (Kurki and Morris, 2001, p. 431), which is not comparable to the involuntary conditions of confinement. However, a more recent longitudinal study in Colorado examined 270 male inmates with and without mental illness in administrative segregation and in the general prison population. They found no adverse mental health effects from exposure to administrative segregation during a one-year period (O'Keefe, Klebe, Metzner, Dvoskin, Fellner, & Stucker, 2013). As the authors themselves note, more research is needed on these findings because they are from one state and conditions of confinement vary across jurisdictions. In addition, mental health effects may emerge after the one-year interval in which they were studied.

Limitations and Recommendations

On the whole, studies tend to show adverse psychological conditions for inmates living in restrictive housing (Mears, 2008, p. 691), although evidence is mixed. More research is needed to clarify the psychological conditions that may arise in restrictive housing and to evaluate how variations in these conditions of confinement (e.g., level and types of deprivation strains) are associated with mental health outcomes. This research would be further enhanced by considering the potentially offsetting role of coping resources, when available. The GST framework provides a rationale for future research on processes that may explain how strains and coping resources in these circumstances work to affect the mental health of inmates in restrictive housing. This type of empirical research may suggest policy-relevant points of prevention and intervention.

Service Provision in Restrictive Housing

Some information on the services provided to prisoners in restrictive housing is embedded in the recent Liman Program/ASCA report (2015) and in studies of supermax prisons (Shalev, 2009). Concerns about service provision in restrictive housing have emerged from the court case in California regarding the quality of health care and therapeutic programming in *Madrid v. Gomez* at the Pelican Bay Secure Housing Unit (Arrigo & Bullock, 2008, p. 625). The consensus in the limited extant literature is that mental health and medical services are very limited for those in restrictive housing (Browne et al., 2011).

Supermax facilities such as Pelican Bay often can provide more in-depth information about service provision in restrictive housing. Programming for inmates in supermax conditions is provided within cells due to safety concerns (Pizarro & Narag, 2008). Educational services may be provided, as they are at Pelican Bay, by placing inmates in a row of educational cells that face computer monitors, through which the instructors teach the lesson (Shalev, 2009). Other information on supermax conditions suggests that when education is provided, it is by teachers talking to inmates through openings in the cell doors (Pizarro and Narag, 2008). In some cases, prisoners may sign up for in-cell study packets (e.g., for GED, substance use, aggression management) (NYCLU, 2015, p. 32). However, extant literature generally points to an absence of programming.

The literature pertaining to services also indicates that mental health and medical services are extremely limited for prisoners in restrictive housing conditions (Browne et al., 2011), where visits with mental health counselors and staff are conducted through the cell door. However, cell-front therapy allows other inmates to hear the prisoner-therapist discussion. If out-of-cell treatment is provided, the inmate is led to treatment in shackles and remains shackled throughout the session. Shalev (2009) provides some information on other medical services in supermax conditions. For example, the Pelican Bay Secure Housing Unit has on-site medical and dental clinics, but more systematic information on medical services across jurisdictions is needed. Telemedicine is also used in supermax facilities, with medical examinations performed via video conferencing links between the prison and medical centers. One 10-minute telemedicine conference requires roughly two hours of preparation, which involves a strip search of the prisoner, an escort to and from the telemedicine clinic, and two guards who remain with the prisoner during the examination (Shalev, 2009).

Prisoners in secure housing units in New York state explain that medical staff come to a cell when the inmate submits a sick-call slip; the inmate talks with staff through a locked cell door and the food slots, affording no privacy (NYCLU, 2015, p. 40). Visits with a psychiatrist are sometimes conducted via teleconferencing (p. 41). Over all, prisoners report difficulty in receiving attention from medical personnel and social workers; when they do receive medical services, issues of privacy remain a concern.

Finally, the literature shows an overall dearth of programming for prisoners in supermax conditions, drawing attention to the idleness often observed among these inmates (NYCLU, 2015; Haney, 2009) — who live a deeply monotonous existence with pronounced deprivations (Haney, 2009). Restrictions on programming and services also likely amplify the overall pains of imprisonment experienced by prisoners.

Limitations and Recommendations

Information in extant literature on the availability of legal, medical, educational, and mental health services in restrictive housing is sparse. However, service provision is potentially very pertinent in terms of the GST framework, as services represent a programmatically modifiable form of coping resources for prisoners. More information is needed, as well, about the effectiveness of the services provided, including, for example, different modes for providing medical services in these circumstances.

Gender Similarities or Differences?

Data on women made available by the Liman Program and the Liman Program/ASCA report (2015) were synthesized to provide insight into gender similarities and differences in service provision for those in administrative segregation. This information indicates that in-cell programming is the most common for both men and women, whereas out-of-cell programming is less common. In-cell programming includes mental health care, GED, and education services. Out-of-cell programming includes mental health groups, education, and visits with a counselor. Although important in understanding the parameters of service provision in restrictive housing, this information is limited — the data do not speak to the quality of the programming or how it is experienced by prisoners.

Information pertaining to legal visits is available for both men and women in administrative segregation. All jurisdictions permit legal visits for both, but these meetings are a mix of contact and non-contact visits that are monitored. Therefore, the information about legal visits by gender shows similarities, but more information is needed about the quality of these visits and how they are experienced by inmates. In addition, the monitoring of legal visits should be viewed within the totality of constraints that these prisoners face. Is it yet another form of deprivation strain that prisoners must endure?

Systematic Research on Step-Down Programs

Step-down programs allow inmates to alter the extreme conditions of confinement in restrictive housing and regain certain privileges or coping resources by reaching specific milestones. By establishing step-down programs, states “tie an inmate’s departure from segregation to the completion of certain goals, such as behavioral plans and classes” (Liman Program, 2013, p. 18). Some

states — including Connecticut, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia — have structured programs that target behavior in some way. Of the states listed above, Massachusetts, Mississippi, and Virginia — like Washington and Colorado — are working to find ways to hold prisoners in restrictive housing while allowing for more opportunities for group activities and therapy in those circumstances (Liman Program, 2013, p. 18). Without such measures, inmates serving the remainder of their sentences in restrictive housing cannot access the transitional programs for community re-entry that are available to the general prison population (e.g., assistance with acquiring letters of recommendation and in developing post-release plans, a resume, and cover letter) (NYCLU, 2015, p. 33). In fact, one survey found that 4,400 prisoners in 2013 were released directly from secure housing to the community (p. 29). In some of the jurisdictions listed above, transition release programs are part of the step-down programs offered in restrictive housing (Liman Program/ASCA, 2015, p. 30). Information on the effects and workings of step-down programs is not widely available; however, these programs should be the basis of research inquiry because they may reduce the deprivation strains that prisoners encounter and help prepare prisoners for re-entry.

Finally, changes in the confinement conditions in some restrictive housing circumstances are either in place or are being recommended. In California, for example, prisoners will no longer be held in isolation indefinitely (Ford, 2015; Lovett, 2015; Schwirtz & Winerip, 2015). The implementation of these changes should be monitored and studied for the benefit of practitioners and prisoners throughout the nation.

Considering Conditions for Subgroups

Much of what is known about the conditions of confinement in restrictive housing practices pertains to adult male prisoners. To further consider diversity in prisoner experiences of the conditions of confinement, this report features women as a group of inmates that tend to be overlooked when considering restrictive housing. To move toward an even deeper understanding of embodied experience, other overlooked groups must also be included in research and policy considerations. In fact, information is needed on a range of subgroups, including racial and ethnic minorities, transgender inmates (Sylvia Rivera Law Project, 2007), juveniles (ACLU, 2012; Birckhead, 2015), and mentally ill prisoners (American Civil Liberties Union Colorado (ACLUC), 2013; Rodriguez, 2013).

Research shows that transgender women in men's prisons are 13 times more likely than non-transgender inmates to be sexually assaulted by other inmates (Jenness, Maxon, Sumner, & Matsuda, 2010; Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014). Given high rates of sexual victimization, New York's Rikers Island Jail has created a special housing unit for transgender inmates (Mathias, 2014). Other responses

to the elevated threat of sexual victimization among transgender inmates involve placing those inmates in protective custody (Sylvia Rivera Law Project, 2007). Therefore, it is important to consider the degree to which transgender inmates are differentially exposed to these conditions compared to non-transgender (cisgender) inmates. The experiences of transgender women in restrictive housing also need further research (Sylvia Rivera Law Project, 2007). For example, as reported by a transgender female prisoner in a larger study in California, the likelihood of being moved to restrictive housing serves as a deterrent to reporting sexual assault (Jenness, personal communication, January 12, 2016).

Discussion and Conclusions

This report brings together information on the conditions of confinement in restrictive housing. Although some details pertaining to physical conditions, sanctions and incentives, social conditions, psychological conditions, and service provision are synthesized in this report, there is an overwhelming lack of systematic information on the topic. This lack of information stems from a gap in the research — prisoners' personal experiences of the conditions of confinement. The Liman Program/ASCA data provide some of the most informative, nationally representative data on these conditions across jurisdictions in the United States and are used extensively in this report. However, many issues raised by the current synthesis and critique point to areas that require further empirical inquiry.

The majority of the information available describes the basic physical conditions in some forms of restrictive housing, but systematic information about restrictive housing is lacking. The most comprehensive information available tends to come from descriptions of supermax facilities, but very little is known about the social conditions and services provided in restrictive housing. Even when these elements are present in the literature, their coverage is sometimes inconsistent (e.g., total isolation or whether family contact is permitted), which may reflect the myriad conditions encompassed by the term “restrictive housing.” As is shown in this report, there are also some differences in conditions labeled “administrative segregation” for men and women (e.g., regarding sanctions and incentives), although there are also similarities. Furthermore, details are also lacking about the effects of restrictive housing conditions over an extended period of time. Nationally representative, descriptive information is available on the demographic and criminal justice history patterns of groups of inmates who experience restrictive housing (Beck, 2015). Most important, however, is that very little is known about their experiences in these conditions of confinement. Research also must move beyond trace mentions of the conditions of restrictive housing embedded in other studies and further address the nuances and workings of these conditions. Such efforts may be of considerable benefit to practitioners; they may help them to better monitor prisoners' behavior and provide effective conditions when and if restrictive housing is absolutely necessary.

Quantitative Story of Restrictive Housing

The quantitative story of restrictive housing addresses the trends and patterns surrounding who experiences it and descriptive information on the prevalence of particular conditions of confinement. Given recently available information on the criminal justice histories of those in restrictive housing (Beck, 2015), it is clear that prisoners often bring some importation strains (pre-prison stressors) with them to restrictive housing. However, a review of evidence covered in this report suggests that inmates endure considerable deprivation strains (stressors experienced while living in these conditions). More research on these deprivation strains is needed to better flesh out the quantitative story of restrictive housing.

General strain theory (Agnew, 2001; 2006) and the pains of imprisonment concept (Sykes, 1958/2007) offer theoretical tools to better systematically detail the deprivation strains involved in restrictive housing. This framework points not only to detailing the types and levels of strains that prisoners face in restrictive housing but also leads to a consideration of the totality of strains that they endure in these conditions (Turner, Wheaton, & Lloyd, 1994).

Developing the quantitative story of restrictive housing would entail creating questionnaires requiring inmate feedback, which would systematically measure strains in prisons and different conditions within them. Furthermore, using a comprehensive theoretical framework will help to move research from description to empirical analyses of how these conditions affect prisoner outcomes, including health. Inquiry along these lines may also offer theoretically guided and empirically based recommendations for ways to reduce the deprivation strains that prisoners endure in restrictive housing. General strain theory may be further used to consider instituting programming to modify the coping resources available to incarcerated individuals living in these conditions. It predicts that mitigating those strains should reduce antisocial behavior in keeping with rehabilitative goals, and in considering the future re-entry of these inmates to the general population of prisoners and, eventually, to society. The development of coping resources, according to GST, should also foster order within restrictive housing conditions in keeping with the managerial goals of correctional institutions. Investment in coping resources, therefore, may be particularly justified when restrictive housing conditions are imposed. More information is particularly needed on programs that are effective in reducing deprivation strains and on the potential of step-down programs.

Furthermore, a number of questions remain about the conditions of confinement considered to be deprivation strains. For example, if deprivation strain is experienced in restrictive housing, as suggested by the conditions described, how does it spill over to inmates' families? How does that affect prisoners? What are the long-term effects of exposure to restrictive housing conditions for inmates and their families? For practitioners, further inquiry along these lines may lead to the development of effective policies and programs when and if restricted housing is needed.

Qualitative Story on Restrictive Housing

The qualitative story of restrictive housing points to the body as a site of deprivation. In line with critical sociological theories (Foucault, 1979; Wacquant, 2004), a focus on embodied experience may illuminate why different social locations may matter in restrictive housing conditions. As an example of moving toward embodied experience, this report has touched on gender similarities and differences in restrictive housing. Most of the research (although sparse) has been conducted with men; even less information is available about female inmates living under these circumstances. Although the data show that men and women face fairly similar conditions in solitary confinement (e.g., types of physical conditions and a lack of services), there are differences that must be understood. For example, fewer incentives are provided to women in administrative segregation, and more sanctions are provided to men in these circumstances. Such differences may have implications for inmates' adjustment to living in restrictive housing. This limited inquiry into gender and restrictive housing suggests a need for more systematic research on embodied experience. Further development of this concept will yield insight into how different subgroups experience strains in restrictive housing and may inform better policy and practice.

Conclusions

This report begins to synthesize what is known about the conditions of confinement in restrictive housing. It offers some initial insights based on extant research. Due to a lack of information, both the quantitative and qualitative stories of restrictive housing presented here are limited — and are in dire need of more research. Taken as a whole, the conditions of confinement present for inmates living in restrictive housing are extremely challenging across all the dimensions considered (physical, sanctions and incentives, social, psychological, and service provision). These conditions suggest that the use of restrictive housing needs to be avoided as much as possible. Fleshying out these qualitative and quantitative stories will lead to ways to make the conditions of confinement as humane as possible, and to use restrictive housing only when absolutely unavoidable.

Further empirical information is needed to systematically understand how the conditions and processes of restrictive housing affect the inmates who live there. One pressing area of research involves the systematic investigation of the conditions that constitute the pains of imprisonment; their types and levels; and how they work together, separately, and as a totality in affecting prisoner experiences. The GST and pains of imprisonment frameworks may be used to illuminate the types of strains that inmates endure in restrictive housing and the role of coping resources in these conditions. Research is urgently needed

on services, programs, and opportunities for social interaction (e.g., visits from inmates' family members). Such areas may be clear points at which programming can be modified to be more responsive to prisoner needs. Another area that is amenable to change through policy may be informed by more empirical research on the promise of step-down programs for reintegrating those held in restrictive housing into both the general population of prisoners and society at large. Research with implications for programming will be useful to practitioners in shaping safer and more humane practices as they conduct their vital work.

Finally, future research may consider the promise of mixed research methods, which involve using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to understand a social problem (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). A systematic program of research may begin with qualitative studies that may fill in missing information on the meaning of myriad conditions that inmates face in restrictive housing and yield new insight into inmates' embodied experience in these circumstances. As a next step, a program of research could build on the qualitative information by generating systematic questionnaires to quantify the strains, coping resources, and psychological outcomes among a representative sample of inmates living in restrictive housing and in the general prison population. A mixed-methods program of research on restrictive housing would then yield comparative assessments of the conditions of confinement. By investigating the processes involved, this program of research would also inform practitioners about promising areas of intervention and prevention — grounded in experience and theory — for problems that arise among inmates when restrictive housing cannot be avoided.

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