SERVICE PROVISION WHEN CONSUMERS HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO: A GROUNDED THEORY OF CONSUMERS' CAPTIVE SERVICE EXPERIENCE

By

STEVEN W. RAYBURN II

Bachelor of Science in Marketing
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky
1996

Master of Business Administration
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky
2007

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Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Tom Brown

Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Marlys Mason

Dr. Todd Arnold

Dr. Denni Blum

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Name: Steven Rayburn

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Abstract:

In this research, I propose that while typical service consumers might anticipate fulfillment of their needs and desires coupled with positive service outcomes, consumers of captive services may instead experience service captivity and several other negative outcomes in their service experiences. Captive services are those services that operate with structures and processes that, to varying degrees, limit consumer choice, control, or power. Service captivity refers to a consumer's perception that s/he has no options for obtaining a needed service other than the current provider. While it is often suggested that firms actively manage the service delivery process to improve consumers' service experience perceptions, in captive services power imbalance in favor of the organization can short-circuit the need to do so. The result of this power imbalance is consumer feelings of service captivity. As a result consumers are thought to experience service deficiencies untenable in typical service contexts.

To explore these possibilities, a qualitative study is performed. Specifically a grounded theory is developed of consumers' captive service experience. Findings suggest captive service exists and consumers feel service captivity. In these findings it is also found that service concepts seen vital in prior service research do not manifest or manifest differently in a context of captive service. Consumers' service experience is colored by power imbalance in favor of providers. Felt dependency further leads to feelings of powerless and dehumanization. The burden of managing interactions emotionally, relationally, and procedurally shifts to consumers. These outcomes notwithstanding consumers attempt to exert their influence in service interactions, thereby taking back some control of the service experience.

Findings in this study expose that providers are sometimes in control rather than the implicitly held notion that consumers always have power in service exchanges. Understanding of "service" in such captive services is provided. Ultimately, the negative outcomes for consumers of this shift in power is delineated and interpreted in relation to existing literature.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The service experience of consumers in captive service relationships may be qualitatively different than those of consumers in more traditional service relationships. In this research I propose that while typical service consumers might anticipate fulfillment of their needs and desires coupled with positive service outcomes, consumers of captive services may instead experience service captivity and any of several negative outcomes in their service experiences. As developed in my research, *captive services* are those services that operate with structures and processes that, to varying degrees, limit consumer choice, control, or power. *Service captivity* refers to a consumer's perception that s/he has no options for obtaining a needed service other than the current provider. While service captivity may be based on real or imagined service constraint, the effect creates a perceived power imbalance in favor of the service provider. Consumers are dependent, with little choice, control, and power; boundary spanners become powerful gatekeepers to a needed or desired resource. As a result, boundary spanners and the provider firm may act in ways incongruent with accepted principles in current service literature. Most service research has focused on more typical service experiences, those in which consumers have choice, control, and power. Since researchers have largely ignored those services in which consumers are not in control, this research makes an initial foray

into the world of captive services, consumers' felt service captivity, and their lived captive service experience.

Under the name *service quality*, it is often suggested that firms actively manage the service delivery process to improve consumers' service experience perceptions, thereby improving consumers' responses to the service (e.g., Bitner et al. 1990, Brady and Cronin 2001, Rust and Oliver 1994, Zeithaml et al. 1996). Heskett and colleagues (1994), when discussing the service profit chain, propose that such management of the service experience will result in customer retention, repeat business, and positive word of mouth. Zeithaml and colleagues (1996) empirically correlate positive service experience with favorable consumer behavioral intentions, specifically with commitment, willingness to pay, and positive word of mouth. Building on these and other service studies, Brady and Cronin (2001) offer three dimensions of the consumer experience on which managers can concentrate their efforts in attempts to improve perceptions of the service. They propose and empirically support a hierarchical model that includes outcomes, the physical environment, and boundary spanners as primary dimensions of the service experience that directly influence consumer perceptions. Most recently, Vargo and Lusch (2004), through the Service-Dominant Logic of Marketing (SDL), have refocused academics and practitioners alike on the importance of managing all aspects of service interactions to develop relationships, be customer centric, and co-create value with consumers. Research has given managers much support for the idea that managing specified dimensions of the consumer experience will contribute to positive perceptions of services, which in turn will lead to beneficial consumer outcomes for the firm.

Because much of the research has focused on traditional service contexts, in which substitute service providers are readily available, I ask the following question: How might captive service and the resulting feelings of service captivity allow for deviation from "typical" service processes and outcomes for consumers? I propose that a fundamental shift in power-dependence can occur between providers and consumers in captive services that can result in changes in the manifestation of service, potentially negating the need to actively manage consumers' service experiences as assumed in typical services. If consumers are dependent and service providers do not need manage consumers' experiences, will these services become oppressive and contribute to feelings of vulnerability (Baker and Mason 2012)?

To develop the concepts of service captivity and captive service, I draw on Emerson's (1962) theory of power-dependence relations in social exchange. Emerson's initial work sought to bring together the many discussions of power in relational exchange into a single theory (Emerson 1962, Emerson 1972a). In marketing, power research has primarily focused on business-to-business exchange (Frazier 1983, Scheer et al. 2010). Building on theory and what has been learned of power-dependence dynamics in business-to-business contexts, I explore the impact of consumer dependence and provider power on consumer perceptions of the service experience in captive services. Specifically, I focus on power and dependence in exchange and how these potentially affect service delivery since delivery is a potential precursor to service-related well-being outcomes, for example when consumers are thrust into vulnerability by situational cues in service exchange (Baker et al. 2005, Baker and Mason 2012).

To explore these issues, I employ qualitative methods to identify and understand consumers' captive service experience. A qualitative approach is consistent with that used by leading service marketing researchers as they embark on research of previously unexplored service issues (e.g., Bitner 1990, Parasuraman et al. 1985). Specifically, I develop a grounded theory of consumers' captive service experience. This theory permits understanding of not only how context changes the nature of service delivery and consumer responses to the delivered service, but also how these service changes and consumer responses relate to consumers' felt service captivity and other well(ill)-being outcomes. In short, I explore the service experiences of consumers in which they have few, if any, alternative means of need satisfaction. This study contributes to current service research by extending key service concepts to identify how they may deviate from expectations in captive services. Additionally, I contribute to the service conversation with explication of service captivity and captive service, phenomena only tangentially addressed in service research. A call for Transformative Service Research (TSR) has made explicit the need to apply the cumulative knowledge in service marketing to identify how, when, and where services and service providers can or do impact the well-being of consumers, their families, communities, and society at large (Ostrom et al. 2010, Rosenbaum et al. 2011, Anderson et al. 2012). This study contributes not only to service research as described above but also to marketing's discussion of social justice for all by focusing on consumers' well(ill)-being outcomes in relation to the grounded theory of consumers' captive service experience. This information is needed for development of improved service delivery processes and structures.

Service Captivity and Captive Service

Perceived service captivity is consumers' perceived lack of choice, loss of control, and powerlessness to consume in a self-determined fashion. Captive services exhibit the structures and processes that contribute to consumers' perceptions of service captivity. In these and other situations, consumers are largely, and sometimes completely, dependent on the service provider for much needed (or desired) resources. In these situations, consumers perceive no viable option for a needed or desired service other than a current provider.

Consumers experiencing service captivity perceive only one possibility of receiving a needed or desired resource. The idea of a perceived viable alternative is important because at least one alternative is available to consumers in any service situation and that is to leave the service. In some captive services, however, the alternative to not participate is much less viable in that the service provides basic physiological needs such as food, clothing, health, or shelter. The ultimate result of consumers experiencing service captivity may be deviation in service which would be untenable in typical service situations. When consumers have choice and control, versus feeling powerless, they are less tolerant of service deficiencies (Andreasen 1985). In fact, a typical service consumer has the option to leave and will often do so when encountering deficient service (Jones and Sasser 1995). Consumers experiencing service captivity may not perceive this same ability (Hirschman 1970). Since captive consumers perceive no or possibly only extremely "costly" options, they have lost control of their consumption experience.

Middlestadt and colleagues (2009), Hirschman (1970), and Jones and Sasser (1995) all discuss constrained consumers; however, each discusses them only from the structural perspective. In each case the authors discuss the various structural or procedural constraints faced by consumers. Middlestadt and colleagues (2009) discuss issues when consumers encounter Managed Healthcare, Hirschman (1970) is concerned with consumers' responses to monopoly providers, and Jones and Sasser (1995) briefly mention firms that are dependent on a monopolistic provider. They do not discuss consumers' perceptions of no or limited choice and they explicate only limited theoretical outcomes. I discuss structural captivity but also propose that service captivity is an extreme form of the constrained consumption experience (Layton 2007) and explore the possibility that there may be many oppressive and ill-being outcomes related to these feelings.

Power-Dependence Theory

Emerson introduced his theory of power-dependence relations to bring together the multiple perspectives and discussions surrounding power and dependence between individuals and groups into a general theory (Emerson 1962). According to Emerson (1962, Emerson 1972a), power is a product of one individual's (group's) dependence on another individual (group) for resources, coupled with the potential for the first to obtain the resource elsewhere. Power does not reside in people but in the social roles they fulfill, and power will not always be observed in social exchange but the potentiality for power to be exercised is ever present when power-dependence relations are unbalanced, when one actor (group) in the exchange has more power in the relationships due to the other's dependence on him/her (them) for valued resources (Emerson 1962). This

imbalance is precisely what can occur in captive services. The consumer is dependent on the provider for a given resource, a resource not available or perceived available elsewhere. In this situation, consumers can experience perceived service captivity.

Emerson (1962, 1972b) proposes that any power imbalance will naturally move toward equilibrium through one of four possible balancing operations – withdrawal, network expansion, status giving, and coalition formation. He also suggests that the dependent actor may perform a "cost reduction" by changing his/her values to accommodate power; a "cost reduction" does not affect the power imbalance but makes it more bearable for the dependent (Emerson 1962). Much of this discussion has assumed that the dependent actor either (1) can obtain the resources elsewhere and/or (2) has something of value that the powerful actor wishes to extract. Even when discussing unilateral monopoly situations, Emerson (1972b) implies that the dependent actor has something of value to be extracted and suggests that s/he will continue in the relationship, even if only at a subsistence level. I challenge these assumptions in that in some captive services the dependent actor is merely asked to exhibit eligibility and comply rather than to actively return resources to the provider. When this occurs and consumers experience service captivity, it changes the options the powerless partners feel they can exhibit. The theory of power-dependence assumes the dependent consumer can reduce the amount of the resource needed or can obtain it elsewhere. This may not be the case; consumers may have to just deal with what they encounter. Service captivity perceptions and captive services challenge the assumptions of alternatives for the service and the dependent actor's always having resources the dominant position holder wishes to extract.

The Service Experience

For decades there has been a strong focus on what pieces of consumer service experience colesce to impact perceptions of the service. For example, Parasuraman and colleagues (1985, Parasuraman et al. 1988) began with ten dimensions and then reduced them to five in later research: reliability, tangibility, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (see also: Berry 1995, Bowen et al. 1999). Brady and Cronin (2001) conceptualize consumers' service quality perceptions with a hierarchical modeling of three primary dimensions: outcome, physical environment, and interaction quality. In most service research, the focus and recommendations are on proactive management of consumers' service experience. However, the pressure that is assumed to play on organizations is reduced, or removed, in captive services, potentially allowing for a less proactive approach or a complete disregard for these issues altogether.

Viewing the service experience from the perspective of captive service and service captivity suggests that the manifestations of these key service concepts may vary from those observed in typical service interactions. Vargo and Lusch's (2004) explication of SDL and Brady and Cronin's (2001) service quality conceptualization serve as the lens for examining consumers' captive service experiences. However, in the context of service captivity and captive service, consumers' experiences are expected to challenge current conceptualizations of the "typical" service experience. The importance of dimensions of the service experience may change and wholly new and different patterns of service experience may occur in captive service.

Research Purpose and Questions

The service experience of consumers in captive service may be different from that of consumers in typical services. Dependency in captive services creates a power imbalance that favors the provider and thus can lead to service delivery problems untenable in typical service settings. The purpose of this research is to understand the difference this power imbalance creates in the manifestation of service delivery and the impact it has on both service captivity and other immediate service outcomes such as consumers' emotional, psychological, and action responses. By understanding these differences and how they impact consumers, I can recommend service redesign that can provide better service outcomes. To accomplish this purpose, I pose the following questions: What are consumers' captive service experiences? More specifically: do consumers experience service captivity, as defined here, in captive services; how do service experiences manifest themselves in captive services; do consumers' perceptions of the components of the service experience, as proposed in current service thought, change in captive services; and what are consumer well(ill)-being outcomes in service captivity and captive service?

Public Social Services as Captive Service

To explore the manifestation of consumers' captive service experience, the captive service I explore in this research is public social service, focusing on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). These programs are chosen for two reasons. First, they present circumstances congruent with my definition of captive service. There are strict eligibility and compliance requirements for acceptance into the service. Also, consumers enter into

these programs to supplement meager or non-existent incomes and doing without the resources provided could be highly detrimental to individuals and their families. These, and other, assumptions about why and how individuals encounter a need for these social services could result in consumer experiences of service captivity. This context appears quite fruitful as a source of knowledge on consumers' captive service experiences. Second, Bagozzi (1975) called for understanding exchange in social services; Vargo and Lusch (2008a) suggest that service researchers focus on relevant social issues; and Ostrom and colleagues (2010) call for research that considers the well(ill)-being outcomes of service delivery. Limited research addresses these issues. This research addresses this void by exploring the potential implications of captive service on service delivery in this context and potential consumer ramifications.

Conclusion

In summary, the goal of this research is to understand consumers' service experience in captive service situations, what service looks like in this context and how it impacts consumers. This research answers the call in Transformative Service Research to understand and evaluate when and wherever service interacts with consumers to affect their well-being. In this context, it is critical to understand if and how services are negatively impacting consumers so that new and empowering service designs can emerge.

Chapter 2

Conceptualization, Literature, and Research Questions

This chapter begins by defining and describing the proposed concepts o fcaptive service and service captivity. From this, it discusses Emerson's (1962) theory of power-dependence in social relations, exploring the underlying exchange dynamics that gives service captivity importance in service research. In this process, potential extension of power/dependence theory is exposed by confronting it with service captivity. Following this, current conceptualizations of consumers' service experiences are discussed from both the abstract Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) perspective and the more concrete Service Quality perspective. This discussion is presented in light of service captivity and captive service and serves as a lens through which to develop a grounded theory of consumers' captive service experience. Finally research questions and goals are presented.

Captive Service and Service Captivity

Captive services **are those that operate with structures and processes that, to varying degrees, limit consumer choice and power.**

Service captivity **is a consumer's perception that s/he has no viable options for obtaining a service other than the current provider.**

Research has begun to examine constrained consumers in locales around the globe, offering insight into the considerable restrictions consumers face and the effect

these have on their well-being (Martin and Hill 2012, Viswanathan et al. 2010). Prior studies of disadvantaged and vulnerable populations have exposed limited choices and predatory conditions (Alwitt and Donley 1997, Chung and Myers 1999). And, policy research has illuminated the controlling nature of service provision to impoverished consumers (Allen 1993, Hill and Macan 1996a). Common to all of these studies is the lack of choice, loss of control, and seeming powerlessness of consumers to consume in a self-determined fashion. In these and other situations, consumers are largely, and sometimes completely, dependent on service providers for much-needed (or desired) resources.

Building on the cumulative knowledge of these literature streams, this research develops the concepts of captive service and service captivity. It moves beyond Mittelstaedt's (2009) conceptualization of constrained choice when dealing with healthcare and insurance providers as a structural component of an exchange system and extends Hirschman's (1970) concept of captive consumers who are dependent on a monopolistic provider to include all consumers perceptually dependent on a single service provider. This research also subsumes prior definition of captive service as consumers dependent on the service setting (Conlon et al. 2004), to include any structural or procedural constraints placed on consumers. *Captive services* are those that operate with structures and processes that, to varying degrees, limit consumer choice and power. *Service captivity* is consumers' perception of complete dependence upon a particular service provider to acquire a much-needed (or desired) resource; consumers perceive no option for obtaining service other than the current provider. Although, all consumers face restricted consumption choice (Botti et al. 2008, Inman et al. 1997), for

some this is a way of life. Service captivity, based in reality or imagination, is an extreme form of consumption restriction due to consumer feelings of complete dependency.

Captive Service

Captive service can be conceptualized along a continuum of service from limited/no consumer constraints to severe constraints. This research focuses on captive service that creates pronounced constraints for consumers. Consumer choice and control are diminished, power in the relationship resides more in the provider, and "penalties" related to service exit are high.

Service Captivity

Service Captivity is a perception of the individual. The strength of consumers' perceptions of service captivity depend on the level of and the mechanisms used to enforce dependence. As the concept service captivity is developed, examples are drawn primarily from social services, a presumably more extreme captive service manifestation. Using a context of more constraint to study consumers' experiences, allows for discussion of the many potential influences of both service captivity and captive service on service delivery. Discussion can later focus on what applies in other forms of captive service.

Antecedents. Consumers desire choice in consumption (Botti and McGill 2006). Even in the presence of completely chance situations, consumers prefer to exercise choice in "influencing" outcomes (Langer 1975). However, to perceive choice, at least one alternative must exist that is as desirable as the current option (Steiner 1979). When there is a large discrepancy in the attractiveness of alternatives in a choice set, consumers report low (or no) feelings of choice (Harvey and Johnston 1973, Jellison and Harvey

1973). As a result, in the presence of a perceived "take it or leave it" situation, consumers will feel no choice and captive in their current service situation.

Control is also instrumental in satisfaction in marketplace interactions (Hui and Bateson 1991). Psychological and interpersonal theories both point to the ability of individuals to competently engage and influence (i.e., control) their environment as a vital basic need (Deci and Ryan 2000, Schultz 1996). Perceptions of control are intimately entwined with perceptions of choice, such that in the presence of choice, perceptions of control increase (Averill 1973, Hui and Bateson 1991, Wortman 1975). Understanding that full access and choice are not guaranteed in the marketplace (Layton 2007) and that the ability to control resources and outcomes is contextually based (Rucker and Galinsky 2008), it is reasonable that all consumers can, from time to time, be thrust into positions of perceptual captive to a service provider.

Consequences. Consumers do not have equal access to market assortments (Layton 2007). Everyone faces consumption restrictions in some fashion at least occasionally. In response, Botti and colleagues (2008) suggest that choice constrained consumers will comply, adapt, bend/break rules, or even rebel. Hirschman (1970) proposes that these consumers have voice (negative organization speak) as their best option since they are dependent. Emerson (1962, Emerson 1972b) suggests that consumers will either perform a "cost reduction" or engage in one of four possible "balancing operations" – withdrawal, network expansion, status giving, and coalition formation – to cope with dependency.

Only some of these possible outcomes have been empirically established. Individuals feeling a lack of power, feeling that they are not in control, may compensate through conspicuous consumption (Rucker and Galinsky 2008); they may acquire high

status products or services, occasionally to the point of indebtedness or doing without other needed resources. In more extreme circumstances, peasants operate in a safety-first mode; they remain economically disadvantaged though choices to avoid risk (Scott 1976). They plant low yield, reliable crops rather than high yield fluctuating crops that could be sold on market at a profit. Over years, this choice leads to more hardship, as one bad year leads to devastation for the peasant family; however from the peasant's perspective, "choosing" the known over the unknown only makes sense. These individuals have not learned to be "helpless" to improve their lot, as Seligman (1975) might describe them, they are in fact quite industrious in attempting to maintain subsistence in the face of calamity. They are simply captive to an extreme situation in which they see no viable options. In an even more extreme case of restriction, individuals in internment camps in WWII faced almost absolute restriction in consumption. Here, the desire for choice and control in consumption led people to create entertainment, to trade, and to commit subterfuge, at the risk of death, so they could participate in self-determined consumption (Hirschman and Hill 2000).

As constraints increase, so do the potential penalties of consumption, yet consumers continue to consume. Consumers act out their consumption motivation by over-consuming, under-consuming, and covertly-consuming; in each case, consumers are enacting their own will to manage the constraints in whatever way they can. Though some understanding of the actions taken in the face of constraint has been developed, more needs to be understood pertaining to the emotional and cognitive responses to consumption constraint consumers experience.

Exit. Exit in service captivity is another important piece of the consumption puzzle. Consumers leave service providers daily. However, when consumers leave a captive service, they do so with little or no prospect of acquiring the service elsewhere; and when they can reacquire the service, it is often at an increased cost. If the service is highly needed, such as in social services or healthcare, exit can exacerbate disadvantage and vulnerability. In any case, consumers face hardship when they exit captive services. People leave cell providers and pay the penalty; consumers leave social services while still qualifying and needing the associated resources. Understanding how and when this occurs offers insight into the effect of consumers' captive service experiences.

Power and Dependence in Service Captivity. Emerson (1962) provides a theory of power-dependence relations in social exchange. He discusses imbalanced power-dependence and the potential effects on individuals. Consumers in service captivity are on the dependent side of the exchange. They need or want resources that a powerful provider controls. In the most extreme cases, they have no resources to give and no alternative sources of supply. They are completely dependent; they are stuck with whatever they are given in the service. This situation has the potential to change "service," with little recourse for the consumer.

Power-Dependence Theory

Theory

Emerson introduced his theory of power-dependence relations to bring together the multiple perspectives and discussion surrounding power and dependence between individuals and groups into a general theory (Emerson 1962). According to Emerson (1962, Emerson 1972a, Emerson 1964), power is a product of one individual's (group's)

dependence on another individual (group) for resources, coupled with the potential for the first to obtain the resource elsewhere. Power does not reside in people but in the social roles they fulfill, and power will not always be observed in social exchange, but the potential for power to be exercised is ever present when power-dependence relations are unbalanced (Emerson 1962). Dependence is also a characteristic of social roles; it is impacted by the importance of the resource, the number of viable alternatives, and the resource satiation ability (Emerson 1972a). Power and dependence occur mutually in social exchanges between people fulfilling social roles.

When power-dependence relations remain unbalanced, it is expected that more powerful actors will systematically demand/extract more resources from dependent actors until the latter leaves the relationship (Emerson 1972b, Emerson 1976), willingly or under duress. When leaving does not occur, Emerson (1962, 1972b) proposes that any power imbalance will naturally move toward equilibrium through either "cost reduction" or one of four possible "balancing operations" – withdrawal, network expansion, status giving, and coalition formation. The dependent actor may perform a "cost reduction" by changing his/her values to accommodate power. This change does not alter the power imbalance but makes it more bearable for the dependent actor (Emerson 1962). In this case the dependent actor changes personal values related to the "costs" required to obtain the resource. The individual may change his/her moral or social values that are in opposition to the behaviors required to obtain the resource, thereby changing the emotional or psychological costs associated with resource acquisition.

If cost reduction is not possible (or chosen) the dependent actor may employ one of the four balancing operations listed previously (Emerson 1962). Withdrawal describes

reduction in the motivational investment the dependent actor has in the actual resource. It is different from cost reduction in that it focuses on lowering the importance of the resource rather than changing the values of the actor. Network expansion refers to the dependent actor's engaging alternate sources of the resource. Status giving describes the process of increasing to the powerful actor the importance of whatever resources the dependent actor controls. This often occurs within intact groups and results in the least dependent actor in the group moving to a higher position as others in the group bestow upon this person esteem or leadership. Finally, coalition formation explains the joining together of multiple dependent actors to cooperatively resist the demands of and to extract increased resources from the powerful actor in the exchange relationship. Hirschman (1970) offers an additional option, voice (negative organization speak) as a possible response to dependence, though he argues this option will likely be actively managed by the powerful actor in the exchange relationship.

Much of the power-dependence discussion rests on two assumptions: that the dependent actor (1) can obtain the resources elsewhere and/or (2) has something of value that the powerful actor wishes to extract. Consumer perceptions of service captivity challenge the assumption of perceived alternatives for the service as well as the dependent actor's having resources the dominant actor can demand/extract. When consumers have no perceived alternatives for a service and when what they bring to the exchange is constrained, the viability of the proposed options may change. Consumers may only have at their disposal cost reduction (Emerson 1962) and voice (Hirschman 1970). As a result, providers (the powerful actor) may or may not adjust the terms of exchange to the benefit of consumers (the dependent actors); and policy makers may be

asked to "fix" the exchange in these conditions, as can be seen in legislation to control unilateral monopolies.

Marketing

In marketing, power-dependence relations have seldom been examined in service research or with a concern for business-to-consumer contexts. Rather, a large body of literature in business-to-business contexts has developed. In this literature, the same assumptions as those in Emerson's theory have been applied to the proposed relationship qualities and outcomes: that alternatives and relational interdependence exist (Brown et al. 1983, Frazier 1983, Kumar et al. 1995, Kumar et al. 1998, Scheer et al. 2010). These assumptions have pervaded this stream of literature to the point that Lai (2009) states, "The importance is not unilateral dependence but rather interdependence" (p 426) when exploring power-dependence relations. However, some concepts and findings from this literature have import in a business-to-consumer context and to service captivity and captive services.

Frazier (1983) suggests that dependency is related to role performance. The better the powerful actor performs, the more dependent the other actor will become and the fewer alternatives s/he will perceive. In service captivity, this idea means that providers would benefit from improving service provision by creating more loyal and committed consumers. However, some of these services do not want consumers to stay nor do consumers want to stay. This dynamic changes the importance of the idea of role performance. It can be argued that in these circumstances, role performance need not be managed. It has been assumed in some cases that if managers make the service "too good," consumers will become more dependent and will not ever leave the service; this is

the notion behind "less eligibility," or reduced resource provision, in social services (Hill and Stephens 1997).

Kumar and colleagues (1995, Kumar et al. 1998) introduced the concepts of total interdependence, interdependence asymmetry, and punitive capability. They found that while increases in total interdependence resulted in more trust and commitment and less conflict, asymmetry in interdependence creates the opposite effect. They also find that punitive capability asymmetry in favor of a supplier has negative ramifications for downstream channel partners. If exchange partners are equally or similarly dependent, the exchange relationship will be stronger. However, once interdependence is unbalanced, the relationship falters from the dependent actor's perspective and conflict increases as a result. Ultimately the dependent actors' ability to defend themselves decreases, opening them to further demands from the powerful partner. Consumers of captive services start in this position.

The use of coercive and economic influence techniques in the presence of power-dependence imbalance is particularly troublesome (Brown et al. 1983, Frazier and Summers 1986). Such techniques are particularly conducive to decreasing trust and increasing conflict and retaliation. While non-coercive techniques do not have the same negative effects (Brown et al. 1983), they are often used only when exchange partners have shared norms and values (Lai 2009). The likelihood of exchange partners holding shared norms and values in captive services is low because providers in these contexts can make whatever demands they desire and consumers must comply. How demands are made has the potential to impact relationship quality.

Recently, Scheer and colleagues (2010) have provided a more nuanced perspective of dependence. They differentiate between dependence that is benefit-based, i.e. based on benefits received from the exchange, and cost-based, i.e. dependence that is based on the cost to acquire benefits elsewhere. They find that though both lead to insensitivity to competitive offerings, only benefit-based dependence does so by positively influencing relational loyalty. Only the benefits received are important to building strong relationships and, assumedly, cooperation in exchange; costs simply keep exchange partners captive. This form of dependence works only so long as the costs do not get too high.

The channels literature gives insight into the relational outcomes – trust, commitment, and conflict – that are manifest in power-dependence imbalances. To identify these outcomes, the research assumes interdependence and alternatives. Therefore the findings provide no understanding of the ultimate relational outcomes in unbalanced exchanges – continuation or exit. Also, there is no understanding of the "individual" outcomes for the dependent actor. This literature provides some insight to what may occur in unbalanced power-dependence situations in some business-to-consumer contexts, but insight in contexts involving captive service and service captivity.

Service Experience

This research draws on two research streams to identify and describe consumers' service experience. One is the Service Dominant Logic of Marketing (SDL), an abstract perspective, and the other is Service Quality, a more concrete perspective. From these two literature streams we can construct a picture of what constitutes "service" for consumers. Brady and Cronin (2001) suggest that consumers draw on actionable aspects

of the service encounter when they consider the service experience so key concepts in both SDL and Service Quality are discussed in this section. A brief history of these perspectives is given, important concepts in each are described, and these concepts are discussed in the context of captive service and service captivity, creating "change" in their manifestation.

The goal of typical service provision is an experience that promotes customer loyalty and repeat interaction with the service provider. This is not always the goal of captive services. While some captive services wish to have extended relationships with consumers, others would rather have consumers exit the service. These goals appear on the surface irreconcilable but are not; what has been learned about the importance of various dimensions of service quality may be adaptable to understanding consumers' captive service experience.

The divergent goals of typical and some captive services notwithstanding, a transformative service perspective suggests that the commonality of treating customers well and satisfactorily meeting their needs should hold in both. How a service firm leads individuals to the behavior most appropriate to its goals is a function of the service experience. In prior service quality research, it is assumed that perceived service performance impacts the behavioral intentions of customers, such as positive word of mouth (WOM), repeat purchases, willingness to pay price premiums, etc (i.e. Zeithaml et al. 1996). It is assumed that high quality service delivery will lead to behavioral intentions that are favorable to the individual and these will lead to behaviors that are favorable to the organization. This research is a first attempt to discover and understand

consumers' captive service experiences and how they might impact consumers emotionally, psychologically, and physically.

Service-Dominant Logic

Over the past few years, a new service-dominant logic has taken hold as the dominant logic for marketing. Since before Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and never fully disappearing, the idea that all economies are based on service provision and service-for-service exchange has been recently presented by Vargo and Lusch (2004) (for a brief history of the concepts informing service-dominant logic see Vargo and Lusch 2004 and Vargo and Morgan 2005). SDL can be summarized as stressing the importance of (1) operant resource delivery, (2) consumer/provider relationships, (3) customer centricity, (4) customer value co-creation and (5) consumer resource integration (Vargo and Lusch 2004, Vargo and Lusch 2006, Vargo and Lusch 2008a). The importance of these factors, along with the admonition that service represents benefit provision for other parties (Vargo and Morgan 2005), suggests that concepts central to SDL should apply in any service context. Applying SDL to captive service suggests this may not be the case

The SDL framework, when extended to include service captivity, shows similarities, slight departures, and situations where service delivery markedly departs conceptual underpinning (table 1). The goods-dominant logic portion of the framework is included here to illustrate how some of the departures of social service provision from SDL are related to commonalities with the goods-dominant logic approach to marketing.

Primary Unit of Exchange/Role of Goods

The primary unit of exchange in captive services is not always operant resources as assumed in SDL. Instead it is often a specific, predetermined "good" which may or

may not contain elements of operant resources. Whatever is delivered, however, is to be consumed as delivered. In some cases, the offering is an end product such as cellular technologies. In this case, the product usage limits are predetermined and purchased. The consumers then use this product for whatever purposes they have. This situation evidences the transfer of some operant resources in that the phone purchased and the technology used are intermediary resources used to access the actual service which can be communication, information search, business support, etc. Consumers have a choice in how they use the service but are often constrained in how much of the service they can access and use without penalty.

In other cases, no, or very limited, operant resources are delivered with the service. Unlike in SDL, following a service-for-service logic, where specialized competencies or skills are the primary basis of exchange, in social services provision of financial resources often is the primary characteristic of the exchange. These resources are intended to allow the consumer to participate in the market, though these exchanges often leave consumers still at a financial disadvantage (Alwitt 1995). Additionally, they are often not given the information, training, or education needed to make sound financial or consumption decisions. There is little explicit consideration of consumers' needs, beyond financial, in delivery of the service. Operant resource delivery does not accompany every service delivery process. In both of the above examples the services delivered are intermediary products; they allow for consumers to meet more abstract needs and wants. Only in some cases do they include operant resources.

Role of Customer/Firm-Customer Interaction

Unlike what SDL suggests for service, customers are not always an integral portion of the service process in captive service. Instead, much like a goods-dominant logic, the consumer is acted upon. For example, social service providers determine eligibility, whether benefits will be given or if they may be taken away, similar to the selling to or distributing to customers that is common to a goods-dominant logic of marketing. When consumers are required to interact with the service provider, it is to comply with the paperwork and other demands of the service system. Such interactions with providers are stressful at best for consumers and emotionally damaging at worst (Morgan 1993, Gilliom 2001, Shipler 2005). This distress may create emotional, psychological, and behavioral responses not yet understood.

Also, in typical service exchange, consumers are expected to actively participate in the co-creation of value and resource integration. In SDL it is assumed that firms will be active resource integrators between firm and customers (Lusch et al. 2007). Ballantyne and Varey (2008 , p 12) specifically call on suppliers to shift "to interacting as service providers wherever and whenever worthwhile opportunities arise," suggesting the need to scan for resource integration opportunities. In captive service, however, delivery processes and value are predetermined; no participation is needed. Consumers are to simply use the service and comply with service organization demands; thus opportunity for resource integration is lost.

Finally, the boundary spanner role in any direct service is commonly known to be a dramatic influence on firm-customer interactions. In fact it has been held for many years that it is often difficult for the customer to separate perceptions of the service from

the service worker (Shostack 1977). These service situations provide great incentive for the organization to promote the service worker's performing in a manner that is conducive to consumer satisfaction. Consumer satisfaction is thought to lead to satisfaction, loyalty, and/or improved profit levels. These outcomes are less important in captive service since the consumer has nowhere else to go.

Instead, in captive service boundary spanners find themselves in a unique role as gate-keeper of service; through them all service flows. Consumers may have no other contact with the institution. In social services the gatekeeper is responsible for obtaining information needed to determine eligibility, is on constant look out for ineligible "abusers" of the system, and is constantly monitoring the activities of his/her customers. They have a highly difficult and highly impactful role, and how they chose to do it will directly impact the individuals they serve. It is not unknown for social service workers to illegitimately dissuade customers from filling out applications, effectively refusing service to customers that may vitally need assistance (Shipler 2005). There are often delays in processing of claims, resulting in individuals' doing without needed resources for extended periods (Shipler 2005). These are flaws in the system, but individuals are often afraid to "buck the system," fearing retaliation from social workers (Hill and Stephens 1997, Morgan 1993, Shipler 2005). Knowing these issues exist and fearing denial of assistance places consumers of social service at a disadvantage from the onset; fearing for their existence places an undue burden upon them emotionally, psychologically, and possibly physically. Though social services are only one type of potential captive service, examples here expose the potential power imbalance in these firm/customer interactions in captive service.

Meaning of Value/Source of Economic Growth

The meaning of value and sources of economic growth areas see some commonality with SDL, specifically in that value is determined by the user of the service. How much the service matters is known only to consumers themselves. From the perspective of the consumer who is dependent on the service, any value extracted is positively viewed since the other option is doing without. In contrast from the provider's perspective, value can be created in other ways. For example, value in the social service system stems from the ability of customers to leave the system by achieving self-sufficiency. However, wealth or economic growth can have another contributor: the exit of individuals from the service creates resource savings that contribute to the "wealth" of the system. These contradictory value-creating mechanisms create conflict for service providers.

Summary

Captive service can fundamentally change the form, importance, and/or existence of "service." In a typical service the consumer has the option to leave and will often do so in the process of receiving deficient service. In the case of captive service the consumer may not perceive or even have this same option. When consumers have few or no options, they must participate in the system to receive provision, regardless of the form service provision takes. Best illustrated in social services, captive service consumers report very poor interactions and suffer from service quality issues that would lead them to exit typical services (Shipler 2005). Few leave, however; because of the social service delivery process, they are stuck. Since they are captive, consumers' service experience is anticipated to be "different" from that of consumers in control of their service experience.

While concepts important in established service research are expected to continue to be important in captive service research, the manifestation, the importance, and even the underlying structures of these concepts is anticipated to be unique to captive service experiences.

Service Quality

Several determinants of service quality have been suggested and discussion continues as to what truly constitutes service quality. Bitner and colleagues (Bitner 1990, Bitner et al. 1994) made some of the first forays into examination of service quality using critical incident techniques to identify service experiences that resulted in consumers' positive and negative quality perceptions. Examining service quality from both consumer and provider perspectives, they identified three groupings of boundary spanner actions that were strong determinants of service quality – responses to failure: responses to needs/wants; and unsolicited employee actions. Boundary spanners were very important in their conceptualization of service quality.

Parasuraman and colleagues (1985) followed, also using qualitative methods to identify multiple potential determinants of quality. They began with ten dimensions which they reduced to five in later research: reliability, tangibility, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (1985, Parasuraman et al. 1988, see also: Berry 1995, Bowen et al. 1999). These five ultimately became the SERVQUAL instrument for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality (Parasuraman et al. 1988). Their model was a "gaps" model of quality; it was built on the notion that consumers have expectations of service, they receive a service, and there is a gap between the expectation and the experience. This gap then determines their perception of service quality in that interaction

(Zeithaml et al. 1993). This conceptualization also rested heavily on the idea that boundary spanners were very important to consumers' perceptions of service delivery. In addition to the importance of boundary spanners, this model of service quality incorporated tangibles into the measurement of service quality. These authors identified one missing component important to consumers' experience of quality service.

Rust and Oliver (1994) identified yet another missing piece of the service quality equation, the service environment. Though atmospherics has been a long standing and important topic (Kotler 1973, Bitner 1992), their research was one of the first to specifically inclusions of environment as an indicator of overall consumer perceptions of service quality. Brady and Cronin (2001) adopted Rust and Oliver's conceptualization and incorporated it with other perspectives of service quality to propose a hierarchical modeling of how consumer perceptions of service quality form. They conceptualize service quality as a third-order factor comprised of three second order factors – outcome quality, physical environment quality, and interaction quality. These authors use lower-order factors made up of items representing various determinants presented by earlier scholars. This model could be thought to mask the importance of some determinants, particularly empathy, reliability, and responsiveness; however, in examining quality of service, these components are represented as indicators of each of the lower order factors, stressing their importance. This formulation is an amalgamation of perspectives, yet provides a parsimonious structure of consumers' service experiences.

A Model of Consumers' Service Experiences

Brady and Cronin (2001) bring together multiple perspectives on service quality to develop a hierarchical model of consumers' service experiences and to measure service

quality perceptions based on these experiences. Primarily they adopt Rust and Oliver's (1994) tripartite conceptualization of service quality and undergird it with Parasuraman and colleagues (1985, Parasuraman et al. 1988) dimensions of service quality. By doing so, they present and test a more parsimonious and inclusive model of service quality. This research uses this conceptualization as a basis for the development of a grounded theory of consumers' captive service experiences. Understanding that these three dimensions – outcome quality, physical environment quality, and interaction quality – work together to produce perceptions of service quality, each is discussed as originally developed and also in relation to service captivity and captive service.

Outcome Quality. Three components are thought to make up outcome quality though there has been little empirical research to determine all possible attributes (Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001). The contribution of these components to outcome perceptions may vary but according to previous research are thought to be waiting time, tangibles, and valence (Parasuraman et al. 1985, Shostack 1977, Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001). Waiting time is thought to directly impact the perceptions of an outcome and in qualitative studies has seldom resulted in favorable responses with the exception of extremely timely service. Tangibles are those "things" that customers receive and are thought to be a proxy for measuring the outcome of the service. Valence is a measure of whether the outcome of the service was good or bad beyond the evaluation of the other variables. These components are thought to work together to form consumers' evaluations of the outcome of the service; here I discuss waiting time and tangibles.

Waiting time is a common concern for service providers in the for-profit arena but often less of a concern in captive service. For example, discussions of social service

provision are replete with comments about waiting throughout the day and longer for service (Morgan 1993, Shipler 2005). Waiting occurs in offices as consumers seek to acquire services; waiting occurs while workers determine eligibility; and, waiting occurs during the renewal process (Shipler 2005). Research suggests that waiting negatively impacts consumer evaluations of the service atmosphere, service delivery, and patronage intentions (Grewal et al. 2003). Research also suggests that in healthcare, another captive service, longer waiting leads to lower levels of customer satisfaction (Dansky and Miles 1997). This healthcare research also suggests that waiting can be managed, but captive services do not necessarily have to manage consumers' waiting. Consumers are have no or limited options.

Tangibles are often used as a proxy for outcome evaluation (Zeithaml et al. 1985, Shostack 1977, Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001) and as such are often considered in service marketing as a key variable on which to concentrate managerial efforts. However, in captive service less consideration can be given to the actual output of the service. Consumers are dependent on the service regardless of the quality of the output. For example in social services the tangible output is often no more than a financial voucher or a reduction in expenses, which of course are only a means to acquire the real tangible ends of the service. What an individual is able to acquire with these outputs may be a more accurate measure of the tangibility of social service. Regardless, when consumers are dependent on the service anything received has the potential to be viewed positively inasmuch as it is a needed resource.

Physical Environment Quality. Much work has been conducted on the impact of the physical conditions of retail and service facilities on customers (i.e. Baker et al. 1994,

Bitner 1990, Bitner 1992, Kotler 1973, Sirgy et al. 2000, Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001). Early research in physical environment suggests that atmospherics, "the conscious designing of a space to create certain affects in buyers," is a highly relevant marketing tool for retailers and service providers (Kotler 1973). The environemnt can be used to attract consumers, to set retailers apart where only small differences exist in the price or quality of the service, and it is thought to send a message of who interacts with the service (Kotler 1973, Sirgy et al. 2000).

This dimension of service quality is composed of three components: ambient conditions, design, and social factors. Ambient conditions and design refer to the visual and non-visual components of the physical environment, such as temperature, scent, layout, decoration, or cleanliness (Bitner 1992, Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001). Social factors refer to the individuals (other consumers) with whom the consumer must interact and these interactions while in the service environment (Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001). How service providers manipulate these environmental variables directly impact the consumers.

Service and retail providers commonly design the physical environment to move the customer into an emotional or psychological state considered beneficial to the goals of the firm (Kaltcheva and Weitz 2006, Pullman and Gross 2004) and to attract particular clients and evoke in customers perceptions of the individuals with whom the provider interacts (Kotler 1973, Sirgy et al. 2000). For example, in a Bass Pro Shop it is no accident that the entry resembles a hunting or fishing lodge or that the décor represents every type of outdoor activity in which the naturalist may participate. It can be assumed that the provider is attempting to engage the emotions of the customers entering the store,

putting them in the frame of mind these activities evoke. Service providers follow suit in designing waiting rooms in law offices or medical facilities and in the design of the local coffee shop. Purposeful design in many servicescapes such as these attempts to evoke pleasurable emotions for the customer and to engage them for extended periods of time. This such design is congruent with the goal of attracting and retaining customers.

When the goal is not to attract and retain customers this research would argue, service providers might still concern themselves with presenting an environment that is pleasing to its consumers. This effort of course will be largely dependent on the ambient and design aspects of the environment, as it is likely that some captive service providers have little say in the consumers with whom they interact. In a captive service situation, the service provider has little say in the characteristics of the consumers just as the consumers have little say in where they receive the service. As this is the case, design becomes increasingly important to the minimization of potential negative impacts of social factors in captive service.

Interaction Quality. Interaction quality is perhaps the single most important aspect of the service experience in captive service. We are reminded that "services are often inextricably entwined with their human representatives [and] in many fields, a person is perceived to be the service" (Shostack 1977, p 77). Cooke and colleagues (2002, p 167) echo this saying: "service employees represent the organization in the customers' eyes and in many instances they are the service." In other words how boundary spanners act and their intent directly impact perceptions of service formed in consumers' minds. Boundary spanners have an ability to impact consumers emotionally and psychologically based on the treatment they provide. Their position in captive service is powerful, more

so even than in typical services. Because the consumer has no viable options, the boundary spanner becomes a service gatekeeper, with the power to decide the fate of those entering into the service.

Brady and Cronin (2001) identify three factors – attitude, behavior, and expertise – in qualitative research and subsequently test them to form the interaction quality dimension of service quality. These factors echo previous research that suggests that boundary spanner/customer interactions can be divided into three similar employee characteristics (Bitner 1990, Bitner 1992). "Attitude" is the level of friendliness with which the boundary spanner interacts with the customer. "Behavior" concerns the actions boundary spanner takes on the behalf of the customer. "Expertise" is the perception of whether the boundary spanner has the requisite skills to accomplish the job. Combined these three components of interaction quality comprise the ability to deliver needed and appropriate resources to consumers in a responsive and empathetic manner.

Mohr and Bitner (1991) promote understanding between consumers and service providers as instrumental in the delivery of satisfactory service. The importance of mutual understanding applies to captive service as well. Only by understanding one another's perspective of the situation can boundary spanners and consumers have meaningful dialogue. Certain behaviors are necessary in the provision of captive services such as some health care provision and social services (i.e. provision of background, health, and financial histories) but the attitudes of caseworkers in this process are key to the emotional and psychological responses of consumers. In addition it should be an imperative to respond quickly to the needs of these consumers, who are already dependent and disadvantaged.

Summary – Consumers' Service Experience

Captive service presents a unique challenge for service experience research as it is very different from typical service provision, both in the goals and the "qualities" of the consumers of the service. However, these differences need not preclude satisfactory service provision. Service quality as defined by the outcome, physical environment, and interaction quality serves as a roadmap to understanding consumers' captive service experience.

Research Questions and Goals

With an understanding of current service experience thought that has been developed in contexts featuring consumer choice and, therefore, enhanced consumer power, the overarching goal of this research is an understanding of service experience in the disparate context of captive service, when consumers experience service captivity. To gain this understanding, I pose the following questions: What is the service experience of consumers of captive services? More specifically: do consumers experience service captivity, as defined here, in captive services; how is service manifest in captive services; do consumers' perceptions of the components of service, as proposed in current service thought, change in captive services; and, what are consumer well(ill)-being outcomes in service captivity and captive service?? The goal in answering these questions is to develop a more nuanced understanding of consumers' service experiences, considering atypical service provision; to provide a conceptual understanding of the experience of captive service and service captivity; and to extend the theory of power-dependence to included contexts of business-to-consumer exchange and captive service.

Chapter 3

Methodological Approach, Concerns, and Techniques

Introduction

I focus this project on understanding the service delivery process and consumer/provider interactions in captive service. Following a pragmatic perspective, I am primarily concerned with the substantive problem and choose the method of inquiry that best suits exploring the problem, answering the questions, and achieving the goal of the research (Creswell 2007). Inasmuch as the goal is to grow in understanding consumers' lived captive service experience, the premier methodological approach is qualitative (Creswell 2007). This approach is consistent with prior research into the structural determinants of consumers' service experience (Bitner 1990, Parasuraman et al. 1985). Specifically, I employ a grounded theory approach with phenomenological understanding to answer my research questions. Qualitative methodologies are particularly useful when attempting to understand participants' meanings for a phenomenon, experience, or problem (Creswell 2007). In this research, I want to gain knowledge of consumers' perceptions of service captivity in the interactions they have when receiving service from captive services, the meanings they ascribe to interactions, and the structure of the service experience in this context. I want to understand how consumers experience service in captive service interactions, not how it is perceived by outsiders nor how service has been described in prior literature.

Qualitative methods can be used to give voice to a silent or silenced population and to empower individuals to tell their story (Creswell 2007). Consumer experiences of service captivity, as defined in this research, are thought to often exist in contexts where consumers are in some fashion oppressed. Captive services such as social services have been hotly debated politically; however, little literature in marketing, and virtually none in services marketing, has taken the perspective of or given voice to consumers of captive service. I give these consumers voice as they describe service experiences in this context.

Further, research is lacking in the exploration of the interactions individuals have with social services from a service delivery perspective. There is a basic knowledge of what is necessary for social service provision to occur, but the actual interactions are a "black box." They are held in isolation, much different than typical service provision, and are difficult to observe. I gain a deeper understanding of what is happening in these interactions with qualitative methods than is possible with quantitative research techniques (Kennedy et al. 2003). Further, qualitative inquiry is particularly useful to understanding interpersonal interactions and the feelings, emotions, and reactions that occur as a result and to delineate the contexts in which interactions occur (Creswell 2007). These methods will allow me to look inside service interactions and to see not only how service is manifest when consumers are captive but also how it impacts consumers.

Finally, qualitative research is important in the context of researching sensitive topics (Hill 1995). In socially sensitive research, it is important to consider and protect the psychological, emotional, and physical health and well-being of participants. "*Socially sensitive* research refers to studies in which there are potential social

consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research" (Sieber and Stanley 1988 , p 49). Hill (1995, p 145) suggests that in such a context, participants be treated with beneficence, respect, and justice: "Research procedures must be designed within a framework of sincere respect for the participants' rights to privacy and confidentiality. . . .The study's findings should be of interest and possible benefits to research participants, as well as, potentially, other persons with similar backgrounds."

The findings of my research can have profound implications for individual consumers dependent on the actions they take in response to captive service interactions. On a more abstract level, my findings may influence future captive service delivery design. By employing qualitative methods, I can balance the need to look inside the interaction with the need to respect participants' privacy and need for sensitivity to their situation. This type of inquiry permits me to explore the interactions individuals have with captive service in depth. At the same time I can be respectful of who the consumers are, allowing them to speak for themselves. Through this process I provide understanding of consumers' perspectives of service in captive service which allows for consumer oriented service redesign (Baker et al. 2005).

Hill (1995) suggests that neutrality is impossible. I agrees and one motivation for this research is to "help" in an area I see as a problem. The qualitative paradigm accepts lack of neutrality as fact and requires researchers to acknowledge and examine their own reflexivity in their research (Barnard 1990). This acknowledgement allows me to move forward in good conscience using qualitative inquiry to examine service delivery in this context with a critical eye. The rest of this chapter discusses briefly each of the

methodological components of my research. The research design is delineated, a short description of my qualifications to research this problem is provided, I then discuss data collection techniques, sampling, and analysis, and I finally address ethical considerations.

Research Design

I am following a grounded theory approach in this research. As with any grounded theory study, I have designed my research to be emergent (Creswell 2007, Penaloza 1995, Belk et al. 1988, Charmaz 2000). The process was iterative, from data to analysis and back. This iteration between field and data, allows the research process to follow the data gathered. One set of data leads to expanded and/or redirected questioning for gathering additional data. By following an emergent design I arrive at a more natural and holistic account of consumers' experiences and substantive theory (Creswell 2007).

Grounded theory is the development of theory inductively by examining the experiences of individuals familiar with the process or phenomenon (Straus and Corbin 1990). Creswell (2007) describes phenomenology as examining and explicating the lived experiences of individuals with a phenomenon, while grounded theory goes further to develop a theory, "an abstract analytical schema of a process" (p 63). The goal is to develop an explanation of processes and interactions underlying and emanating from a core phenomenon as understood and described by multiple individuals (Creswell 2007, Straus and Corbin 1990). The relevance of this method is based on its ability to offer nuanced explanations of actual problems in real situations (Charmaz 2000). By moving from description to the development of concepts and interrelationships, grounded theory gains it power (Straus and Corbin 1990).

Charmaz (2000) provides six strategies that underpin the benefit of a grounded theory approach to explaining complex processes: (1) iterative and simultaneous data collection and analysis, (2) multiple coding processes, (3) comparative methods, (4) memoing techniques, (5) theoretical sampling, and (6) integration of the theoretical framework. Grounded theory studies typically iterate between the field and the data, examining emerging concepts and structures (Creswell 2007). Increasingly complex and interpretive forms of coding are used – open, axial, and selective – to develop the theory to include not only concepts but also causal linkages (Creswell 2007, Straus and Corbin 1990). Memoing serves to develop the "story" from the data, leading first to more questions and later to the theory (Creswell 2007, Straus and Corbin 1990). Theoretical sampling offers an established process by which to fill in the gaps that inevitably exist in the iterative data collection and analysis process (Charmaz 2000). Ultimately, the process terminates with the presentation of an integrated theory that moves beyond description to interpretation and explanation of linkages related to the process or phenomenon (Charmaz 2000, Creswell 2007, Straus and Corbin 1990). Combined, these strategies legitimize grounded theory in both positivist and interpretivist traditions (Charmaz 2000).

Though accepted in multiple philosophical traditions, one criticism of the method remains. Original descriptions of grounded theory promote the method (and the researcher) as objective, unbiased, and detached from the data (Charmaz 2000, Straus and Corbin 1990). Charmaz (2000) discusses the impracticality of this assumption, suggesting reflexivity is important in this, and any, qualitative method. To address this critical issue I draw on the phenomenological approach and use a form of bracketing. Originally, bracketing was a complete removal of any presuppositions or judgments

about the phenomenon under study to allow for an approach that is "free from theory" (Husserl 1962, p 100). While some continue in this view, Heidegger (1962) was the first to propose that since humans are in and part of the world, they cannot completely dismiss their experiences when conducting research; for all individuals there is intentionality, that inseparable connection to the world in which we exist. Others suggest that expert knowledge is valuable and meaningful to the interpretation of participants meanings (Lopez and Willis 2004). LeVasseur (2003) suggests that instead of a complete bracketing of presuppositions, which may be impossible, we should simply attempt to suspend the natural uncurious mind to allow the exploration of alternate realities or explanations. Another perspective by van Manen (1990) suggests that

> *If we simply try to forget or ignore what we already 'know,' we may find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections. It is better to make explicit our understanding, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories. We try to come to terms with our assumptions, not in order to forget them again, but rather to hold them deliberately at bay and even to turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing character.*

So instead of completely bracketing thier prior knowledge and theories of the world researchers should hold them at a distance as they move forward. It is impossible to suppress all knowledge of the world; however researchers should acknowledge and work to move beyond it.

Because I endeavor to understand and interpret the meanings and the structure of the experiences consumers have with service in captive contexts rather than to simply describe them, I employ a grounded theory approach. The more abstract goal of my research is to understand the lived experiences of consumers interacting with captive services. The group I am studying does not necessarily share a culture, as one would

study in ethnography; the mambers share experiences. They all have consumed captive services; they have all interacted with captive service boundary spanners; and they have all had service experience in captive services. The focus of my study is their perceptions of these shared experiences, the meaning they draw from these experiences, and interpretation of this meaning in relation to developing a grounded theory of consumers' captive service experience.

Researcher as Instrument

As a researcher, I have a background in researching issues at the cusp of the organization. I have focused much of this research on examining service related issues surrounding front-line employees. I have wanted to shift to examining how the actions of these individuals impact consumers, particularly when the consumer perceives s/he is not in the power-holding position and is aware. I have begun calling this dependent position "service captivity." My interest in this concept stems from personal experience with various captive services. Having been a consumer of such services, I have a distinct advantage in talking to, creating rapport with, and establishing trust with other captive service consumers. At the same time, this perspective can threaten my research if I am not careful to bracket my own experiences as much as possible. However, overall, my experience will allow me to quickly build the relationships needed to explore this sensitive topic. It will help in developing the trust for allow open and honest conversations with consumers as they convey to me their experiences and the meanings they draw from them.

Data Collection

After obtaining informed consent, (see Appendix A), I collected data from current and recent, (within the past six months), social service consumers. This cutoff is arbitrary; I did not extend the time period past six months so as to restrict from the participant pool those individuals whose memories are less recent in order to decrease the possibility of inaccurate memory and weakened emotional meaning. However, I include recent consumers because individuals no longer in the social service system may be more open to sharing their experiences since they are no longer part of that group.

To identify participants, I employ purposeful sampling and the snowball sampling method. Purposeful sampling "selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell 2007, p 125). The snowball sampling method (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981) is particularly useful in identifying specific members of groups and when dealing with sensitive research topics (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). The target population was individuals who interact with social services, the captive service in question. Though not initially the focus, my participants represent an often neglected social service consumer group – the Working Poor. This group is seldom, if ever, the focus of empirical research concerning their social service experiences. Having these individuals as participants, provides a unique perspective of captive service experiences from a working, yet struggling segment of the population. The majority of participants in this study are working; however non-working participants were sought to balance the perspectives derived from the data collection. Also to prevent an overly narrow focus on just one county of social service provision, participants from other counties (two) were

sought out. Additionally, some participants (two) had experiences with other states' service provision and described these experiences in their comments. See Table 2 for general demographic information about participants.

Initial interviews were conducted with personal acquaintances who are receiving or have recently received SNAP or TANF benefits. Each participant was asked to pass information about the research with my contact information to friends, relatives, and other acquaintances. All participants were paid twenty dollars for their time and insights. This amount was chosen to fairly compensate them but not to overly persuade them. The study was presented as an opportunity to provide input about their service experiences. Creswell (2007) suggests interviewing between twenty and thirty individuals about their experiences, but focuses more on working to reach thematic saturation; saturation occurs when no new information is gleaned from continuing interviews. I conducted interviews with fifteen individuals and five couples, thematic saturation occurred after approximately seventeen individuals/couples. One couple was interviewed three times over the course of the data collection effort and served as key informants; both are self-employed part-time and have interacted with the captive service intermittently for multiple years and in multiple locations. They assisted in connecting several additional participants with the data collection effort. One other participant also voluntarily solicited participants on a Facebook "mommy page" to which she is an active contributor. Data collection was completed over a twelve month period in 2012 and 2013 as I collected data from participants, analyzed data, and then returned to the field to collect more data, and so on until no new insights were gleaned from returning to the field.

In-depth interviews were the primary data collection technique. Interviews allow for individuals to tell their stories in their own words and also produce a record of individuals' experiences that can be examined iteratively over time (Anderson and Jack 1991). They also facilitate understanding of consumers' lived experiences and the meaning they ascribe to those experiences (Anderson and Jack 1991, Scheurich 1995). With interviewing, I followed individuals' lead in conversations while at the same time probing for clarification and deeper meaning (Anderson and Jack 1991). Though it is possible for social norms to cause limitations in the efficacy of interviews at drawing information from individuals in seemingly lower power groups (Anderson and Jack 1991), in the intimacy of these interactions I can address potential power dynamics by establishing myself as part of the same group and as sharing similar experiences as participants (Scheurich 1995). Additionally, all interviews were conducted in a public space, in a local non-profit coffee house with which many of the participants were previously familiar. Depth interviews allow for a potential exchange not possible with quantitative data collection methods. By listening, probing, and acknowledging participant's experiences, I gathered data rich in information that will make it possible to better understand consumers' shared experiences in engaging with social services.

I conducted interviews in person. Interviews lasted between 40 and 85 minutes, averaging around 55 minutes. Participants were interviewed once in most cases. However, when information from interviews with subsequent participants stimulated additional questions, I reconnected with prior participants, informally on multiple occasions and twice formally, soliciting their perspectives (Charmaz 2000). In addition to individual interviews I conducted small collective interviews with two to five participants

(Epp and Price 2010) when consumers were willing to share their experiences in a more public setting. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

I followed a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). I started interviews with a variant of the critical incident technique (Roos 2002, Gremler 2004). This approach has been used extensively in service marketing research (Roos 2002). The technique allows the participants to focus on specific incidents in their interactions with a service provider, usually exceptionally positive and negative experiences (Gremler 2004, Roos 2002). It allows for a wide range of unstructured consumer responses and it is inductive, which generates in-depth understanding of consumers' experiences (Gremler 2004). To use this technique, I first asked about a "typical" interaction which allows participants to choose the valance of their experience. Following this, I asked specifically about the opposite valance experience to ensure that discussion occurs of both good and bad consumer experiences. After these questions were addressed, I moved the interviews into topical areas related to service experience concepts in the service literature – procedural, servicescape, and boundary spanners. I addressed consumers emotional perceptions of service interactions before closing interviews with an open ended question soliciting additional information participants felt may be helpful to the study. I interviewed new participants until the additional data yielded no new insights (Creswell 2007).

Data Analysis

I followed a procedure that is in keeping with prior grounded theory researchers (Creswell 2007, Charmaz 2000, Straus and Corbin 1990). I began the data analysis process by extracting "bits" of data from all forms of data collected. I began with open

coding, separating the data bits into identifiable concepts and categories; from this I moved to axial coding, making connections between the concepts and categories; and then to selective coding, relating the core category to other categories (Creswell 2007, Bloomberg and Volpe 2008, Straus and Corbin 1990). See Appendix C for an example of the coding process leading from consumers' verbatim responses to selective coding into primary themes. During the data collection and coding processes, I used memoing to turn the coding process into the story that undergirds the theory (Straus and Corbin 1990).

The entire process was iterative in respect to collecting and analyzing data. The results of early data collection and analysis led further data collection. Rounds one and two data were collected and coded using multiple iterations of open coding. After two iterations of open coding on round one data, round two data were collected and subjected to similar treatment. This process resulted in the crystallization of sixty-two open codes. Axial coding was used to develop a preliminary framework, which was subject to two early member checks. After developing the initial framework, I moved back to data collection. I coded rounds three and four data focusing on codes from previous rounds of data collection while simultaneously anticipating new themes as well as collapsing existing themes and expanding of others (Creswell 2007). I collected data then analyzed it, re-collected and re-analyzed and so on throughout the data collection and analysis process. I moved iteratively from the field to the data and back until the data collection effort and themes were saturated (Creswell 2007). Ultimately, this process led to thirty-one final themes and sub-themes arranged to represent a grounded theory of consumers' captive service experience replete with connections between the various elements of "service" in this context.

Ethical Considerations

The data I collected could be considered sensitive to the consumers with whom I am interacting (Hill 1995). For this reason, I took multiple steps to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of participants. I conducted all interviews in person. I read the informed consent and gave copies of the document to participants. I stored all signed documents in a locked location, separate from interview transcripts and recordings. All transcripts and recordings are kept under lock and key. I gave all participants pseudonyms and no references to names and places are included in the transcripts. I trained transcriptionists according to these and other privacy and confidentiality requirements. These individuals also signed a binding agreement concerning confidentiality and the privacy of participants. Ultimately all recordings will be destroyed after final data analysis, leaving only cleaned transcripts.

Beyond confidentiality and privacy, I am concerned with accurately representing members' experiences. I used member checking to assist in this process at two points in the data analysis process. Once data were collected and preliminary analysis complete, I solicited the assistance of two participants to check the trustworthiness of my analysis from their perspective; this check was completed again after the final analysis (Creswell 2007). I asked these individuals to read portions of transcripts, to examine coding schemes, and to explore the analysis giving me feedback and direction. I used this process to guide additional data collection if needed, but more importantly I used it to ensure I am accurately portraying participants' feelings and experiences and the meanings they ascribe to these.

Inasmuch as the data I gathered are potentially sensitive and participants could experience risk associated with sharing their experiences, I included these processes to ensure confidentiality, privacy, and accuracy. Consumers' stories are important to my research. I wanted participants to feel comfortable and safe sharing their experiences.

Trustworthiness

Creditability and dependability of data collection and analysis are vital to the trustworthiness of any qualitative study. Credibility refers to the "accuracy" of the study; it is the study's ability to accurately portray consumers' meanings and to give them voice (Creswell 2007). Dependability refers to the consistency in responses of multiple coders examining the data (Creswell 2007). Transferability is also mentioned in some cases, but to suggest that findings from qualitative inquiry in one context can transfer to another context goes against the grain of understanding the lived experiences of individuals in the first context as the goal of the study (Bloomberg and Volpe 2008, Creswell 2007). This does not mean that transferability at the theoretical level does not exist, however, and its potential can be enhanced through thick description both of individuals' experience and of the context of the study (Bloomberg and Volpe 2008, Creswell 2007).

I address credibility in my research in multiple ways. I use triangulation, thick description, and member checking (Creswell 2007). Triangulation provides multiple points of verification of findings. To accomplish this, I utilized multiple data collection methods; a second, experienced investigator conducted one interview and assisted analysis through critique and discussion of findings; data were collected over time with later findings reviewed and verified with prior participants; and multiple service providers are referenced in consumers' discussion of phenomena. Thick description

allows participants' voices to be heard; allows readers to access transferability, and best represents participants' stories. Member checking insures the story is told correctly by asking participants to assess my understanding of the story, comparing it to their own understanding and ensuring accurate representation. To ensure dependability, I developed an audit trail which offers transparency to data collection and analysis processes (Bloomberg and Volpe 2008, Bowen 2009). See Appendix D for Audit Trail.

Conclusion

In summary, qualitative inquiry using a variant of the grounded theory approach offered the best set of methods and tools to answer my research questions. This approach enabled me to arrive at members' meanings (Creswell 2007) and to explore a sensitive topic (Hill 1995); as the study emerged through an iterative process (Belk et al. 1988, Creswell 2007, Penaloza 1995). The data collection process permitted individuals to tell their story, allowing me to follow their lead and to simultaneously probe for deeper meanings in the experiences they relate in these stories (Anderson and Jack 1991, Scheurich 1995). I iterated from the field to the data and back until concepts crystalized and became saturated (Creswell 2007), effectively using participants' stories to explain their captive service experiences.

Chapter 4

Findings: A Grounded Theory of Consumers' Captive Service Experience

It's so broken, everybody's broken - Becky

Themes have emerged from the data to provide a holistic, yet nuanced, understanding of consumers' service-specific experience within captive service. These themes have been organized to reflect a grounded theory of consumers' service experience in one captive service - social services, and specifically with food stamps (SNAP) and other means-end services (see Figure 1). The broad themes are Captive Service and Service Captivity, Service Experiences, and Consumers' Service Responses. This model shows a general direction from captivity, through experiences to service responses. It includes feedback loops from service responses to both the experience and felt captivity; this model represents the interactive nature of consumers' feelings, perceptions, and actions with both experiences and feelings of captivity.

This model and these themes provide a holistic view of the service experience accounting for context, and within the holistic picture consumers' expectations, lived experiences, and responses to service interactions. Subthemes that emerge offer a nuanced view of specific service attributes that comprise the overall captive service experience. Each theme and sub-theme is developed in subsequent sections. First, a description of data that provides a basis for understanding social service provision as a

captive service coupled with consumers' feelings of service captivity. Throughout, the pervasiveness and impact of power and dependence in captive service is described.

Captive Service and Service Captivity in Social Services

It is important to establish the studied service as a *captive service* and consumers' feelings of *service captivity* in the context. *Captive services* are services that operate with structures and processes that, to varying degrees, limit consumer choice, control, or power. *Service captivity* refers to a consumer's perception that s/he has no options for obtaining a needed service other than the current provider. If consumers' self-described service experiences are void of references to these concepts the validity of the social service as a type of captive service is called into question. The research questions in this study identified many different points of exploration within the context of captive services, but one question has to be answered first. Do consumers feel service captivity? They do. In conjunction with this feeling, the structural and procedural components of receiving service in the social service also fit with the definition of captive service. This social service is a captive service and consumers experience service captivity.

From a structural/procedural aspect, social services have a myriad of rules and regulations stipulating who can and cannot be involved with the service. Several eligibility guidelines must be met and to do so requires disclosure: disclosure of living arrangements, finances, assets, and working status. Within these rules there is no leeway; applicants either qualify or they do not. In the services primarily mentioned by participants, there is no customization, no choice; it is "take it or do without". So consumers give up rights to privacy and agree to follow the rules set out to receive the service. Sometimes this process works and consumers do what is required; other times

this process "works" and consumers do what they see fit to survive. These issues are addressed as I move through the subsequent discussion.

Felt Service Captivity

What feelings does the captive service elicit in response to this removal of choice and control from consumers; this usurping of power? Consumers repeatedly describe dependency when discussing their interactions with social services. When pushed, consumers will say that they can make-do or somehow get by, but that they try not to think about it, they would have to give something else up like heat or lights, or they would have to get help somewhere else. Becky simply states "These are services that people have to be in . . . we *need* help, we don't want help." Like others, she is stating the obvious, but painful; they are stuck in this service. They feel dependent, or trapped, in the service with little hope of getting off of the service. Interestingly, with few exceptions, consumers describe their time on social services as temporary. In fact some have been on and off of services periodically for years. Most of the participants of this study were working; they are the Working Poor, they work yet still remain in poverty. They see these services as something they will need only for a while, but the while extends sometimes indefinitely because of the value in what the service provides. It provides an answer to hunger. Regardless of their temporal perspective, consumers view these services as vital to their survival.

Consumers' responses to questioning are rife with comments about their lack of choice and relative powerlessness, as well as the controlling nature of the service experience.

> *You know a lot of us when we go into DHS we can't help whatever brought us there. I think sometimes they just assume everybody's there because they can be and not because they need to be.* (Joan)

> *After having a child and having a husband that's a part-time student, no a full-time student and works part-time, there was absolutely no way for us to support ourselves. . . . Really I was backed into a corner, you either work and pay for childcare or you stay at home, if I was to apply I guess for help, but I just wasn't interested, especially being a breastfeeding mom, in like, doing that.* (Ramona)

"These are services that people have to be in...we NEED help, we don't want help" (Becky); "..you have nowhere else to go" (Shauna). This is a common thread in consumers' experience of social service. Feelings of having only one provider from which to receive a needed (or desired) service directly reveal feelings of service captivity in this context, as well as lending credence to the designation of social service as a captive service.

Consumers also express feelings of powerless and loss of control in this context. Some of the disclosure requirements are questioned: "yeah it makes you feel low, because when you are sitting there being told you are lying and there is nothing you can do about it" (Hannah). Maintaining eligibility also means limiting what consumers can do for themselves (a theme developed more latter): "you know they just make it really hard to, if you have any opportunity to bring in extra, they make it hard to do that" (Hannah); "I would lose way too much going to work" (Suzie). In these cases, consumers feel a loss of control and a powerlessness to act in a self-determined fashion; their actions become driven by the processes and structures inherent in the service; they are captive.

The fear that is also associated with social service receipt is reflective of felt dependency on the service.

> *If I didn't get the help, I would probably not be in school. . . .Actually I lied. Until I figured out how to pay for daycare I would be at home watching my daughter, I mean that's what I had to do [before]*. (Tracy)
>
> *It would be a big loss and would probably be a lot of hungry nights for me and my husband. Just make sure the kids eat.* (Kenzie)
>
> *We have to get food. Tthis is going to mean we're going two months late on our mortgage or more.* (Daniel)
>
> *I actually just started receiving food stamps again about two months ago. I had been off of them, I just started receiving them again and we weren't eating well, my husband and I. He [son] was eating good, I mean we had WIC and he had everything else. He is still on formula. Eating healthy is so huge, but it's also expensive and so all we could afford was Hamburger Helper, and that's even if we could afford hamburger. We just weren't eating well at all. I don't think we would have survived without it."* (Kenzie)

The thought of losing the assistance is often coupled with thoughts of losing something else, at a minimum the freedom to do as one chooses, and at the maximum, the ability to meet basic subsistence needs for themselves or their family. These thoughts of loss create for consumers a heightened sense of dependency. "It's not an easy thing, it's not a fun thing, it's not anything my husband and I would choose to do" (Becky); "You become dependent on it, but if we didn't have it, I don't want to think about it" (Sammie). Captive consumers do not perceive viable alternatives to getting the resources they receive from the service; consumers' perceptions of this service are that they cannot do without it.

Consumers in this context are dependent; they have no choice. Consumers without choice often forgive poor service (Bendapudi and Berry 1997, Holmlund and Kock 1996, Kasper 1988, Ping 1993, Rienzner and Testa 2003). Consumers in this research not only forgave poor service, they made excuses for poor service actions by workers. While this phenomenon is described in coming sections, here I address where

consumers suggest power does reside in this service. Their perception of where service resides offers understanding as to why consumers forgive poor service, why they feel they have to forgive. It also illuminates the potential cause of other service-related outcomes of power imbalance in this captive service.

Powerful Providers

Power is described in many forms, but at the root of all power is an imbalance in resources (Bourdieu 1985, Emerson 1962, Foucault 1978). Regardless of the resource discussed, it is the imbalance of the resource that creates differences in power and, through the imbalance, dependency (Emerson 1972a, Emerson 1972b, Scheer et al. 2003, Scheer et al. 2010). Since power resides with those who control resources, power resides in the social roles of those in control (Emerson 1972a) . Because of consumers' real and perceived dependency, power in this service interaction shifts to the service provider. As a result, workers in social service are seen as powerful controllers of resources. Workers are described as barriers that must be overcome to obtain resources. Consumers "must overcome caseworkers to get what [they] deserve" (Trey). Workers are also perceived as judges determining the fate of those they serve; Becky describes it as "if you are deemed worthy" Workers are also described as persons to be feared, and the ability to voice one's concerns or dissatisfaction is severely constrained. Suzie relates that "if you have a problem, it will bite you in the end" describing her hesitancy to ever report workers who were not doing their job. After years of recieving services of various types, she understood the laws that were there to protect her, yet she remained in fear of retaliation if she somehow invoked these laws to the potential harm of her worker. Other consumers

echoed this sentiment, reporting that they would wait a long time before approaching a supervisor or attempting to get help so they wouldn't make waves.

> *She was explaining to me, . . . "I'm the caseworker and I have every right to deny or approve your case depending on what I feel and what I think."* (Tracy)

> *They always make you wait so long . . . like you know they are playing like they are God or something . . . they say don't talk to me until I say something to you.* (Tommy)

> *Sometimes you worry about if you voice what you want to choose, what's going to happen. If you basically voice, we need this help for this reason whether its food stamps or whatever. Is that caseworker actually going to do her best in the timely manner of policy and procedures to get it done or is it [going to] be prolonged?* (Suzie)

> *Because you're not sitting there stressed out because you've been sitting there for an hour and 45 minutes, which was normal up there, with your kids asking to leave the entire time. Then you're stressed out because you know where you are and you have to be careful how you react to them. That doesn't help. The back half was child protective services. So I mean, you didn't have . . . there's no buffer anywhere. They'll take away your child in that office if you don't fill out your Ps and Qs. And then you have the situation that you're stuck.* (Mary)

Participants discuss waiting at the "little window" and having been told to "step away from the window" (Trey), as if they were threatening and the worker needed to exert her/his authority. One consumer reported that "somebody wrote something negative" (Suzie) in her case file and this comment, that they will not show or disclose to her, has caused her service problems in the past, so she lives with a constant fear to not "upset" anyone else. The power imbalance in interacting with this service is very real to consumers involved; it appears to impact their perceptions of the service and heightens their sense of dependency.

Provider power is reinforced in this service through surveillance. Surveillance is one of the most notorious forms of power exertion in that it works by limiting the resource freedom (Foucault 1980, Gilliom 2001). In the case of social service, it is exercised through the required disclosure of financials, assets, living arrangements, and working conditions. Disclosure of these "situational" variables is to be constantly updated, though doing so is difficult in itself. These eligibility requirements ensure that only the needy receive services, and many participants agree that they are needed, but the process is seen as prying and results in stress and worry. Consumers worry that they will say the wrong thing or that small changes will result in lost services. This worry puts additional emotional strain on consumers and reinforces felt dependency.

Service Experience

Though consumers' experience with captive service may be considered atypical, these services impact many consumers. Also, since there can be degrees of proposed captive service it may be more pervasive than first imagined. The service examined in this study is conceptually an extreme case of captive service, yet what came through as consumers' service experience is un-surprisingly similar to what is expected in typical services. Much like what is prescribed in the Service-Dominant Logic of marketing and other service experience literature (i.e., Vargo and Lusch 2004, Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001), consumers expect competent and efficient services that are tailored to their specific needs. As these expectations versus experiences are discussed, components of the service experience pertinent to consumers are similar to existing frameworks. (Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001, Rust and Oliver 1994). Consumers suggested that they were not looking for anything more than what is considered normal in a service interaction but

they expressed that these expectations were either unmet or met negatively. Power imbalance in favor of the provider allows disruption in service expectations untenable in most typical services.

The subthemes that emerge from the data describing consumers' captive service experience are grouped in a way that reflects the Brady and Cronin (2001) conceptualization of service quality. Service quality derives from a concretized description of consumers' service experiences including specific, actionable, components of service interactions managers can manipulate to benefit both the organization and consumer (Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001). "The overall perception of service quality is based on the customer's evaluation of three dimensions of the service encounter" (Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001, p 36). Because consumers focus on and evaluate specific pieces of service interactions to formulate perceptions of service experiences, I draw on this literature to interpret findings in this data.

Inasmuch as this perspective serves to propel forward the delivery of positive service experiences in "typical" services, it also serves as an organizing framework to understand what consumers experience in captive service interactions. Drawing on Brady and Cronin's (2001) perspective of service quality, I develop a framework of consumers' experiences with service providers in social services.

As described in Brady and Cronin's (2001) original framework, consumers' service interactions are integral to consumer perceptions of service experiences. While these, and other, researchers have focused on boundary spanners within interactions, participants in this study differentiated between interactions with boundary spanners and processes inherent to interactions with the system in general. This distinction provides a

more nuanced understanding of how service interactions are perceived by consumers as well as how these interactions impact consumers. Outcomes are still important in captive service as is the servicescape in which the service experience occurs. Each of these sub-themes - Boundary Spanner Interactions, Interaction Processes, Outcomes, and ServiceScape – are developed in this section.

Boundary Spanner Interactions

"The interaction depends almost completely on the worker that you get" (Becky); "it makes a big difference in how [the] meeting goes, which kinda person you get" (Mary). This sentiment runs strong through the various interviews as participants discuss the service they receive in their captive service. It reflects what Shostack (1977) meant when stating that "services are often inextricably entwined with their human representatives. In many fields, a person is perceived to be the service" (p 79). Service workers are perhaps important to perceptions of service experiences in captive services to an exaggerated extent since consumers attribute their success or failure in obtaining the service directly to the worker.

> *I've had that with a girl here, who I deal with on the phone. When I'm doing my renewal, she checks through and makes sure everything is there, it's current and that the children's medical doesn't need renewed and everything else. And she's been really, really quite nice. She's not overly personable or anything but she's just knowledgeable and pleasant and it just makes it a whole lot . . . better of an experience than if you've got somebody's who's condescending and looking at you like "you need to go get a job. You shouldn't be here. You need to go get a job."* (Mary)

> *I mean, if they like you, I think they can speed things up if they can stay like five minutes after work to finish the thing rather than waiting to come back the next morning. I mean, we've had people go out of their way to get it finished quick. And then I've had people make us wait a week and a half. I think it's up to the person. Sometimes like there's a supervisor like the newer ones have to check everything with the supervisor. But even then like they'll make sure they keep*

> *checking with the supervisor for us. And actually answer the phone instead of leaving a message constantly.* (Becky)

These two excerpts illustrate the idea that the worker is so vitally important as do some of the subthemes that emerge in this discussion. Subthemes suggest the particular "things" that captive consumers notice during the interactions they have with a provider: perceptions of employees' actions, competence, and attitudes. These employee attributes reflect Brady and Cronin's conceptualization of the importance of boundary spanners, though in a reversed form; examples here stress the negatives associated with these employee attributes.

> *The office was full of really angry people that work there. They seem angry, overworked, irritated.* (Ramona)

> *There was one girl at the desk in [******] county when we started. She was absolutely horrid. I would go stand in line behind somebody else rather than talk to her. You name it. She was rude. She was condescending. She didn't want to help anybody. One of those people that just made you feel like scum for being there.* (Mary)

However, positive attributes were often associated with the employee as well.

> *The actual caseworkers were always very understanding . . . uhm. . . . The girls would come in with me, it wasn't a big deal . . . they take the paperwork right away.* (Hannah)

> *The interaction depends on the worker you get . . . we've had workers that treat us inferior to them. We've had workers that are great and even said 'we've been on the system, we understand'. So I think our interactions depend on* [the worker]. (Becky)

The worker seems to take on an almost mythical role in the consumers' interacting with the service. As described previously, workers in captive services become powerful

gatekeepers. They have the power to permit or deny service delivery. Consumers are dependent and this dependency exacerbates workers' potential influence within the service.

Actions

Employee actions are very important to making service interactions more humane. Participants suggest that caseworkers don't "make a lot of eye contact … or call me or my families by our names" (Ramona). "So we had workers who treat us as inferior to them, . . . and I've had people make us wait a week and a half, I think it's up to the person sometime." (Becky).

> *I don't feel like they greet me well at all. And I don't know if it's because we're from a small town and I know everybody in that town and just to be able to. And that's another thing that bothers me. I mean even if you know me, I worry that they're going to go talking for sure. Because from the way they act in there. I mean I don't feel like they greet me well at all. It's like "okay you're here so go over there and sit down." Like . . . "We'll get to you when we can."* (Kenzie)

Consumers have been sent to their car to nurse a baby (Joan). Others reprimanded: "this needs to be straightened out or else" (Hannah). In one case the choice to have a child was called into question,

> *Did she ask us about sterilization or did she ask, tell us we shouldn't have gotten pregnant?* (Becky) *Both.* (Trey) *She wanted to offer us ways so we wouldn't have anymore* [children], *and suggest, offer her opinion that we shouldn't have gotten pregnant again.* (Becky) *She actually told us that we should have picked up and moved in with my parents instead of getting on services* (Trey) *And we didn't ask for her parental advice.* (Becky)

Almost without exception consumers have complained about having to leave messages, being unable to reach a worker when they need to, and waiting up to several days for a

return phone call. Employee actions like these make a big difference in feeling "dehumanized" when in a captive circumstance and feeling service captivity, as these consumers have expressed feeling.

On the other hand employee actions also can validate consumers and make them feel positive about the interactions. One worker in the midst of a "bad situation" was "cracking jokes; he was doing everything he could to make me smile, and it's probably the best experience in all the services that I've had" (Joan). It is the posture and actions that the employee takes that impact consumers.

> *She went out of her way to check with me [speaking slowly] instead of me having to check with her on income changes, on to make sure I knew the renewal was, to make sure I had gotten the piece of paper in the mail to do the renewal, things like that and they just don't have to do that . . . but they can.* (Joan)

> *I think they can speed things up if they can stay like five minutes after work to finish the thing rather than waiting to come back the next morning. I mean, we've had people go out of their way to get it finished quick. And then I've had people make us wait a week and a half. I think it's up to the person. (*Becky)

Much like in typical services, service workers who will "bend over backwards" rather than your having "to pull teeth" (Joan) are lauded. Participants readily refer to the one or two worker examples to demonstrate how the actions can be positive, but often tie these examples to the caveat that these positives are the exception and not the norm. Regardless of the truth of this perception it is pervasive. Employee actions are scrutinized for intent and meaning by consumers. Negatives are perceived as purposefully hurtful, positives as exceptions.

Competence

Some of what is conceived as employee actions is intimately tied to perceptions of employee competence. In fact, the competence of employees was repeatedly questioned by participants. "They can't figure out how to do it and want me to do something about it" (Mary). "She got behind and there was nobody to do it, which is not my fault" (Shauna). "They make a mistake, it's our fault and we have to do something to solve it" (Tommy). Often these comments are discussed in conjunction with disruptions in service delivery, particularly surrounding the abundance of "lost paperwork". The blame is place squarely on the service worker. Sometimes the difficulty with a worker's competence is related to a request that appears too extreme, and is,

> *I don't remember the specifics. I just remember arguing with this lady about something she was trying to get me to bring in about something that was just not possible for me to do. When she finally got the supervisor on the phone, he agreed with me and said that I didn't need that, it was not required. He got off the phone with me and now of course the counselor doesn't want to talk to you anymore because they just got yelled at.* (Trey)

Competence can relate to the specific skills of processing paperwork, "they are so confused on what's going on" (Jessica) but also to the soft skills thought needed for jobs where public interaction is so vital. Jessica suggests training may help.

> *I think that if they are trained properly, I think they need to get individuals in there that really enjoy their job. Because if you don't enjoy your job, you're not going to have a good attitude. If they get people in there with good attitudes that are trained well so then maybe they could get their work completed in a timely manner and keep up on appointments. I feel it's very important to have someone skilled [people skills] in a position that they are filling.* (Jessica)

Being a veteran of multiple services for several years, Joan expresses a great deal of frustration when she encounters workers who appear to understand the services less than she does:

> *Some of the people don't seem to know what they're doing. Particularly for like somebody like me who has been on services and not only the food stamps but multiple services, for years on end. There's things I know because I've been on it for so long. So when you go in and you talk to somebody you get a worker. I don't know if they're new, or whether they just don't care, who simply doesn't know what they're doing very well. And I've had that happen. It's really frustrating because if you're sitting on this side and you get somebody over there who knows less than you do, you've got a problem.* (Joan)

Another consumer in a similar situation sees diminished competence as a symptom of a different problem. "They can't figure out how to do it and want me to do something about it, 'cuz they're too lazy to do their job" (Mary).

Regardless of the cause, perceptions of diminished worker competence, it creates frustration for consumers. Most profess to not take action in response to failures in the service they blame on employee competence because they fear retaliation; those that do take action report retaliation. Consumers are stuck with providers they view as incompetent, with no perceived recourse.

Attitudes

The final and most complex subtheme, employee attitudes, came up repeatedly in conversations about service interactions. Consumers describe positive interactions:

> *A positive interaction is . . . warm, friendly, and happy. . . . This is the exception rather than the rule though.* (Ramona).

> *Open-hearted, easy-going and very good listening . . . [a person who is] interested in what you have to say instead of thinking you're making an excuse or that you're lying about your situation.* (Christie)

> *Our caseworker was great. . . . He was nice, he was courteous, he had a great personality. He didn't talk down to us.* (Sammie)

On the other hand, Mary suggests that caseworkers are "not understanding, they were not helpful; they would . . . [they] had a really nasty attitude." Others add:

> *I don't want somebody who is judging me or doesn't like their job and you find that a lot. There are caseworkers who don't want to be there; they are just there to make money.* (Kenzie)
>
> [They] *don't seem to care that your family is without right then.* (Michelle)
>
> *They are kind of rude. . . . That's their job to help, help you with what you need help with. If you don't want to, if you don't want to deal with people that need help, don't be a social worker.* (Tracy)

Regardless of the valance of the comments, employee attitudes are key to the interactions between employees and consumers. Three powerful issues emerge within this subtheme – judgment, burden, and empathy.

Kenzie's comment above captures the thrust of judgment. "Rude and nose high up in the air" is how Stacy describes this feeling. It is the feeling that employees think the consumer is using the service because they can and not because they need the service; that workers do not consider the circumstances of the individual. "They look at us like 'just try harder', and it's hard you know, the good jobs you can't get" (Tommy). This feeling also manifests itself with young mothers surrounding the judgment associated with having a child at a young age,

> *I feel really judged, . . . especially having a child and being so young. I feel like they look at me like I should be doing more. And that's not to say that they're not nice; they try to be, but just . . . Mostly the way they look at me and they're not*

> *very um . . . I'm a very open person, I like to talk and to be nice and they're not.* (Kenzie)

Workers are also perceived as being on the look-out for abusers of social services, which creates an air of suspicion surrounding the application for help. They "actually told us they watch for people that have all of their paperwork in order because it shows they know how to work the system. . . . They were looking for any little error" (Hannah). Consumers are accused of lying "No this doesn't add up, We do not believe you are reporting your income" (Daniel); "They didn't believe us. They approved us to get us out of the office" (Becky). Others are made to feel inferior "I felt they assumed I was uneducated" (Ramona). Consumers do not know "whether you were going to get somebody who was going to look down their nose at you like you were the scum of the earth because you are on assistance" (Mary).

"Your first interview sets the tone; you are judged at this point. If you pass judgment and are considered of value, you get good service and if you're not, then you get crap" (Becky). Becky is the same person who was told she should have been sterilized. Now she relates:

> *I was nervous, because I was like, am I forgetting something or is there something I have to hide because I wouldn't get it. You know I hate being like that but how are they going to treat you. I get pretty nervous and frustrated. . . . I don't see how they can treat you like you're below. Because you can't help your, like not everyone can't help their circumstance. You know, she can't help the divorce, you know we can't help the going to school. Um . . . sometimes like it seems to people like we can change things but our priorities are in the places where we need them. You know what I mean. So if they treated it that way . . . and I know there are people who abuse the system. But why penalize those who aren't. Why not work with them on a case by case basis, which is what they should be doing?* (Becky)

The judgment reinforces shame, which suggests there is something to hide, which reinforces feelings of judgment. As participants relate this situation, the painful cycle becomes apparent.

Beyond feeling judged, consumers feel as if they are a burden – to the worker, not the system; it is very personal. This feeling is associated with the attitudes as well as some of the actions of employees. Being told to step away from the window or having to interrupt workers to be acknowledged are symptoms of the negative attitudes associated with being a burden on those on whom they depend. "Feeling like I was inconveniencing them, instead of like they were there to serve me" (Ramona). Feeling "like it is a hassle . . . like SHE is giving me the money" (Shauna). "We are a burden, just by being in the office . . . we were wasting her time, [she was] rolling her eyes" (Becky).

The flipside to judgment and burden is empathy. Just the expression of empathy goes far in the minds of consumers captive in their situation. The tone of the interaction all depends on "whether you were going to get somebody who understands" (Mary). The weight of being a burden, the oppression of judgment, and the perceived hopelessness of the situation is softened by a listening ear and an understanding heart. Consumers in this context need empathy, they ask for it, and when they get it, they do not forget.

Summary

Beyond what Brady and Cronin (2001) suggest as integral to perceptions of the service experience, perhaps even more like when Shostack (1977) suggested that employees are the service, employees have an almost mythical importance in captive service. As described in prior literature, the actions, competence, and especially the attitudes of employees as they provide service are vitally important to consumer

perceptions of the service experience (Brady and Cronin 2001). Beyond that, when confronted with feelings of service captivity, employee power becomes evident to consumers. Their evaluations of the service offering become colored by this perceived reality.

Interaction Processes

The processes and structures that are used in the delivery of service are another contributor to perceptions of interactions in the service experience. The importance of interaction processes extends Brady and Cronin's (2001) description of interactions to include processes in the interaction which consumers perceive as influencing their service experiences. Consumers focus on the "things" that occur in service interactions that are part of the processes required to gain and/or maintain the service. The process of eligibility determination and maintenance for services is described generally as "tedious" and as if one is "doing something wrong" (Ramona); the subthemes – herded and privacy – related to processes and structures tell the story more clearly.

Herded

"They herd you all the same" (Becky). "I always wanted to Moo" (Suzie). The process to obtain the service in this study starts with individuals arriving and needing to "speak through a little window, that feels like, uhm, . . . just impersonal"; the process continues with consumers feeling "like I was being shuffled through the process" (Ramona). The way consumers are treated is described as being shuffled into and through the process like paperwork would be handled; it is referred to as a herding process, as if consumers were livestock being moved through some farming process. In either case the process becomes one of moving things through, not one of helping people receive a

service. The process "dehumanizes" consumers. This lack of caring for consumers as people is evidenced in other themes. Since consumers are dependent on the service with few or no other options, workers appear to no longer view them as people to serve but as something to move through the process.

Privacy

> *It was also tedious, uhm . . . I don't know, just like having to give, like, copies of our bank statements and things that have, like, details itemized list of how we spent our money, . . . which I kind of feel conflicted about because on the one hand I can see why that would be necessary to insure that someone was in need of food stamps, but then on a personal level it felt very intrusive.* (Ramona)

Disclosure is necessary but it creates an emotional burden on consumers at the same time. Consumers understand the why of disclosure, but they do not understand the process and why such intimate information required. Consumers mention "spend-downs" that have been required to show that there is no money left, from a tax return for example. Disclosure creates uncomfortable emotions, consumers "felt debased, like under thumb, penalized, [they] give you are hard time about spending" (Becky). The process of providing information to verify need feels as if it goes beyond simple disclosure to prying into personal business. Another consumer spoke of being taken aback when the worker mentioned 'oh you like Indian food' (Shauna), as she perused recent bank statements. "They want to know where every dollar comes from, why there is any difference month to month, even birthday money; every penny in and out must be accounted for. They have to have a lot of private information to process assistance" (Shauna).

In this process, consumers feel judged. They feel that nothing is un-exposed to the worker, to the service. This over-exposure creates self-consciousness in consumers, "the

feeling I got when I went to go apply for food stamps, which was I was doing something wrong and that was amplified by the whole process" (Ramona). Consumers understand disclosure; they do not understand what they feel is an invasion of privacy. For them, disclosure goes beyond showing they are poor to the point of judging what they do with the limited resources they have. In this process, workers again exert their power by becoming judge and jury over the fulfillment of consumers' needs.

Outputs

Service output is another component of consumers' perceptions of the service experience (Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001). Outcomes are also reflected in consumer descriptions of captive service experiences, though underlying structures differ. Brady and Cronin discuss waiting, tangibles, and valance as important outcome indicators. For consumers in captive service however, more than just waiting, service inconsistencies become important; not just tangible outputs but any resources provided (or not provided) are pertinent; and, consumers mention resource loss as a potential output of the service experience.

Inconsistencies and Waiting

Service inconsistencies and waiting are difficulties faced by multiple consumers.

> *You would know everything that you needed to bring in up front. And when you got there, you know, the individual knew their job, was able to take all the information you brought in. And with minor exceptions, would not have to brow beat you about the information you did bring in. Knowing when you are going to get your services. I mean a lot of times you go and you go through the whole interview process and they tell you they'll let you know. Instead of you know this is what needs to happen and we'll know by this date and let you know if you are going to get your services or not. I don't think that happens often enough really.* (Trey)

In some cases changes in the requirements to maintain eligibility for the service surface, creating difficulties in ensuring continuing services. These changes concern paperwork requirements that are different from prior application periods. Some consumers attribute these changes to caseworkers being difficult; others think it is the service itself that has created the changes. In either case changes in requirements create difficulty and delays.

Another paperwork issue also arises.

> *I turned in a whole packet of renewal papers one time, you know I hand delivered it over the counter, I was told they never received it and was called a liar over the phone. . . . They actually said "You are mistaken. You didn't turn it in."* (Hannah)

Lost paperwork is a problem encountered by multiple consumers and it helps to create inconsistencies in service delivery. Multiple cases of improper cancellations were connected to lost paperwork. Occasionally the lost paperwork is found on a desk later or has simply been covered by more recently arrived application packets. In any case potential cancellations create stress and worry for consumers: "One minute you are cancelled and the next you are not" (Shauna). Consumers struggle financially and then loose a portion of their resources, even temporarily, due to inconsistencies beyond their control.

For others, service workers change during the service process, creating opportunities for delays in service. Long-term service consumers described the difficulty in having to interact with and bring up-to-date the multiple service workers they encounter. This inconsistency creates a context where there is no relationship development, no continuing understanding of consumers' situations. For workers, lacking

a relationship with consumers may disconnect the humanness of person needing help from the paper on which the application is written. For consumers, it means learning new people and trying to manage interactions in attempts to ensure service continuity.

Within the process and in conjunction with inconsistencies, consumers experience waiting at several points. On some days workers do not take calls; in some cases workers are the "worker of the week" and do not take calls for the entire week. Most consumers speak of not receiving the courtesy of promptly returned phone calls; only one consumer spoke of receiving a returned call within a day. Often, service cancellations are connected with multiple calls to the office, left messages, and eventual trips to the office to get answers. This is just one component of waiting.

> *[It would be great] not having to wait an hour to have our appointment with these people talking about how they hate their boyfriends with all these diaper dirty babies. I'm sorry I mean just put something on them. I mean seriously, all this stress in the waiting room for an hour or two when you had an appointment. I mean if I just walk in there I expect to be waiting a while. But if I had an appointment, I don't know, just schedule better; put more time in between them or let someone else take me. Or you know, page me or something outside. . . . Let me wait in my car. Just something. You know, people schedule child care for that time, people just. . . . It's like they disregard that you're a human and have your own life.* (Becky)

> *When I applied for food stamps, we went in, they gave me an application, I filled it in, I handed it to the receptionist, and I had to wait about a week before I got an appointment date. And the appointment date was two weeks after that. On the appointment date, it didn't require bringing information at all. Although I do anyways, just in case. She sat down into the composition and tell me that yes I would be eligible and it would take up to 30 days to certify my case. That they are overworked and she started my case soon as I can. Was very nice and cordial. And after I'd left, I came up with questions and she already told me if you have any questions, call me. They don't return phone calls apparently anymore. It's very hard for them. I called a Monday and by that Friday, I had to call a supervisor. Legally they have 48 hours to get back to you. And it wasn't done. And it was just a simple question, it wasn't hounding her as to "are you done with my case yet." Umm, I believe it took until that Monday. The supervisor didn't call me back but the caseworker did. I finally get to get my questions answered and*

> *she wasn't as friendly that time. She was very put out. It took her the whole 30 days after that to get the case done.* (Suzie)

Beyond waiting for phone calls, there is waiting for approval, waiting for renewal, waiting for appointments. The entire service is built on waiting, stressful waiting. Consumers want appointments kept, they want the services delivered on time, common courtesies in most services. Initial set-up of services can take up to two months. Although the official time-line is thirty days, this is after all of the paperwork is turned in. Renewals, if connected to a disruption in service, can take just as long. Though they may blame workers and make excuses for them simultaneously, as Suzie does in her comment, consumers feel degraded by the constant waiting, as evidenced by Becky's closing remark: "they disregard that you're a human." Inconsistencies and waiting can also be linked to changes in consumers' personal circumstances. The service under study required continual proof of eligibility and constant updating of such information; it could be assumed that this process would be relatively simple and straightforward. Unfortunately this assumption is not born out in the data. One couple experienced great difficulty in reporting changes in their circumstances and encountered considerable resistance from service providers as they tried to "follow the rules." They were told that they were creating a problem for the caseworker and that it would have to stop. The exchanges became more and more difficult, to the point that the wife was called a liar. Not only was she called a liar, the worker told the wife that "[the changes] had to stop or else." (Hannah) Though an empty threat, the worker attempted to exert her power over Hannah to control her future actions when interacting with the service. The family ultimately chose to leave the service though they continue to need the service rather than continue to put up with what they saw as abuse. Daniel summarized his view of the

situation: “It would have been easier if I had a crappy job with very little hope for advancement but had a steady income.” As they were trying to improve their personal circumstances and were, they reported changes to the service worker; this process resulted in push-back from the worker who were unable, or unwilling, to accommodate repeated changes.

Resources Provided

Resources provided represent the “tangible” aspect of this service and their importance varies considerably. Consumers’ opinions of resource amounts varied. In prior literature on social services, the amounts dispersed to consumers is often a point of contention (Hill and Macan 1996a). However in this data, consumers’ opinions ranged from “it was very generous” (Hannah) to suggestions from others that the amount was not enough to feed the family and they had to be creative and careful in their purchases with the resources provided. Becky and Trey reported receiving ten dollars a day to feed their family of seven; Sacha and John, five dollars per person per day. The amounts varied as did the income and size of the families in question. What did not vary is the thought that more money was better, coupled with consumers’ perception that whatever was given was all that was available for food. When encountering the service, consumers focus on the money received from the service as the only money they should have to spend on food; everything else is considered their own money that should be used for other things, primarily bills. When asked what they would without the additional funds, consumers often the commented about going without electricity or hot water. Additionally when discussing what they receive from the service, consumers provided almost no

commentary on operant resources that might help individuals to manage their financial resources.

The result is "gaps" in the services provided.

> *I mean it helps out a lot. Because you get food, but to me, they push, push, push healthy eating and then they don't give you enough to buy anything but unhealthy foods, you know.* (Kenzie) *Uh, yeah, and like with us, I get formula on my food stamps if I need it. And you know formula is expensive. It's almost $20 a can. It's expensive.* (Stacy) *And you definitely don't get enough WIC.* (Kenzie)

> *My son has to have diapers at night, one of my sons. So part of the program through them is getting them once a month. They have messed up and not ordered it a time or two, a few times. Did they do anything to fix it? No. I was stuck for one month. Things like that. . . . They've only supplied you with so much and that's the other part. The so much will help, but it's not completely what we need.* (Suzie)

Most consumers suggest that "it's not enough, but it's something" (Tracy). Consumers do not always need more of a particular resource, but sometimes they do. Consumers want providers to understand what they actually need. As designed, there is little to no service customization, there is virtually no operant resource delivery, and there are "gaps" in the services provided.

In discussion of service experiences, what is missing in the delivery of these captive services becomes increasingly clear – operant resources. Operant resources are those resources brought to bear on more tangible resource forms; they are the knowledge and skills needed to convert operand resources – money, physical goods, etc. – into something of value to the consumer (Vargo and Lusch 2004). In these captive services consumers seldom discuss resources dother than food/financial vouchers, subsidized rent, or direct financial payments earmarked for specific use. These services operate to allow consumers to more equitably engage in the marketplace, to allow them to compensate for

some marketplace disadvantage. Missing, however, is discussion of educational materials, etc. that might enable consumers to more efficiently employ whatever is received from the service. Operant resources are identified as missing inasmuch as the only time resources of this type are discussed is in the case of the service WIC, and specifically in one person's unique situation.

> *I think WIC is an awesome program. I mean they are going to provide you with a breast pump. I mean the breast pump they provide you with is a $200 breast pump. They give you milk for the baby and formula if that's the route you decide to go. I mean, milk, cheese, fruits and vegetables. I mean it helps moms eat healthy during the pregnancy. Yeah, I mean I had a breastfeeding nutrition class and I thought it was really informational. And I got to, we watched a video and he went with me, because I've never breastfed before. . . . I wasn't breastfed. I had absolutely no idea what it was going to take. I just knew it was what I wanted to do. So that breastfeeding nutrition class helped answer all my questions and they gave me like all kinds of pamphlets and a book… for me to read to my daughter about breastfeeding. Yeah, it's a little book that has all the different animals that breastfeed in it, which are all the animals. But it was just a really neat book.* (Sammie)

This case is the only one where operant resources are discussed. The only resources in the conversation that are described rather than mentioned are the breast pump, the cost of which would have been out of reach, and the pamphlets and book, which answer her questions, give her knowledge, and provide the skill to do what she wants to do. These resources are more than "eat this and be healthy"; they give her the tools to eat and be healthy; they empower her.

Resource Loss

"You know they just make it hard to, if you have any opportunity to bring in extra, they make it hard to do that" (Hannah). Every increase in pay appears to be accompanied by an immediate decrease in received services. One consumer commented

she lost all of her food stamps because of being ten dollars over the established guideline. Another stated that "it's not set up to help anyone . . . you know, teach a man to fish, it doesn't do that" (Sacha). As individuals approach the income edge they become reticent to jump; they instead make hard decisions to not jump.

> *It's easier for him to take a cut in pay than it is to pay him to get to work and pay for daycare.* (Christie)

Several participants reported that their spouses, often husbands, stayed home from work because the increased expenses associated with working coupled with the loss of benefits just didn't make sense. Some make the leap to self-sufficiency but have suggestions to make it easier:

> *And the money they cut from us a month, was more than double the income that she brought in.* (Trey)
> *The gas, the childcare, that's not for us, but a lot of people have that expense, the wardrobe expense. Right, it's just like wardrobe supplies. It's not like you start a job from scratch with nothing. Before what you're perfect world would be is if they had a tiered stepping off program. You know, we're going to keep giving you this $900 for three months and then we are going to cut you to $550 and then we'll go to $300 and if you get to the point that you don't need it, let us know. I mean treat people like they're going to be honest, I mean a lot of people aren't. And then we're going to drop you. It like, I think about it when I'm working my butt off; it's like we might gain a little bit of income but if I don't work, we'll get double. You know what I mean, when I was working. It was, it was just . . .* (Becky)
> *It doesn't seem like the system actually works to get people off the program. They work harder to keep people on. The less you do, the more you get.* (Trey)
> *Exactly because in the long run, it costs them millions and billions more than it would have to just give a little extra for a few months.* (Becky)
> *I just mean, not even giving extra, but not cutting. You know what I mean, just because someone is getting a little bit more money, you don't need to cut back that much. You need to help them progress so that they don't need the service anymore.* (Trey)
> *But that would require individualized attention and a plan. It's all a herd mentality.* (Becky)

Consumers in this project want to work, but they need the safety-net, at least for a while. Resource loss appears to deter them from trying, one of many unintended consequences of the processes inherent to the service system.

Summary

Processes are the "how" of the service. In the case of captive service, particularly one based on need such as the service in this research, it appears that the procedural and structural aspects of service delivery can become oppressive in some cases and create unintended consequences in others. Procedural aspects of the interaction are not proactively managed to the benefit of consumers. Consumer dependency circumvents the organizational need to treat consumers as customers that is assumed in much of the marketing literature. This lack of need to manage the process, promotes a service design for processing things rather than serving people.

Servicescape

For decades it has been understood that atmospherics is important to the service experience of consumers (Bitner 1992, Kotler 1973). Brady and Cronin (2001) include the service space as a third component of consumers' service experiences. It is taken for granted that service providers will manage the servicescape to the pleasure and benefit of service consumers. Respondent commentary and observational data in this study suggest such may not be the case in captive service. Several subthemes emerge – Institutional, Others, and Impatient Waiting.

Institutional

The building is itself reminiscent of many of the institutional buildings that house government offices. Though the service in this study is a government service, little of the

attempt to manage the atmosphere that can be seen in other state offices is visible. The paint is bland; the lighting, fluorescent; and the decorations, sterile. Hannah described the building as similar to what she experienced as a military kid moving around the country. However, it is also dirty "the last thing I would do when I walked in there was put my son on the floor" (Kenzie).

There has been an attempt to maintain the building through paint. However, the attempt was either haphazard or unfinished: on the exterior the awnings are dented and the parking lot is full of holes and in the interior everything is grey. What decorations exist are a mix of motivational posters and "get help" posters. It makes for an interesting mix of messages: "you can, or should do it on your own" and "we can help." The chairs are old and worn, the fake plants are dirty, and there are almost no magazines in the racks. Overall the institutional aspects of the space are almost overridden by the lack of care the facility appears to receive.

The institutional perception continues to the offices. They are small and cramped with few or no decorations.

> *'Cause it's like one little computer and one little chair and I just sit there and I don't know. It's just uncomfortable. I'm just uncomfortable, you know. Especially if I'm going to talk to somebody about something important. I like to feel comfortable and I don't like to feel like I'm not human. And it's just kind of like these little rooms that you go in and they're cold and they're very small.* (Tracy)

There is nothing in the space that says to the individual "you are welcome," "you are safe," "you are important here." The lack of this type of message hinders communication, particularly concerning the needs that bring individuals to this service. Little effort is made to make this an inviting and pleasurable space. The few decorations in the office

appear forced; overall it is very sterile. Little is going on to break the monotony. The importance of the servicescape appears lost on these providers.

Beyond the institutional aspects of the building it is also noticeably missing a key element of spaces designed to accommodate families. There is nothing in the space for children to do. The television is off and there is no play space designated for kids. Mary spoke of another location where she had received help: "The interview rooms all had toys. And that, since that in this situation most of [us] are going to have children, that usually makes a difference in how well that interview can go with a child being entertained instead of being crabby because they have nothing to do." Jessica, Stacy, and Kenzie, all with small children, stressed the importance of maintaining the attention of their children during the interactions they have with the service. In only a couple of cases were specific workers remembered as having something for the kids to do in their offices. Interestingly, these are the same workers that expressed or took some sort of positive attitude or action, usually customer centric in nature, toward the consumers. Overall, however, the space appears uncared for, and this lack of caring carries over to the feelings of consumers that must interact within the space to obtain services. They also feel uncared for.

Others

Within this institutional space, everyone is quite intimately involved with one another in the servicescape, though in most cases they don't wish to be.

> *You get the hateful people who have been there forever. I mean you also have child welfare in there. Those situations aren't necessarily good when they're waiting to see their caseworker. Or have a visitation scheduled. You've got all these angry people waiting plus this other situation. Whatever they might be in…It's not to me a very good environment, for anybody in that situation. I mean*

> *I know personally, you don't go in on a Monday and you definitely don't go in there on a Friday. They're too swamped. You'd be setting in there forever.* (Suzie)

> *People in there running around because they do not have, like, a little play areas [for] kids to entertain themselves while you're waiting, they don't have a TV or nothings. Just chairs out there for you to sit on. And you have people sitting right across from you, just sit there staring at you and your kids and it's like, okay this is really uncomfortable. Some people that go in there with bad B.O. sorry. But some people do, especially during the hot summer days and you're like, oh my gosh, let's hurry and get back. Cause it's, yeah. Yeah and just the kids just sitting there and it's so crowded so many people and yeah. It looks like people look irritated.* (Jessica)

There is a desire to not be in contact with the others in the environment but the cramped space, overcrowded conditions, and the overwhelming quiet don't permit avoidance. People do not want to be connected with the other people in this context, others from whom they emotionally distance themselves: others who are in a similar circumstance, that have a similar need, but to the consumer, others who are entirely different and somewhat "lower" than themselves. However, this forced intimacy doesn't stop people from trying to avoid one another. Consumers piddle, they pretend to sleep, they listen to music, whatever can be done to avoid contact with other people in the space.

> *You don't want to really try to connect with anybody, you know. You just want to get in there, get your work done, and get out.* (Trey)

> *A lot of the other people there don't want to have a conversation with you.* (Joan)

Even in line, spacing occurs so as to not get too close to anyone else. The line moves forward as necessary, but no one is getting close enough to talk. Everyone is close enough to hear, but no one appears to want to talk.

> *I think there is a shame, I don't even think I try to meet peoples' eye, walking in the door is oppressive enough . . . it's so broken: everybody's broken.* (Becky)
>
> *I think that most people when they go in there because of the circumstances that [brought] them in there to begin with, don't really want to [talk]*. (Trey)

This space is also a silent place; not quiet, it is noisily silent. There is little background noise; but the lights buzz incessantly, consumers can hear the buttons on a telephone and the conversation behind the counter, and most troublesome, they can here everyone's conversation with the service worker behind the glass. Despite the fact that most everyone in the servicescape leans way into the window to speak to the receptionist, consumers cannot help but hear what is being discussed. This "hearing" is particularly problematic in this service since it deals with such a sensitive resource. Only as the space gets busier is there any relief from being able to hear what should be private, but even then consumers are intimately involved with everyone in the space.

> *It did put you in really close quarters that you could hear what was going on at the desk, you could hear what was going on with other people. . . . It's something you know that they don't want you necessarily hearing*. (Hannah)
>
> *The back rooms, they really need to think about redoing. . . . You can have the door shut in those rooms and I can tell you who's saying what. Yeah, there's no privacy. And I would, you know, tell them that. But, I guess funding. But uh that is a huge issue. I went on an interview on the side that child welfare is on because I guess all their room were filled and I could hear this whole story laid out and I could tell you, you know, this is not a good situation, mom messed up, blah, blah, blah. And it's like, I should not be knowing this. You know my kids are usually with me. They don't need to be hearing this.* (Suzie)

Though the experience is shared and the circumstances are similar, there is a shame that keeps everyone separated and in their own misery. No one makes eye contact, few if any

converse and no mutual support is offered. Everyone must suffer through on their own – together. There is a great deal of discomfort in this forced, unwelcome, intimacy.

Impatient Waiting

As people wait in this space and attempt to not interact, the result is a very impatient waiting. No one appears to want to be here. They rush in and go straight to the window; as they wait, they are restless and don't make eye contact; when they leave, they hurry. People watch the window; as they wait, they return to the window repeatedly to check when it will be their turn.

> *People look irritated, on their faces like okay, come on, and looking at their watch. Some go out and smoke a cigarette while they're waiting because they're waiting so long. And then they come back in and they go back up to the window where you have to stand in the line. "Well I had an appointment at this and this time, where's my caseworker at?" And, yeah, a lot of impatient, irritable looks.* (Jessica)

As people are required to wait, they never settle down. They come in quickly, move to the line, and wait, shifting about. Once they approach the window the exchange is quick and then they go to a seat to fill out paperwork. They do it quickly and then back to the window to turn in the papers. Back to waiting, shifting, listening, avoiding, never resting completely. Finally a consumer is called back to start a similar process in the interview office. Once finished, they are out the door.

This impatience is a symptom of being in a hurry and not wanting to connect. "You don't want to be here; you want to get in, do your business, and get out" (Trey). This impatience is visible in the way people move so much as they wait. Everyone is in a hurry to wait, and then to do what they can and then wait again, hopefully to leave. No one connects, no one rests; everyone wants to get out.

Summary

Unlike what is considered prudent in most marketing literature (Bitner 1992, Kotler 1973), the servicescape in this service appears less than managed. Consumers do not enjoy the space. They also do not want to be in the space simply because what brings them there is their own dependency and encountering the servicescape reminds them of it. Consumers also want no contact with others in this space, assumedly for similar reasons. Consumers wait impatiently, hurry through the process, and leave. The servicescape is strained in many ways because providers don't need to keep customers; consumers are already stuck.

Consumers' Service Responses

Consumers' service responses describe their feelings related to their captive service experiences. These responses manifest both independently and simultaneously as consumers try to obtain services, feel free yet constrained, and process what they see as abuses. Within this I first explore consumers' emotional responses and second consumers' action responses in attempts to take back control of their service experience. Concluding, I provide descriptions of consumers' responses to the exertion of power by providers as they engage this captive service.

Emotional Responses

Consumers' emotional responses to the treatment they receive in captive service reflect their felt dependency on the service. Most view the service as temporary and for some, receiving assistance allows limited feelings of freedom. These feelings contradict the felt oppression and dehumanization that results from interacting with the service.

Understanding consumers' emotional responses puts into perspective consumers' action responses.

Receiving these services is for only a few of the participants interviewed considered a long term situation. Most, even those that have had several encounters with the service, have some sort of loosely-defined plan. Tracy and Kenzie are both in school, Nichole is heading back, and Shauna's husband is finishing school soon. Others look forward to an improved economy or the prospect of moving to find work. In all, consumers mostly maintain a hope of not being dependent on the service indefinitely.

Also, for some consumers, receiving the various services represented in this data, while being oppressive also creates limited feelings of freedom.

> *Getting to raise her the way that I want to raise her and not having other people. And I mean at daycare, in my opinion, people learn bad things. And I don't want her to get sick all the time, because there is always a sick kid.* (Sammie)

> *We'd probably just have to buy less organic things and uh . . . That's why it's so . . . I take it with a grain of salt when I see people using food stamps in a way that I wouldn't because I want to use it the way I want to.* (Ramona)

> *I actually have just started receiving food stamps again about two months ago. I had been off of them. I just started receiving them again and we weren't eating well, my husband and I. He [baby] was eating good, I mean we had WIC and he had everything else. He is still on formula. Eat healthy is so huge, but it's also expensive. And so all we could afford was Hamburger Helper and that's even if we could afford hamburger. We just weren't eating well at all. I don't think we would have survived without it. I could have seen me moving back in with my parents, if we didn't have food stamps.* (Kenzie)

For these consumers the service offers the freedom to live a lifestyle of their choosing. For some this means Mom can stay home and raise the children; for others the service offers that freedom to choose the types of food that their family is going to eat, as in

Ramona's case the vegan lifestyle. For some consumers, however, receiving these services means the freedom to eat at all: "I would be starving" (Nichole). From this perspective, the service provides a level of consumption adequacy and permits some choice; however, interacting with the service remains oppressive.

This contradiction of freedom and oppression in a single service is expressed in the contradictions consumers witness when encountering captive services and feeling service captivity. For example, in the office one set of walls has several posters describing the many forms of assistance available while other walls are covered with motivational posters describing the benefit of hard work, perseverance, and faith. For consumers the message is, "we are here to help, but if you just worked harder maybe you wouldn't be here at all."

The second aspect of this duality comes through in the interactions consumers have with service providers. Feelings of being dependent, a burden, and judged lie heavy on consumers as they seek help; these attitudes from service workers color interactions negatively. Statements such as "we need the help . . . we don't want the help" are coupled with "There's a shame in going in [to the service]" (Becky). There is a need, yet this need is met with disdain from workers, a reaction which creates, or exaggerates, the guilt and shame associated with the service. Being dependent on others for services that are so vital seems to cause internal conflict "A confliction inside of me like, am I doing the right thing? Could I be working harder? Should I do something else?" (Ramona). "My libertarian-ness keeps me from going back on [the service], unless I absolutely have to" (Becky). These consumers are attempting to process their need of the resource, the

oppression of being dependent, and the stigma and guilt associated with the particular service.

More judgment and oppression occurs during disclosure: first, judgment in the form of disbelief at the limited amount of earnings, and then in the accusations that there is more to the story. Daniel stated, as he was discussing what happened when they chose to not hide earnings, "We know people who do, and they don't have these problems". Hannah added that she even told a worker, "We can go back and falsify documents; if that is what you want, we can do that, but we would rather not." They were facing the contradiction of being accused of lying while they were disclosing and at the same time personally knowing individuals who were having no issues because they "failed to disclose." Frustration surfaces in doing what's right, knowing those that don't, and having more trouble than they do. Through their service interactions; while the service lifts consumers up from disadvantage economically, the contradictions they encounter thrusts them down into vulnerability emotionally. This experience occurs in the contradictory meanings consumers draw from the treatment they receive in service interactions.

While these contradictions emerged in participants' responses, another phenomenon began to emerge also: consumers began to make excuses for the poor service they received. The dehumanizing actions of service providers were forgiven because in this context, it seems to make sense. "They are used to dealing with people who don't report . . . I guess" (Hannah). "I felt like they assumed I was uneducated, and then I, then I realized people getting on [the service] are confused by those things" (Ramona). Shauna blamed the poor service on workers' being overworked and poorly

trained. Ramona also suggested they are "shuffled into their own little line," just like her. Sasha believed that caseworkers "deal with a lot of garbage." Consumers, in some cases, appear to expect poor treatment and accept it as being deserved simply because they are in need.

Consumers are looking for a reason for the poor service they receive. Though many of them blame the service workers, they also look for procedural issues that may be causing the problem. Based on the interviews, it appears to make consumers uneasy when they blame caseworkers. Service workers are seen as "overworked and burned out" (Suzie). "They deal with a lot of stuff and it just trickles down the ladder" (Christie). Consumers feel for the workers and they want to understand their plight; as a result, they excuse workers for treating them poorly.

While consumers make excuses for the treatment they receive in the service, they shift the blame to other consumers. In the process, consumers emotionally distance themselves from others receiving the service. Consumers evoke a separation between themselves and what they see as the "typical" service recipient. Practically without exception when making excuses for the poor treatment they receive, consumers refer to "normal" or "usual" clients. These terms suggest that the consumer speaking is different in some way from what is typically encountered by workers in the service and that these "normal" clients in some way might deserve the poor treatment. This emotional distancing excuses the worker from the poor service and allows consumers to not feel as though they are the "typical" client who deserves nothing better.

Other consumers of the service are called "abusers," "obnoxious low-lifes," "bad parents," "teen mothers," "homeless," and "they". Perhaps "they" is the most telling.

Consumers feel lumped in with these other consumers and use language to separate themselves from what they see as lower-level human beings, people who may deserve to be treated with the disdain they feel. This gives them cause to claim the right to better treatment; consumers look at "they" the same way they accuse the workers of looking at them.

Whatever the response to the service experience, many emotions are tied to these outcomes. They range from resigned, "I just kinda know how my life is" (Mary), to outright "Anger! It made me angry" (Daniel). Within these emotional extremes there was mention of aggravation, depression and hopelessness, humiliation, and shame.

> *Frustrated is what I would say. Um, the whole experience is frustrating. Um, from the situation that brought you in there to begin with, to all the hoops that you have to jump through to try to get the assistance. The fact that uh, once that you are on the system or in the system and you start to, you know, dig your way out of the hole that you're in, instead of helping you, they are hurting you by taking away services because you're progressing. The whole process is just frustrating.* (Trey)

> *I generally try to go into it as blank slated as possible. But after you have done it for so many years, you just get used to it. But I guess there is some level of shame because you have to be there.* (Joan)

> *I don't even look people in the eye, you know. And that's why with the [way the] secretary treats you….It's like when you walk through the door, it's oppressive. Then when the secretary looks at you like you're beneath them and you know, your case worker does, you go out there even more deflated. I don't know. Sometimes people just . . . are on the phone or I've witnessed bad parenting. Maybe I should minister to people but that's why I'm concentrating on just getting in and getting out. Because it's so broken, everybody is broken, and the people that work the system.* (Becky)

> *I kind of had it coming and going. I had to bust my butt during the day for very little then I come home and you know, because she's upset and I have to you know . . . invest. . . . emotionally. And you know another thing that sort of feels like work I guess. It was tiring . . . I don't know. At times it made me understand how somebody could just flip out and, and do something crazy in response to just plugging away and not get anywhere. Anger! It was making me angry.* (Daniel)

> *[I feel] depression and helplessness. Cause if that's the system out there that's supposed to help and you're being told that they can't, that they are not willing to help you and you're being told that you're lying through the whole process. There's you know that's all you do. . . . You can't turn to the system, there are very few options at that point. You have to look and say okay…our kids either go hungry or we go and deal with being called a liar and have to grovel and beg for this money so that's pretty humiliating at that point.* (Hannah)

> *The caseworker, like, just didn't do things like call me or my family by our names . . . didn't make a lot of eye contact . . . not feeling acknowledged as a person.* (Ramona)

> *I just get tired…they treat you like you're a . . . you're a peasant.* (Tommy)

> *It feels like a helpless situation, it really does. As far as the, you want the help and you're trying so hard to get it. It feels like there is not an understanding person on the other end. Sometimes I sit and cry about it after [the visit is] over.* (Christy)

Beyond frustration and anger, consumers feel oppressed, dehumanized, and a lack of personal worth. The way in which services are delivered and the apparent lack of attention to managing the service experience in this context are contributing factors to consumers' feelings. In particular, social services can be emancipatory or controlling (Beresford and Croft 2004); it appears in this case to be the latter. This is built the on notion of service captivity – provider power and consumer dependency – and can be manifest anywhere service captivity is present.

Action Response

Consumers' emotional responses to captive service experiences are largely negative and reflect and reinforce felt dependency. These emotional responses are connected with specific action responses. In prior literature, when consumers face consumption constraint, they often "take action" to regain control of their consumption experience and to ensure consumption adequacy (Hirschman and Hill 2000, Szykman and

Hill 1993). Consumers have a number of action-oriented responses to felt constraint; in this study, these responses range from consumers not trying to improve their situations to consumers leaving the service prematurely. This contradiction in responses is discussed in the first subtheme, Giving Up. Representing the middle ground, and discussed primarily by the working poor in this study, is the second sub-theme, Managing Interactions. In this sub-theme, consumers exert power to regain control of the service where they can and when controlling these aspects of the service is beneficial.

Giving Up

Some consumers say "why try" when faced with the complexities of the service system. Accompanying the resource loss structure of the services in this research is a pervasive attitude that it does not pay to try to get ahead. "You become dependent on the system with no gentle weaning off" (Becky).

> *It doesn't seem like the system actually works to get people off the program. They work harder to keep people on. The less you do, the more you get.* (Trey)
>
> *It's in our financial best interest to not go to work right now*. (Suzie)

"Teach a man to fish, they don't do that" (John). For consumers, the processes and structures of the service are not empowering, but disempowering. The service offers financial relief, but this relief comes with the threat of lost help if consumers take action to improve their situation.

One couple increased their net salary $750 a month; their services were reduced $450. They focused on the abruptness of the decrease, the loss of the services; only after some discussion, and with caveats, did they come back to the $300 net increase per month. The caveats were in their eyes legitimate. The father would now be traveling two

days a week, having to carry more food to work, and unable to eat at home some nights; he would be "away" more, all costs of the increase, and all for $75 a week. They questioned whether this increase was "worth" it, but settled eventually on the fact that "it is a step in the right direction." (Shauna)

Others do not make this choice. Instead, not working becomes the choice for consumers who are attempting to manage their captive service experience in this context. Participants report spouses choosing to not work to maintain eligibility; others report choosing to limit hours worked to maintain eligibility. For example, "It's in our financial best interest to not go to work right now" (Suzie). She was told by a "friend," who was reportedly a caseworker, that with her situation, it was better to get a doctor's note to prevent her from participating in TANF than to work at any job they could find her. Karly discussed the decision for her husband to stay at home instead of working since he can't find a job that pays enough to cover daycare and the lost benefits. Shauna reported the same thing for her and her husband, but she was the one who chose to stay home. Karly and Jessica both reported "managing" their hours to maintain just enough income to get by but not enough to lose services.

These activities are discussed along with reports of being depressed and out of control. These actions are taken because the perceived cost of working is greater than the benefit. It is a choice that exacerbates negative emotional feelings. Consumers are daily faced with the decisions requiring them to weigh losses against gains; many focus on the losses. This loss focus creates thoughts of giving up, and further feelings of service captivity. While some may connect giving up to learned helplessness (Seligman 1975), it more closely resembles consumers' safety-first response (Scott 1976). Scott witnesses the

tendency among agrarian peasants toward planting low-yield, yet consistent, crops. Instead of planting high yield, variable, crops with which they could engage in marketplace exchange in years of surplus, they chose instead to plant what they "knew." These low yield crops would barely provide for subsistence in good years, but the farmers knew what to expect; this is "safety-firs.t. Consumers respond in ways similar to these peasant farmers. They choose the known, though constrained, over the unknown.

The other extreme is giving up the service while still in need.

> *We qualify now, we're not making anywhere near enough to disqualify us, but we're so sick of their crap. . . . I mean she was coming home from interactions with these supervisors and what have you in tears and you know, uhm, and agitated and upset because of the interactions with them and it's basically we will do whatever we have to do, we have to get additional jobs, uhm, eat . . . less . . . interesting food . . . . You know eat whatever . . . we're just not, we're going to make it work somehow.* (Daniel)

This couple was trying to do what they thought was right and reporting income as it came in and they encountered a great deal of push-back from service providers. The pushback became more and more intense to the point that they left the service despite needing it for them and their four children. They were four months late on their mortgage before family and church stepped in to help.

Others have left the service, seen their circumstances change, and are now in need again. "My libertarian-ness keeps me from going back on, unless I absolutely have to" (Becky). Trey, Becky's husband, spoke to me afterwards and told me he wants to get back on the service despite the difficulties because they need it so badly but "she just won't." The couple eventually went back on services due to inability to properly "feed our kids" (Trey). For others, the issues they face and associated oppressive feelings are

too high a cost. In these situations, consumers give up; they give up trying and except their disadvantage, or they give up and go it alone.

Managing Interactions

When consumers continue with service receipt, they often actively manage the process of receiving services, as a result of the service experience. Service literature suggests it is imperative for service providers to activity engage and manage consumers in the co-creation process (Payne et al. 2008, Vargo and Lusch 2004). In captive service this is not the case; the burden of managing interactions falls on consumers. This burden occurs in multiple ways, emotionally, relationally, and procedurally.

The emotional burden in the captive service experience falls on the consumer. As described above and repeatedly in interviews, workers in this space have attitudes that are negatively construed by consumers. Workers are repeatedly described as "cold" and "uncaring." Consumers simply ask for warmth and friendliness in the interactions, but if this is to occur, it is through consumers' efforts.

A consumer might "psych myself up for it" or profess to have "gotten used to it" (Ramona). Others suggest they "learn what to expect . . . I try to go in blank-slated" (Joan). In any case, consumers are actively managing the emotions they feel as they encounter the service. Since workers provide little, or only negative, emotion to the interactions, consumers must work to keep these encounters emotionally positive. Other consumers take managing the process from an emotional stance even more proactively. Sasha describes her interactions saying "You get what you give out" and "you get more flies with honey." She is attempting to manage the process by being overly nice, saying

this gives her better service because most of the people that come in there are just rude to the service workers.

Tracy repeats the refrain, "sometimes they are not the nicest people"; as a result, she tries to "put myself in their shoes." She tries to understand the workers and the feelings they are having; her empathy allows her to better manage her own emotions during the interaction. She tries to be nice and understanding so she can "get in and get out" with whatever she needs.

Consumers tie the emotional valance of the interactions to their ability to get what they need from the service. In this service, the perceived connection between the valance of the interaction and the ability to obtain service, means attempting to positively influence the emotional aspects of the interaction for the caseworker. The consumer, instead of the worker, becomes the responsible party.

The burden to develop and maintain relationships also falls on the consumer. Caseworkers change often, so there appears to be little incentive for them to get to know their consumers. In the case of TANF, service appears to be more relational at the onset, but connections break down quickly as workers change. In an example from vocational rehabilitation, Nichole describes her counselor as listening and getting to know her, as developing a relationship. More specialized services tend to offer more in the way of relationships but even in these cases, the onus to maintain that relationship over time falls on consumers.

> *This one caseworker has been dealing with you and she knows all, everything you're going through. Everything you've been dealing with, you know, what you need help with and all of a sudden you switch to somebody who has no clue who you are. You have to tell them your name, tell them all your information again. It was just . . . ugghh.* (Tracy)

> *You would rotate between caseworkers like if you go in and you apply for just food stamps, you would be assigned to one caseworker. Well say you needed daycare and you go back and you apply for daycare, then you go to whoever is handling daycare cases for that day. So then your whole entire caseworker changes, and then you can have to start from the beginning with explaining everything because they're not familiar with your case. So then you have to go over from start to finish and the whole household in history and all that stuff. So I've went through several caseworkers.* (Christy)

Tracy and Christy are frustrated with having to redevelop relationships, to develop rapport with new workers, and to have to explain everything again. Things are "really good because you feel like you connect with the person that is interviewing you" (Christy); but then workers change. Suzie manages relationships by playing ignorant and, hopefully, endearing herself to workers so they will help her, as she meets new workers repeatedly. Whatever their tactic, consumers take responsibility for relationship management in this captive service.

Consumers also attempt to manage the procedural processes. Several participants proudly discuss their ability to now manage the service process and to manage their interactions with service workers. Others are not proud, but are skilled:

> *It's frustrating because you have to work the system. You have to know what you are doing in order to get assistance; it doesn't come easy at all.* (Christie)

Many claim to have learned to move through the bureaucracy, getting what they need and want; being able to do so, gives them a pride that is normally not evident as we discuss service interactions.

Navigating service interaction procedures becomes a part of the process for many consumers. Navigating is very one-sided for consumers.

> *Now that I know how to do all that, it's less frustrating, because before when I would ask for help . . . uhm . . . I was treated like I was stupid.* (Ramona).
>
> *I think we went to great lengths to jump through all of their hoops, to try and make things easier. I do not think by any stretch of the imagination was the same effort put forth on their side of the equation.* (Daniel)
>
> *There were times where I would actually call specifically on the days I knew my worker wasn't going to be in just to get somebody else.* (Mary)
>
> *I would actually sit there with the people that actually look through the paperwork and made sure everything was there. . . . We learned really quickly that you have to have the paperwork stamped as received.* (Hannah)
>
> *I turn things in early and they still can't get it done.* (Shauna)

Knowing how to do paperwork, knowing when to do renewals, and taking action to avoid interruptions in services are all part of navigating the procedural aspects of the service experience. Consumers take these actions to maintain continuity of service and to ensure limited service waiting. Taking action is not required and in some cases not welcome.

Pushing is used to describe the persistence needed to obtain service. Pushing goes beyond the navigational aspects of knowing how and when to take action, it captures the perception that consumers must proactively manage employees' activities by prodding them along.

> *The last one didn't get back with us, and we don't stop calling so they always get back with us. We call every day if we don't hear back. [You must] assert yourself.* (Becky)
>
> *You have to go up there every day and hound them before they even get to caring enough to do anything and it's just to get you off their back.* (Michelle)

With unanswered calls and long waits, consumers report taking direct action to ensure their case is handled properly.

> *Don't settle for one answer If you think it's not right ask again and ask somebody else . . . Keep digging, talk to the supervisors . . . [but] this can bite you* (Suzie)

In some cases pushing involves getting supervisors involved, though as Suzie mentioned pushing can be met with perceived push-back and intentional delays by caseworkers; accordingly some consumers are reluctant to do so. Others discuss the need to go after what you deserve.

Others underreport. Underreporting occurs when consumers fail to disclose information that could negatively impact the services they received. Underreporting is related in consumers' minds to potential resource loss. It is an unintended consequence of the looming potential losses associated with disclosure. Consumers underreport financial and other circumstances, such as family status and living arrangements. This is illegal, but occurs as calculated risks.

> *Honestly I haven't reported my changes and I've only been working overtime for about a month and a half. Um…which is against the rules. You are supposed to report within ten days and a lot of times I do report within ten days. But it's hard. Um and when I went back to work after having my son, I wasn't going back for January. DHS knew this so my food stamps were higher. So I went when I went back to work in November it was only a month instead of reporting that I went back to work and our income increased, I waited until my review date. My review date was coming up in a month. A month or two anyway so you know sometimes you just slide under the radar. And if you're not making a big deal about things and you don't make yourself noticed, they don't notice a lot of times. Now if they were to do an audit, I would have to pay money back and which would hurt my family drastically but it is a risk that I'm willing to take in order to feed my family…Right at this moment, I mean, Christmas is coming up, and my kids birthdays are February, February, July and September so of course and then you got Christmas between the September and February birthdays. So right now, we are trying to save money to buy my kids presents. We do rely on the Angel Tree for my family. I do sign my kids up every year because we wouldn't be able to provide a good, I say good, Christmas. They get maybe three presents each time. They get maybe three presents from Angel Tree so all in all it gives them a decent Christmas. You know for a kid. And if I didn't work overtime, we would be able to do that.* (Christy)

Under-reporting is the opposite of giving up. It occurs when consumers continue to receive the service but work too much and their income reaches a level that would decrease or eliminate services. This is however not the only form of underreporting that occurs.

> *If you're talking to DHS and you say the wrong thing, you might get turned in for something. And that's the scary thing. I've been in that situation. Uh…my husband [ad I] lived with his dad while I was pregnant. They wouldn't let us have food stamps either. Now we both had separate incomes but since we were living in the same house, they wouldn't approve us. It made me want to lie.Well we really need food, so oh, we live alone. But that fear of someone coming up into your house and arresting you, it's scary. And all you need is a little bit of help.* (Kenzie)

Consumers know these information omissions are illegal but they do it anyway, some trying to get ahead, some trying to give their kids something, some trying to eat. In each case the risks are known and calculated before the omission occurs; the immediate loss looms much larger than the one that they may or may not incur in the future.

Finally, advocacy occurs as consumers take specific actions to help others to obtain services. Consumers who have become veterans of the service and who have learned to navigate the procedural aspects of service provision often help others who are not as seasoned. Hannah has taken the approach of asking for specific "help", like getting papers stamped in front of new recipients to "show them how" without getting in trouble with workers. Suzie reports that "a lot of people just have to get friends, look for advocates" when trying to work through the service system; she has helped people she knows. Christie helps her parents.

Tara is the most overt in her attempts to help people. She has received services for several years in one fashion or another. She runs a small at-home childcare service for

low-income families and takes an active role in helping these families get what they qualify for, up to the point of going with them into the office, where she stops reluctantly. She knows what is available and believes her duty is to help those who cannot help themselves. She assumes the identity of advocate for the less fortunate and oppressed, though she herself falls in this category.

As consumers attempt to manage their interactions with this captive service, they assume the burden in the encounter emotionally, relationally, and procedurally. Consumers managing interactions, is a shift from much of the service literature, which places the responsibility for managing the interaction on the organization and its workers (i.e., Vargo and Lusch 2004). While prior literature has suggested that organizations engage consumers in co-creation (Payne et al. 2008), in captive service organizations appear to be content to hold consumers at arms-length. Organizations want only cursory interactions in which consumers comply with organizational requirements and take little personal action. Consumers do not share this desire and instead take action to co-create the service experience and to take back control of their consumption experience. Consumers proactively engage the service and its workers in many ways as well as proactively avoiding them in others. These actions redefine service co-creation in this context on consumers' terms and to their benefit. Desired or not, consumers are an integral part of the service experience; organizations can harness consumers' actions and resources to the benefit of organization and consumer. If they do not, consumers take action for their own benefit; fundamentally ignoring the effect these activities have on the organization.

Power Response

In this section, I discuss how consumers' responses to captive service and service captivity relate to their being out of control and being dependent and powerless. This discussion is connected to existing power literature that delineates consumers' power responses within existing frameworks.

Being Out of Control

The result of service captivity is a feeling of being out of control. Personal control is a basic human need (Deci and Ryan 2000, Schultz 1996). Having control is directly related to several positive psychological and behavioral outcomes (Wortman 1975, Ruback et al. 1986), and perceived control in service interactions is related to positive service exchange outcomes (Hui and Bateson 1991). However, "control limited environments are stressful for those who inhabit them" (MacKenzie and Goodstein 1986, p. 209) and result in negativity toward the institution or organization (MacKenzie et al. 1987).

Without control, consumers are subject to negative affect surrounding their service interactions. Both Joan and Suzie describe their situations as "just how my life is." Both of these women have been receiving services for many years, encounter multiple services, and profess to be resigned to the treatment they received. Both of these women, however, express fear of loss of services and both become very animated and expressive when discussing the ills that befall them. Both are especially passionate about their good workers as well, particularly those that take an interest in their lives. Both of these women, and others, feel out of control of their lives in some area or another, revolving mostly around whatever may have forced them into the service to start with.

This lack of control is accompanied by frustration with service providers and distrust of the service organizations.

"The absence of choice, coupled with forced dependence on others for survival, removes the essential elements of self-determination" (Hirschman and Hill 2000, p. 477). Szykman and Hill (1993) report that life in prisons cannot be too good or prisoners will not want to leave, so prisons are built to constrain and deprive; prisoners lose choice, control, autonomy, and privacy. Prisoners don't want to lose control or go without certain consumer goods, so they create informal economies to exert control over their lives. Participants in this research describe the same feelings in their interactions with social services. They feel controlled and deprived of their choice and their humanness. While some become involved in illicit or illegal actions associated with earning or living arrangements, all grasp control wherever they can. With few exceptions, consumers are actively managing the service interactions they have with workers. Management comes in many forms; for example, Joan exerts her knowledge of the service process with workers, reluctantly "helping them do their jobs" to make sure she gets service on time and without gaps. Suzie "plays dumb" so as to appear she needs the service more and to not be threatening in any way to the worker. While Joan is exerting control by acquiring power and using it to help the worker she views as less competent, Suzie is giving additional power to the worker. Power is being used in both ways for these consumers to exert control over an out-of-control situation.

Consumers operate to manage their interactions emotionally, procedurally, and relationally. They manage the emotional tone of interactions, they attempt to connect with workers even if only for a moment, and they actively navigate the service system.

They also underreport income and "fail to disclose" certain living situations. They exert control where they can. When prisoners are out of control, perceptions of maintaining control over some aspects of their life have a positive emotional and psychological impact (Ruback et al. 1986, Hirschman and Hill 2000, Szykman and Hill 1993). This works for captive consumers as well.

Being Dependent and Powerless

Although many individuals and households experience consumption restriction from time to time, for some, this is a way of life due to economic or social status (Botti et al. 2008). When this is the case, choice, control, and/or power are circumscribed. Consumers in captive services, particularly the captive service in this study, are limited in service interactions. Whenever power, choice, and/or control is constrained, consumers react negatively toward the service and service provider (Botti et al. 2008). The literature offers several possible consumer reactions. Botti and colleagues (2008) suggest consumers will adapt, comply, and/or bend or break rules and Hirschman (1970) proposes consumers have exit, voice, or loyalty reactions to constraint. Emerson (1962) offers an inclusive and succinct theory and framework for organizing possible reactions. Within this theory, consumers are thought to perform an internal "cost reduction" and/or one of four balancing actions – withdrawal, network expansion, status giving, or coalition formation. Voice and bending/breaking rules are not explicitly considered in this framework. I discuss voice, each possible consumer reaction in the framework, bending/breaking rules, and cost-reduction, along with how each becomes manifest in and relates to findings in this research.

Consumers specifically and repeatedly express that voice is not a possible reaction to their consumption constraints. Consumers often do not feel that their voice is heard in the service interaction process; nothing can be said other than whatever information is requested. The exception to this experience is revealed when discussing specific positive interactions with workers. Especially empathetic workers are described as good listeners. In these situations the consumer's voice is at least heard. Though this hearing may not result in changes or adaptation of the service provision, the simple ability to speak and be heard is very important to consumers as it contributes to making them feel human. In other cases, speaking of services other than the focal means-end services of my research, Nichole revealed the comfort she felt when engaging in service interactions for vocational rehabilitation. She spoke of the worker as one who listened and took her needs into account when designing the service. In this case, not only did the consumer have a voice, it resulted in a customized service option as well. Another component of voice is the ability to express dissatisfaction with the service. This aspect of voice appeared constrained as well. Consumers expressed reservation about being willing to voice service concerns unless the service situation had failed extremely because of possible retaliation by workers. For example, Trey discussed his need to voice a problem to a supervisor that then negatively affected the rapport between him and his worker. Suzie described a similar experience, suggesting that whenever there was a problem that required the involvement of a supervisor, the result was usually longer delays. Hirschman (1970) says that monopoly providers actively attempt to manage negative voice; such attempts appear at work in this captive service at least at an informal level. Consumers do not have voice in making choices as to how the service is provided

or what they receive from the service; they also have only restricted voice if there is a problem with the service they receive.

Another option, one assumed in much of the current marketing literature, is withdrawal. Emerson (1962) describes withdrawal as a limiting of the need for a particular product or service, Hirschman (1970) speaks directly of exit. In most services explored in service research there is the understanding that consumers can choose to leave the service, and will, if service levels fall too low. If they do not leave, consumers will at least lessen the amount of a service utilized in response to negative service interactions. In the case of some captive services, withdrawal is unlikely because the service provides resources needed for personal or family survival. Limiting the amount of the service is also unlikely. In my research, in only one case did participants choose to leave the service due to the treatment they received from service workers. "We qualify now, we're not making anywhere near enough to disqualify us, but we're so sick of their crap that we will do whatever we have to" (Daniel). The service interactions became so negative that they were untenable for this family. They left the service and fell months behind on other bills because of the way they were treated by service workers. While only one family left, others complained about service provision but were unwilling to take this ultimate step of doing without. Withdrawal is not a viable option for many consumers in captive services.

Network expansion is described as acquiring a service/product from a different provider. Network expansion neutralizes the effect of dependency on a particular person or group for a resource. In the case of captive service, other providers may be available to some extent. In this data, participants did discuss the occasional trip to a food bank or

acquiring food from other third parties; friends, family, or churches. In this captive service, network expansion is limited because these options are limited. Food banks and other sources of help also have limited resources and limit access to assistance. These sources of help are also unattractive to some consumers because using them is seen as taking away from other who are perceived as less able to help themselves. Shauna mentions not using food banks, preferring to instead "borrow" money from other household accounts to cover shortfalls in the family's food budget. Structural and emotional limitations circumscribe the availability of network expansion. Though obtaining resources elsewhere does occur to a limited extent when absolutely necessary, the current service is still seen as the primary, and often sole, service option.

Compliance occurs in this captive context as in other constrained consumption contexts. Consumers comply with the demands of the service system, though occasionally not completely. They turn in paperwork when needed and manage interactions to insure that they will not incur gaps in the service. Consumers show up, act right, and do what they are told in order to insure their need is established and their compliance is seen.

Status-giving occurs when consumers manage service interactions. Emerson (1962) describes status-giving as occurring within groups when one member, or sub-group, has a needed resource the rest of the group needs or desires. In social service interactions, status-giving occurs across group boundaries. Consumers give status to providers. Consumers see workers as powerful and in control of their destiny; as a result consumers often play to the emotions of these workers. Sacha is overtly and overly nice when interacting with workers, stating "you get more flies with honey." Suzie speaks of

"playing dumb." Both of these consumers play "down" to the authority of workers, lifting them up in status and playing to their egos. Both feel they get better service through this process. Another consumer describes how he would lower his physical stature and play up workers egos in attempts to make interactions go more smoothly. In each case, consumers feel the need to manage the interaction and to make it more pleasant for the worker to make these interactions go smoothly.

Coalition formation is not witnessed in this service. In fact, the opposite occurs. Consumers use language to separate themselves from the "stereotypical" service recipient; emotional distancing occurs when consumers enter into the service experience. In descriptions of interactions with other consumers in the servicescape, Trey mentions "you don't want to connect with anyone . . . you want to get in and get out." Observing in this same space, I witness consumers avoiding eye contact and conversation. There is solitude in receiving this service; although consumers' lives are on display, this display occurs in isolation. Consumers do not seek coalitions to fight for service rights; this possibility was not once mentioned in interviews. What is seen in some cases is informal advocacy. Consumers actively help individual others when they can but there is no formality to these efforts. Even in prisons, consumers work together to ensure consumption adequacy (Szykman and Hill 1993), but in this captive service, consumers distance themselves from one another instead. Coalition formation, though potentially a viable option, does not occur.

Bending and breaking rules is often alluded to as a response to consumption constraint in this service. In some cases it is associated with managing service interactions. For example, Kenzie mentions "we really need food, so we live alone." She

is describing the choice to not fully disclose her living arrangements to ensure she will continue receiving the food she needs for her family. Christy revealed "I haven't reported any changes and I've been working overtime for about a month and a half." In this case, the consumer was readying herself for the holidays so she could give her children an adequate "Christmas from Santa." In both cases these comments were made in conjunction with expressed fear of being found out, but the bending of rules continues as a calculated risk: they will lose services if they are found out, but they also lose if they report. So consumers underreport. They lie to manage their own assistance program since it is not customized for them. Most consumers mentioned something in an interview that could have been construed as unethical in the way they manage the service. These perverse incentives are built into the system (Caplow 1994) and create consumers who resort to false compliance and working the system (Blocker et al. 2013 - forthcoming). "It doesn't seem like the system actually works to get people off the program; they work harder to keep people on. The less you do, the more you get" (Trey). When saying this, consumers are also telling about how they do work and how they wish there was a way to "work off of the system" rather than being pushed out as soon as things get better. Not being able to work legally does not stop this particular group of Working Poor; they just become very skilled at bending and breaking rules without being caught. Consumption is vital to humanness (Klein and Hill 2008); when constrained, consumers take action to restore their consumption levels and to reaffirm their humanness.

The last potential response to consumption constraint is described as adaptation or cost reduction (Botti et al. 2008, Emerson 1962). For some consumers, being on social services is degrading. These are working people, some of whom are self-described

conservatives against social services as currently designed, who hold the same stereotypes as others about social service consumers, but who cannot make it without the service. So they need to balance their preconceptions with their current situation of need. Often this balance results in emotional distancing from others within the service situation; it also results in making excuses for the poor service they receive. They begin to feel deserving of the poor service. They begin to identify with the very populations they try so hard to distance themselves from. They accept "service." They accept what they perceive as inhumane treatment because they begin to identify with this "less than human" population, a population which because of their need deserves poor treatment, a population which deserves to be "herded" through the service. Cost reduction and adaptation connect to other responses to consumption constraint. Individual attitudes toward non-compliance and other rule bending actions are negative, but consumers rationalize these activities. "Gifts aren't income" (Shauna) is just one example of the rationalization of under-reporting changes in financial or living situations. Consumers reduce the psychological and emotional cost associated with accepting the inability to be independent. They also reduce the cost associated with lying and cheating to keep services they see as an absolute necessity for their and their family's survival. They move from pushing the limits of their morals through non-disclosure to pushing the limits of their identity by changing their morals.

Summary

Power and dependence are very real in this captive service. Vulnerability is not a trait, it is a state to which one arrives due to context and circumstance (Baker and Mason 2012). Power exists wherever one constituent is dependent; vulnerability then surfaces as

the lived experience of the dependent. While the exhibition of power may differ according to the severity of captivity in the service, its potential is always present. In this captive service, power is real to consumers and they do not possess it. Providers become gatekeepers and consumers respond in many of the ways anticipated in prior literature. Many of these responses are negative, but they are the foundation of consumer survival in this captive service experience.

Conclusion

Several potentially negative consumer responses are associated with captive service experiences in this data. These are as minor as making excuses for poor service and as extreme as early exit. Also it appears that the responsibility for managing the service experience in these interactions has shifted to the consumer. Most alarming are the types of emotions that are associated with this captive service. Consumers experience many negative emotions that may relate to other potential negative outcomes. Some of these outcomes become apparent in consumers' responses to their felt dependency and powerlessness.

The study has revealed several themes related to consumers' captive service experience. Because it is based on power-dependence relations, captive service changes the manifestation of service imperatives from the literature. In this study, captive service themes are Captive Service and Service Captivity, Service Ideals Disrupted, Service Experience, and Service Responses. Within the Experience theme we see themes that are similar to and extend concepts in prior service literature, but the underlying structures as well as the presence of these phenomena is different than expected or suggested in this literature. Consumers want the same things they experience in typical services; however,

being dependent keeps them from demanding the same. The interpretation of these themes allows for a more nuanced understanding of what makes up each dimension of consumers' captive service experience. Also, this study allows for exposition of the multiple potential consumer outcomes of felt service captivity in response to the powerlessness felt in captive services.

Captive services and consumers' feelings of service captivity appear to allow "change" in the service delivery process. They change what is an acceptable service experience from both the consumers' and providers' perspectives. They do not change, however, consumer desires for efficient, competent, consumer centric service provision.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Interpretation

In this chapter, I discuss the developed grounded theory of consumers' captive service experience based on and reconciling with current service and marketing literature. I utilize three overarching perspectives to this end –Service, Service Experiences, and Service Responses. The first two are discussed independently in connection to relevant literature; Service Responses are described throughout, in connection to other themes as well as extant literature. Within Service and Service Experiences, the effect of Power/Dependence on the experience becomes apparent. Following this discussion, I present Limitations and Future Directions for consideration.

Service

Service-Dominant Logic of Marketing (SDL) is thought to be a valuable asset in informing macro-marketing, policy, and consumer well-being issues (Vargo and Lusch 2008a, Vargo and Lusch 2008b), though it has been remarkably quiet in this space to date. It is concerned with the creation and co-creation of value in every service context (Vargo and Lusch 2006). Understanding that consumer value is created through consumption, service marketing promotes managing the entire service process for the management of value (Gronroos 2006). I look at specific service concepts relevant to SDL and suggested as vital to "service" to identify and understand their presence, absence, and meaning in captive service. Specifically, in this section, I identify Choice,

Operant Resources and Resource Integration, Customer Centricity, Empathy, and Relationships as pertinent to consumers and basic service recommendations. These phenomena are important, yet not always present in the delivery of captive services. This section identifies the manifestation of these concepts and captive consumers' responses. SDL is a mindset, a lens through which social and economic exchange can be viewed to understand the manifestation of consumers' service experiences (Vargo and Lusch 2008a). SDL is an abstracted view of service and what service should be; however, it has focused primarily on for-profit service ventures. I use this lens here to examine what "service" is in captive service.

Choice

While choice is an often assumed to be part of consumers' lives, it is not always available. In captive services choice isoften constrained. Consumers do not "report feelings of choice unless one of their available options is at least as desirable as their comparison set" (Steiner 1979, p. 21). The attractiveness of available options determines the validity of choices in the marketplace (Harvey and Johnston 1973, Jellison and Harvey 1973, Scott 1976). For consumers of captive services, the option to not obtain the resource is often not as attractive as obtaining the resource under duress, particularly when the service provides a survival resource. In the case of SNAP other options exist, such as food banks, but these options are restrictive as well; availability is limited and the procedures are arduous. Consumers in this context do not see choice from an alternatives perspective.

Consumers also face choice restriction in the service delivery process once they have "chosen" to engage in the service. Consumers are not able to choose caseworkers

and if they have problems, they are instructed to "deal with that caseworker; you do not get a new one" (Shauna). Consumers do not choose what they get from services. One family on WIC whose son could not tolerate whole milk was told that even with a doctor's note, whole milk was all that was available. Metrics and guidelines are in place; consumers have no input. These decisions have been made from above and stand with no allowance for consumer choice (Hill and Macan 1996b).

Operant Resources and Resource Integration

Operant resources are viewed as essential to service exchange and as a source of comparative advantage (Vargo and Lusch 2004). In means-end services such as the captive service in this research, operant resource delivery is often limited. According to the participants, only in WIC service interactions are pertinent informational resources offered. For example, prenatal and breastfeeding information is offered to first-time mothers and all recipients are required to watch videos related to nutrition. Nothing similar is provided to SNAP recipients. Instead financial assistance is provided and consumers are left to make shopping and nutritional decisions alone.

With the limitations on operant resource delivery, resource integration is also largely absent in these services. Resource integration is a precursor to beneficial outcomes in both healthcare and social entrepreneurship (Bloom 2009, Lee et al. 1999).

> Therefore, instead of focusing purely on customers' operand resources such as how much economic power the consumer has, firms must be mindful about the operant resources consumers possess and bring to the exchange process. These resources determine which firm resources customers are going to draw on and how they will deploy firms' operand resources in value creation. Since customers' life prospects/goals are a configuration of operant resources, focus on these operant resources will enable firms to anticipate customers' desired values and help them create value in use. (Arnould et al. 2006 p. 93)

To be successful in service delivery and to allow the co-creation of value, organizations must understand consumers' operant resources and be able to integrate them into the service interaction. "Value creation for both the customer and the firm requires collaborating" (Lusch et al. 2007). This collaboration is based around complementary operant resources held by the consumer and the organization. When the organization does not deliver operant resources with operand resource delivery and ignores consumers' resources, collaboration is impossible.

Consumers in this study frequently report frustration with the lack of listening and the ignoring of expressed needs in the services. Workers do not appear tuned-in to consumers as they interact with them during the service delivery process. Customer resource integration, a prerequisite to customization and co-production and the key to service success (Vargo and Lusch 2004, Moeller 2008), starts and ends with understanding consumers. One service exception was noted in the data; vocational rehabilitation services were described as particularly "understanding." Workers in these services took the time to get to know consumers and were adept at drawing on consumers' operant resources to engage them with the service. Integrating consumers' resources helped consumers overcome their limited operand resources and other constraints to the success of the service. Workers were able to engage consumers to take action for themselves and to learn and grow and become more self-determined members of the community. Operant resources are invaluable in the assent from disadvantage. Consumers hold many operant resources. When these are combined within the service, success appears most probable. It starts with understanding the consumer.

Customer Centricity

Customer centricity is vital to satisfactory and successful service delivery and serves as the starting point for many other important service actions. A service-centered view starts with understanding consumers' problems and develops and delivers solutions (Vargo and Lusch 2004); a service centered approach is inherently customer-centric. The services in this study appear largely unconcerned with being customer centric. Interestingly it is those workers that express this approach to serving consumers that are spoken of the most highly while also being described as the most rare. While it is accepted that workers enter social service occupations altruistically (Stevens et al. 2012), consumers do not often describe workers as such. Instead consumers speak of the uncaring and callous manner in which they are treated. Suzie says "I want to moo" as she describes the feeling of being herded through the process. There is a disconnect between the intentions of workers and the experiences of consumers. Lost is the customer centric approach to service delivery that is established as garnering much success in for-profit ventures. With customer centricity, organizations can better identify and respond to consumer needs and wants. Within social services, those services most attuned to consumers are the most successful at reaching their service goals (Bloom 2009). However, the literature repeatedly reports that needs are ignored (i.e., Shipler 2005), as is echoed in my data. If the goal of social service is to "integrate service users into the broader community" (Mandiberg and Warner 2012), this can goal only be accomplished by understanding first who and where consumers are in the community and what their needs are. Customer-centricity is not necessary when consumers have nowhere else to go and no power in the pursuit of satisfactory service experiences. If the service exists

regardless of consumer satisfaction, if there is no recourse for poor service, captive service providers can move forward with little concern for consumer wants and needs.

Empathy

Empathy toward consumers is a valuable tool in identifying consumer wants and needs,. In this service it is the empathetic worker, the one who has been in the shoes of the provider, who gains the most traction with consumers. It is the worker who "listens and understands" that is lauded as doing the job right. When there is a disconnect between the consumer and the worker, there is only frustration and anger on the part of the consumer. Consumers want and need workers who listen, care, and understand. Empathy is a personal attitude that makes it possible to be consumer centric in the approach to service delivery. Consumers desperately need to be heard. In this service however, empathy is missing in many interactions. This lack is often connected with feelings of dehumanization and worthlessness.

Relationships

An additional piece of the service perspective describes service as relational (Vargo and Lusch 2004). Relationships are also repeatedly described as missing yet desired by consumers in the study. Consumers want to get to know their caseworkers; they feel it is helpful to being understood and obtaining services. Stacy described one of her workers as a friend she could call if a question or a need arose. When workers changed and she asked for the prior worker, she was told she could only deal with the new worker. This change was difficult because she felt she had established a relationship with the prior person and now she had to start over; even worse was the fact that Stacy perceived the new worker as not wanting a relationship. When consumers have been with

the same worker for an extended period, they feel a relationship with that worker. Consumers express being understood in conjunction with these relationships; feeling empathy in relationships is also connected to what appear to be improved feelings of self-worth.

Relationships appear vital to and integrated with other service concepts discussed in this section. Empathy is essential to relationship building; both are bedrock to customer centricity. Relationships are also valuable in the ability of workers to identify consumer resources and to integrate these resources within service interactions.

Service Responses to "Disrupted" Service

Consumers have a number of behavioral and emotional reactions to "missing" these service concepts in their captive service experiences. Choice, customer centricity, and resource integration are mostly non-existent; operant resources are limited; and empathy and relationships are intermittent in this captive service. These service "disruptions" influence consumers' service responses.

As described in the section on power and dependence, consumers take multiple actions to exert control over their consumption experiences in response to the lack of choice. Some consumers comply, others bend/break rules, and still others leave. Some consumers take action to manage their interactions with workers. They attempt to manage relationships with workers by repeating family stories, thereby hoping to connect with workers. They manage the emotional aspects of interactions by managing their own personal emotions and by attempting to influence the emotions and actions of workers. These actions are related to consumers need to be self-determined in consumption experiences (Deci and Ryan 2000). Finally, many consumers perform "cost-reductions";

they adapt their mental model to one that conforms to the treatment they receive. This response is perhaps the most potentially damaging from a transformative perspective. While consumers may perform illicit or illegal actions in the process of managing service interactions, they become self-determined in these actions. "Cost-reductions," in contrast, compromise the emotional and psychological self.

Connected to the lack of customer centricity, the limited occasions of felt empathy and relationships, and perceptions of outright needs being outright ignored are feelings of vulnerability and dehumanization.

> *[I felt] depression and helplessness. 'Cause if that's the system out there that's supposed to help and you're being told that they can't, that they are not willing to help you and you're being told that your lying through the whole process. There's, you know, that's all you do...you can't turn to the system; there are very few options at that point. You have to look and say okay…our kids either go hungry or we go and deal with being called a liar and have to grovel and beg for this money, so that's pretty humiliating at that point.* (Hannah)
>
> *The caseworker like just didn't do things like call me or my family by our names…didn't make a lot of eye contact. . . . Not feeling acknowledged as a person.* (Ramona)
>
> *I just get tired…they treat you like you're a…you're a peasant* (Tommy)
>
> *It feels like a helpless situation, it really does. As far as the, you want the help and you're trying so hard to get it. It feels like there is not an understanding person on the other end. Sometimes I sit and cry about it after it's over…* (Christy)

The interactions consumers have with workers feel disconnected and demeaning. Consumers are alone in the process even though they are in constant contact with people. Depression and helplessness, dehumanization, and humiliation are the emotions consumers tie to their service interactions. Ultimately these emotions turn into: "you just get used to it." (Joan); consumers resign themselves to the situation. Consumers become the very *thing* that is stereotyped as being in the service.

Service Experience

Understanding "how the customer thinks about service quality is essential to effective management" of the service experience (Rust and Oliver 1994, p. 2). It is also instrumental in knowing what combines to form the service experience. In the process of identifying the various components of service interactions that drive consumers' perceptions of service experiences in captive services, it became clear that the "gaps" model of service quality does not adequately describe this context. The "gaps" model proposes that consumers have service expectations and the "gap" between these and actual experiences leads to positive or negative perceptions of the service (Parasuraman et al. 1985, Zeithaml et al. 1993). Instead with captive service, consumers expect a low level of service that, though met, is perceived negatively. Though consumers both expect and make excuses for poor treatment, meeting this expectation does not equate to positive service quality; it is still poor service quality, despite the lack of a "gap."

Despite overwhelmingly negative perceptions of the service experience, what is important to captive service consumers is similar to what prior researchers have identified as pertinent to consumers with choice and power (Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001, Rust and Oliver 1994). Service interactions, outputs, and servicescape are dimensions in prior literature findings. A key difference is interactions are more than just people, processes are also important to consumers.

Employees Make <u>the</u> Difference

For decades researchers have described service workers as "the service" for many consumers (Mohr and Bitner 1991, Shostack 1977, Bitner 1990). Participants in this study readily discussed the impact of workers on their service experiences. Like

conceptualizations of service worker influence on service experiences, employee attitudes, actions, and competence are integral to consumers perceptions of employees (Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001). Perceptions of employee power in captive service exacerbate the impact workers have on consumers.

Employee Power

Captive service employees are gatekeepers to much-needed or desired services. In the case of social services, people in this position are responsible for enforcing strict eligibility guidelines. Consumers perceive workers as in control of the desired resources. While the government gives money to the poor, it gives the authority to do so to service workers (Bagozzi 1975). Because workers control resources, they have power. "She was explaining to me, 'I'm the caseworker and I have every right to deny or approve your case depending on what I feel and what I think." (Trey) Suzie relates that "somebody wrote something negative" in her file that has followed her for years causing various problems. No one will tell her or show her what it is, but she perceives that they use it against her. Power is very real to consumers of captive service. It is intertwined in many of the comments about employees' attitudes, actions, and competence.

Attitudes, Actions, and Competence

Many of the attitudes and actions discussed as problematic revolve around the judgment and dehumanization of consumers. Further, the negative and troubled tone that many workers are viewed as carrying into interactions colors consumers' perceptions of how workers view consumers. Workers judge, they "look down" on, and are "bothered" by consumers. For example, they do not make eye contact or call consumers by name during interactions. This combination of attitudes and actions worsens the difficulty and

shame associated with this service. Moreover consumers are fearful of expressing their discontent due to potential retaliation. Workers are firmly in control.

Competence is also discussed as a problem. Perceptions of workers being incompetent come from two directions; for experienced consumers dealing with workers who are responsible for delivering resources yet unable to do so and for consumers who are asked by workers to do something seemingly impossible and sometimes unnecessary. In either case the caseworker is seen "as something to overcome" (Trey) since the incompetence tends to delay service provision. Again any recourse to solving these problems is seen as dangerous due to the potentiality for retaliation.

Consumers' Response to Employees

The combination of perceptions of power and negative attitudes and actions distance consumers from workers and set a negative tone in interactions. Consumers have several emotional reactions to the treatment they receive. They also attempt to manage service interactions.

Emotions. Consumers process many emotions when dealing with service interactions they perceive as negative yet are powerless to change.

> *It's like when you walk through the door it's oppressive. Then when the secretary looks at you like you're beneath them and you know, your caseworker does, you go out even more deflated.* (Becky)

Beyond the shame there is frustration and even anger. Consumers are met with disdain by employees; they are treated as lower class beings; they are dehumanized; they are "herded" as if cattle. The result is consumers who begin to feel resigned to these experiences. If they cannot change the treatment perhaps it is okay, perhaps they deserve

it; they begin to make excuses. They appear to begin to accept the dehumanization in some ways and become vulnerable through their consumption experience.

Managing the Interactions. In response to these emotions and feeling out of control, consumers attempt to and succeed in managing their service interactions emotionally, relationally, and procedurally. First, consumers actively attempt to manage their emotions in these interactions. They make excuses for worker treatment, they attempt to hide emotions, and they force themselves into resignation to numb the emotions, all in response to the treatment the encounter. Also, the emotional burden within the service interactions that is normally placed on service workers (Hoffman and Ingram 1992) shifts to the consumer. Consumers actively manage their personal emotions to keep the tone of service encounters positive. Sacha mentions that "you get more flies with honey" when describing how she tries to manage the emotions in interactions. Consumers also become responsible for relationship maintenance in captive service interactions. For example, Suzie "plays dumb" to get workers to spend more time with her, to feel sorry for her, and to avoid being seen as pushy. She is actively managing the relationship to get what she needs from the service. In both cases, consumers are fighting against the loss of power to regain a self-determined consumption experience. They exert control where they can, despite the attitudes, actions, incompetence, and perceived power of service workers.

Processes and Outputs

Processes involved in obtaining resources from this captive service are also viewed as problematic. Rather than focusing on the tangible resources received from the service (Brady and Cronin Jr. 2001), consumers focus on the procedural aspects of obtaining resources. When mentioned, resources amounts were seen as both insufficient

and generous; this dichotomy appears to relate to levels of family income. In either case, resource amounts were described as based on guidelines, not on what the individual consumer might or might not need. More important and relevant to consumers than resources were procedural issues surrounding being herded through the process, inconsistencies, lack of privacy, and waiting associated with receiving service, the difficulty with reporting changes, and what is seen as resource loss.

The herding metaphor was repeated by a number of participants as they discussed the processes involved in obtaining service. Others referred to being "shuffled" through the process. In each situation the feeling is one of things being moved around and acted upon rather than people receiving service. Inconsistencies develop as a theme in two ways. One way refers to the constant changing of caseworkers and how this contributes to the difficulty in developing relationships. Consumers are repeatedly burdened with needing to develop rapport and bring workers up to speed. The other aspect of inconsistencies is gaps in service delivery. Several consumers discussed dropped service, particularly during renewals. Participants state this is often blamed by workers on having too many cases. Some participants started sending in paper early and several reported calling multiple times during renewal processes to try to prevent a lapse in service occurs. Often these attempts are unsuccessful. These gaps in service create a strain on already tight budgets.

Privacy also has two components. The first is the feelings associated with disclosure. While consumers know and understand the need to prove eligibility, they also report discomfort with the level of intrusion that occurs. This intrusion is one of many dual meanings that occur as consumers understand the purpose of a particular rule or

guideline but still feel oppressed when the rules are enforced. The other aspect of privacy occurs because the space is open and quiet and everyone can hear everyone. Though these matters are often private, they play out in a public setting. Waiting is an issue at multiple points in the service process. Waiting to be seen, waiting to be approved, and waiting to receive resources. Waiting occurs throughout the service interaction. Waiting creates a large time gap between identification and fulfillment of need.

Two additional process issues are treated separately because of the gravity of the possible outcomes. The first is that changes equal problems. Hannah and Daniel were attempting to work themselves off of SNAP and in that process incurred multiple income changes over a short period of time. All changes are required by law to be reported; they did just that. As the reporting occurred though, service workers became increasingly frustrated by the continual paperwork. This ultimately resulted in Hannah being called a liar and threatened; she was told the changes must stop. She couldn't stop the changes; she could only not report or stop the service. They chose the latter, to the detriment of their family.

The last procedural issue I address here is the apparent cliff systems built into the service system. As consumers' income increases, their service resources decrease. This decrease may be less, equal to, or in some cases greater than increases in income. One consumer reported an increase in pay of just ten dollars too much and lost all services. This case is extreme, perhaps an erroneous report but it is not the actual loss that creates strain, it is the thought of loss and the associated decisions consumers make. As consumers are faced with the possibility of losing services, they make decisions that seem logical to them at the time. Scott (1976) reported that impoverished farmers planted the

same low yield crops year after year because they knew what to expect rather than take a chance on crops that could yield a surplus that could be sold at profit. This is a safety first response. Consumers make similar decisions in captive service such as social service.

Consumers' Responses to Processes and Outputs

Consumers are resourceful, as is seen in their attempts to manage service interactions in response to issues associated with service workers. In response to procedural issues, they are no less proactive. Consumers take on the task of managing the processes needed to acquire services. Sometimes proudly, other times with an air of shame, consumers profess to have learned how to navigate the bureaucracy and to push to get what they need. They reported learning what to say and what not to say. A slight omission about living arrangements can mean the difference between receiving services and being denied. "Failing" to report changes can mean extending services a few months, maintaining a higher level of services for a time, or even making Christmas better for children. Consumers learn to underreport or fail to disclose for a number of reasons. While consumers are active in the managing of their service interactions they admit readily to the illegalities associated with these actions. They take these illegalities seriously, knowing they can lose services if found out, but they continue with these calculated risks.

While working hard to manage their service receipt, consumers are not immune to the treatment they receive. Treatment that is considered equivalent to how cattle are treated is demeaning. Consumers have all the same emotional responses to the process as they do to the people that enact the process. Frustration, shame, anger, resignation, all are apparent in response to service processes. Added to these negative emotions, is the stress

of not knowing when the next lapse in service will occur and the inability to reach workers when there is a problem.

While Hannah and Daniel are an anomaly in my data, reports of consumers making the same choice exist in other literature (Shipler 2005), so I briefly discuss the problem of early exit. Early exit is the phenomenon of consumers leaving a captive service while still needing resources that are available only through that service. Exit is not an issue in some captive services, or might at most carry a relatively small financial penalty. However, in this service it means going without resources designated for food for a family. In the case of Hannah and Daniel, it resulted in the family becoming four months late on a mortgage before church and family came to their aid. The family still qualifies for service, but the service treatment they endured they refuse to endure again.

Finally, there are perverse incentives associated with many public services (Caplow 1994). These are the unintended consequences of service design. They are the cliff systems and other procedural components of social service delivery. Some of these unintended consequences are seen in discussion of other service responses, particularly the phenomenon of underreporting. Added to this is the "why try" phenomenon. "Teach a man to fish, they don't do that" was how John described it. Carly actively refused additional hours at work and her husband stayed home from work and suffered depression-related symptoms. Christie's husband chooses not to work. Shauna can't afford the lost services and daycare costs to work. Trey summarized it well when he said "it doesn't seem like the system actually works to get people off the program; they work harder to keep people on. The less you do the more you get." The assistance is not enough to survive on, yet working more results in losses too much to bear. The Working

Poor in this context appear stuck in more ways than one. Their choices are non-choices. They discuss these non-choices as matter-of-fact and unchangeable aspects of their lives. Though some discuss these situations as temporary, the depression and shame associated with dependency is no less painful.

Servicescape

The final aspect of service interactions from Brady and Cronin's (2001) conceptualization is the servicescape; this concept is important for consumers of captive services as well. Within the servicescape, Brady and Cronin discuss three attributes – ambient conditions, design, and social factors – as important to consumers' perceptions. These factors are represented in the data as seen below; within the servicescape I discuss three issues especially relevant to consumers' experiences – institutional, silent hearing, and others – that reflect these attributes.

"One of the most significant features of the total product is the place where it is bought or consumed" (Kotler 1973, p. 48). "Institutional" is the description given to the space where the service in this study is consumed. Atmospherics is concerned with the active management of the servicescape to invoke emotions in buyers (Kotler 1973); atmospherics appears lost on managers of social services. Everything in the space evokes "institution:" there is nothing for children and there is no privacy. The space is quiet, bordering on silent. Even as people actively avoid one another in the space, they cannot help but be involved with each other. There is a forced intimacy that makes consumers very uncomfortable. As Trey mentioned, "you don't want to connect" but consumers can hear everything that occurs with others in the space.

Self-congruity with others in a service space leads to positive perceptions of the space (Sirgy et al. 2000). Though consumers in this space are often there for similar reasons, there is a desire to avoid this truth. Consumers emotionally distance themselves from others in the space (Hill and Stephens 1997), exhibiting the belief that they are different in some way. This disconnect with others in the space is intimately entwined with overall discomfort in the space. The institutional-ness, the sterility, the silence, the forced intimacy are negatively perceived by consumers. Consumers exhibit holistic responses to the servicescape and negative perceptions of the space are connected to negative perceptions of the service (Bitner 1992).

Consumers' Responses to Servicescape

Consumers must consume within this environment; they cannot choose another space through which to receive services. There is a discomfort in the space and as a result of this discomfort, there is both nervous waiting and hurry. Consumers fidget, they ignore, they shuffle, they hurry when they can, all attempts to pass uncomfortable time. Few connections are made in this space, though everyone can hear everyone else's business. The institutional conditions and sterile design do not offer a welcoming feeling to consumers. Holistically consumed, this space borders on hostile to the emotions and psyche of consumers. "Walking in the door is oppressive enough" Becky states when describing what it feels like to be in the space. While a portion of this emotion is likely driven by the shame she associates with dependence, a portion is also likely driven by the apparent lack of concern for consumers in the design of this servicescape. This lack of concern, lack of active management of the space, is another factor contributing to consumer dehumanization.

Conclusion

Consumers' captive service experiences do not appear to be managed as assumed in SDL and service quality literature. Consumers want certain service experiences but they don't expect to receive them once they have been in the service for a while. Provider organizations delivering captive services are in control and have the power. Consumers are dependent. Both sides know the conditions of service delivery in this power imbalance. Organizations don't have to actively manage the service to the benefit of service consumers. The result appears to be largely "missing" service, which directly impacts consumers' lived captive service experience, their service interactions.

Social services have been described as following one of two paths – controlling or empowering consumers (Felice 2006); departures from "service" as described in the literature appear to contribute to the occurrence of the first path in this captive service. While the resultant emotional outcomes are negative, consumers take action in their service experiences. When they do not get those attributes of the experience considered prudent to service delivery, consumers actively seek to create them. They manage relationships, emotions, and procedures as they navigate the oppressive service interactions.

Consumers appear to forgive poor service in that they do not leave, but they cannot leave. They are not forgiving poor service, they are surviving it. Though expectations of service interactions have been lowered through encounters with the service, consumers still hold out hope of better interactions and praise those workers that offer them. Emotionally consumers have many responses to their service experience; the most pronounced are vulnerability and dehumanization. They are treated as less than

human and end up feeling this way about themselves. Most however hold out hope for some unknown change that will come their way to improve their life situation. Most cannot tell what this change may be, but they hope. Consumers' captive service experiences getting help do not completely crush the spirit of these Working Poor consumers: they get knocked down, but many keep going.

While SDL has been espoused as applicable to every service situation, in this context it appears that goods-dominant logic maintains sway in service provision. There is ample opportunity to utilize what is learned from successes in following an SDL perspective to improve service design from captive services. Service reform and redesign that is consumer centric is needed in services such as those in this research (Baker et al. 2005); SDL offers a service design to accomplish such change. Adding to SDL, service quality literature offers a foundation for service design that has been effective at eliciting positive service responses in many organizations. Combining these ideas with the findings in this research offers a more nuanced understanding of consumers' captive service experiences and consumers' responses to them; this understanding offers a foundation from which to build further knowledge of service outcomes for captive consumers. This research answers the call for Transformative Service Research to identify where, when, and how service contributes to the well-being of consumers. Moving forward, combining the multiple service perspectives and findings in this research can also inform transformative service reform and redesign.

Limitations and Future Directions

The primary limitation, and opportunity, in this research is that it is a qualitative examination of consumers' captive service experiences in a single service. Social service

is the sole service represented. While exploring only one service offers the benefit of a deep and nuanced understanding of captive service in this context but precludes generalizability to other captive service contexts. What is learned here was not meant to be generalized, but components of it will be transferable to other service contexts. Therein lies the opportunity to extend this research into other vital and impactful captive service contexts to continue understanding of the impact of captivity on consumers.

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Figure 1 – A Grounded Theory of Consumers' Captive Service Experience

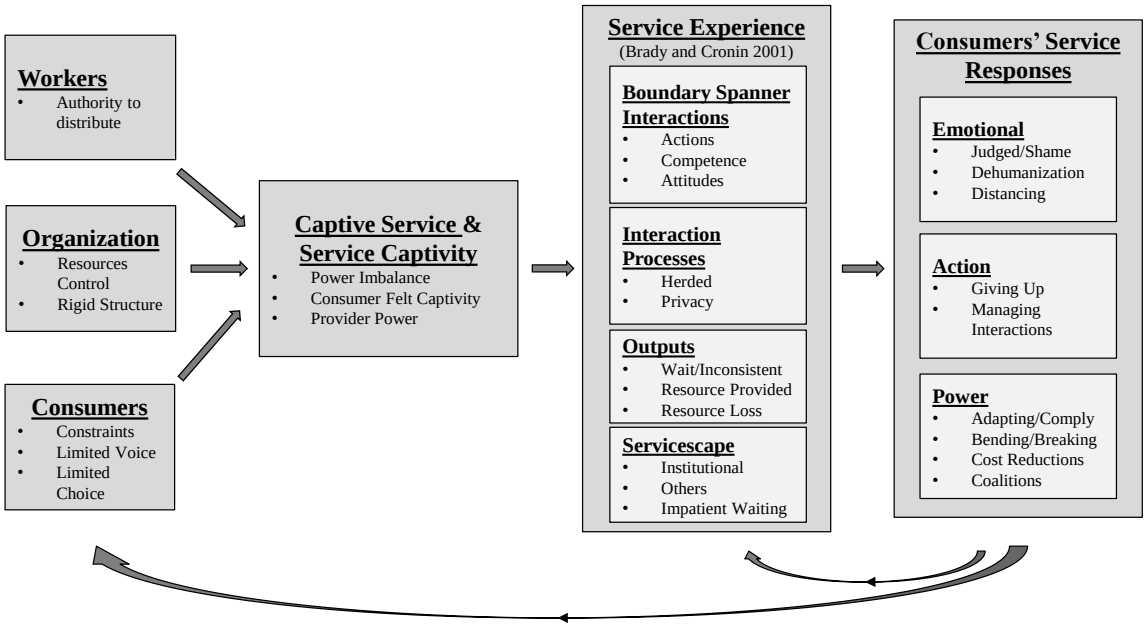

Table 1 – An Extended SDL Framework

	Goods-dominant	Service-dominant	**In Captive Situations??**	**Examples**
Primary unit of exchange	Goods	Specialized competencies or services	May or may not include operant resource provision in service offering	SNAP vs WIC
Role of goods	Goods are operand resources	Goods are transmitters of operant resources; intermediate products	Services serve as intermediaries for market acquisition of "end" service or product, do not always include operant resources	Food Stamp Benefits Cellular Service
Role of Customer	Recipient of goods; acted upon by provider (segmented to, distributed to, etc)	Co-creator of service; interacts with service provider	Accept service Comply with demands of system	Air Travel DMV Social Services
Firm-Customer Interaction	Customers are acted upon to create transactions (sold, distributed to, etc)	Customers are active participants in the exchange process	Little or no resource integration Providers are gatekeepers Consumers are captive	Social Services Health Services Air Travel Cruise Travel
Meaning of Value	Value-in-Exchange	Value-in-Use	Value-in-Use	
Source of Economic Growth	Wealth obtained by owning surplus goods	Wealth obtained by the application and exchange of specialized knowledge and skills	"Wealth" has multiple possible conflicting contributors	Exit - Social Service Loyalty - "Typical"

Table 2 – Participant Information

Participant Name	Demographics	Family Status	Services Received	Working Status	Currently Enrolled
Becky	Caucasian - 30's	Married (Trey) 5 Children	SNAP/WIC/ SoonerCare	Self-Employed Part-Time	Y
Trey	Hispanic - 40's	Married (Becky) 5 Children	SNAP/WIC/ SoonerCare	Self-Employed Part-Time	Y
Shauna	Hispanic/Middle Eastern - 30's	Married 2 Children and Pregnant	SNAP/WIC/ SoonerCare	Homemaker Husband Working	Y
Sacha	Caucasian - 40's	Married (John) 4 Children	SNAP/WIC/ SoonerCare	Homemaker Husband Working	Y
John	Hispanic - 30's	Married (Sacha) 4 Children	SNAP/WIC/ SoonerCare	Full-Time	Y
Hannah	Caucasian - 30's	Married (Daniel) 4 Children	SNAP/SoonerCare	Part-Time	N
Daniel	Caucasian - 30's	Married (Hannah) 4 Children	SNAP/SoonerCare	Unemployed	N
Ramona	Caucasian - 30's	Married 2 Children	SNAP/SoonerCare	Part-Time	Y
Joan	Caucasian - 30's	Divorced 5 Children	SNAP/WIC/SSI/ SoonerCare	Unemployed	Y
Mary	Caucasian - 30's	Divorced 3 Children	SNAP/WIC/SSI/ SoonerCare	Unemployed	Y
Tracy	African American - 20's	Single 1 Child	SNAP/WIC/TANF/ ChildCare/SoonerCare	Student	Y
Suzie	Caucasian - 30's	Single 3 Children and Pregnant	SNAP/WIC/SSI/ SoonerCare	Unemployed	Y
Michelle	Caucasian - 20's	Engaged (Tommy) 1 Child	SNAP/CPS/ SoonerCare	Unemployed	Y
Tommy	African American - 20's	Engaged (Michelle) 1 Child	SNAP/CPS/ SoonerCare	Part-Time Multiple Jobs	Y
Christie	Caucasian - 30's	Married 5 Children	SNAP/WIC/ SoonerCare	Full-Time	Y
Jessica	Caucasian - 40's	Married 4 Children	SNAP/WIC/SSI/CPS/ SoonerCare	Unemployed	Y
Kenzie	Caucasian - 20's	Married 1 Child	SNAP/WIC/ SoonerCare	Homemaker Husband Working	Y
Stacy	Caucasian - 20's	Married 1 Child	SNAP/WIC/ SoonerCare	Homemaker Husband Working	Y
Sammie	Caucasian - 20's	Married (Tom) Pregnant	SNAP/WIC/ SoonerCare	Homemaker Husband Working	Y
Tom	Caucasian - 20's	Married (Sammine)	SNAP/WIC/ SoonerCare	Full-Time	Y
Tara	Caucasian - 40's	Divorced 1 Child	SNAP/WIC/SSI/ SoonerCare	Self-Employed Full-Time	Y
Sandy	Caucasian - 40's	Married 3 Children	SNAP/WIC/ SoonerCare	Student Part-Time Employed	N
Karly	Native American - 20's	Married 1 Child	SNAP/WIC/ SoonerCare	Part-Time	Y
Caroline	Caucasian	Single 2 Children	SNAP/WIC/Section8/ SoonerCare	Part-Time	Y
Nichole	Caucasian	Single Pregnant	SNAP/WIC/ SoonerCare	Unemployed	Y

Appendix A –Informed Consent Document

The research is entitled "Social Service Delivery: A Services Marketing Perspective" The investigator is Steven Rayburn, doctoral student, under supervision of Marlys Mason, faculty, at Oklahoma State University Department of Marketing.

The purpose of this project is to explore service delivery in social services. We hope to better understand service delivery in this domain and what makes up high or low quality service interactions between clients and social services.

Procedure and Confidentiality: The interview will last about one hour and will be audio-recorded. The interviewer will ask questions about your interactions with social services. You can chose not to answer any of the questions the interviewer asks. You also can decide at any time to end the interview.

The privacy of your participation will be maintained in the following way: You will not be called by your name in any part of the interview, and your participation will be identified only by a number assigned by your interviewer (e.g. participant 4 or pseudonym). All of your information will be saved in a file only the investigator has access to. The results of this investigation can be used in presentations or in academic publications. The person who transcribes the interview will be informed to take out any information that could be linked to you. Your audio recordings will be destroyed after they have been transcribed into written form.

We do not believe there exist risks outside of the usual for you, but, if for some reason you feel uncomfortable, or you feel stressed during the interview, you can terminate your participation immediately.

To compensate for your time and participation we will give you twenty dollars cash. Otherwise, you will not benefit directly with your participation. We hope that the results of the investigation will help to better understand service delivery in social service provision.

If you want more information about your participation in the study, do not hesitate to contact the investigators Steven Rayburn, by email steven.rayburn@okstate.edu or at (405) 744-5109, or Marlys Mason, by email at m.mason@okstate.edu or at (405) 744-5109. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Consent: I understand what my participation consists of and I am at least 18 years old. I understand that I will receive a copy of this document, and I give my permission to take part in this study.

_____

signature

Appendix B – Preliminary Interview Protocol

Opening of interview

After informed consent, discuss overarching goal of the research is to understand what service delivery is like in the social service context.

Discuss duration of receipt of social service, why/how on service, family status (may be handled at end of interview rather than beginning.

Transition to informant

Begin by inquiring about service delivery, customer service, and/or service quality understanding or perception in a recent service interaction in which the informant was involved.

Tell me about a typical social service interaction…

Ask informant to describe high quality service delivery in SNAP (food stamp) provision. Request informant think to a particular interaction with their caseworker and give detailed examples of this.

Tell me about an exceptional good interaction you have had with your caseworker…

Ask informant to describe low quality service delivery in SNAP (food stamp) provision. Request informant think to a particular interaction with their caseworker and give detailed examples of this.

Tell me about a particularly bad interaction you have had with your caseworker…

Ask informant his/her perception of how this concept of customer service or service quality applies to the interaction they have with caseworkers in SNAP (food stamp) provision.

How do you feel service quality applies to social services?

Further areas of inquiry:

How does the caseworker impact the provision of SNAP?

How might your caseworker impact the resources you receive?

How does informant feel, emotionally and psychologically, during and/or after the interaction with the caseworker?

Do the meetings you have with your caseworker change the way you feel on a given day?

Does the informant see options other than social service to meet needs?

What would you do if you were unable to continue getting this service?

Final question opens discussion up to issues the informant would like to address

Is there anything else that you feel is important to discuss for better understanding of how interactions between caseworkers and clients such as yourself impact people receiving assistance?

Is there anything else you feel I should know about social service that would be important to understanding these interactions?

Appendix C – Sample Coding Scheme

Interview Responses	Open Codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
had to interupt to be acknowledged	Ignoring	Actions	Boundary Spanner Interactions
didn't make a lot of eye contact	Impersonal		
she told us "this needs to be straightened out or else"	Power Exertion		
some of them that don't seem to know what they are doing	Knowing How	Competence	
they wouldn't get a form, and they wouldn't get a form	Lost paperwork		
she got behind and there was nobody to do it, which is not my fault	Waiting		
a positive interaction is warm, friendly, and happy…	Valance	Attitudes	
they were not understanding, they were not helpful . . . Had a real nasty attitude	No empathy		
they insinuate	Judgment		

Appendix D – Audit Trail

Starting Philosophical Position	Following a Pramatic Philosophical approach I am primarily concerned with the substantive problem. I focus on what I see as anomolies in current service situtions. I am a service researcher at the core and look primarily at interactions between consumers and providers. I research at the cusp of the organization and as such am influenced by both strategy and consumer behavior issues. Through all, it is the issue, or problem, that is important.
Considering Data Collection and Analysis	Since I follow a Pragmatic approach I ten toward using data collection methods and analysis that answers the research question and can provide information to solving the problems. Since the service I was researching and the data I sought was a private affair for many consumers qualitative inquiry was the most suitable approach. Since I wanted to understand consumers' service experiences I thought first a phenomenological approach was appropriate but as I came to understand I wanted to develop a theory of this experience I moved to grounded theory supported by phenomenological understanding. This allows me to develop a theory of consumers' captive service experiences based on thier lived experiences.
Institutional Review Board Oversight	I completed required computer based IRB training. I aquired IRB approval for the data collection process and began colelction.
Researcher Training	As a researcher I was formally trained in quantitative approaches and methods. Since I was embarking to answer questions that, in my opinion, did not lend them to this form of study I understood I needed trainining. I sought an advisor who could guide me and I enrolled in classes specific to the methods I would employ. I began reading to understand the philosophical stance of interpretivist researh. In this process I learned I was a Pragmatist. I completed the formal study. I learned the methods that would lead me to answer my questions.
Researcher as a Participant of the Service	While reading these literatures for information, it is important to acknowledge that I am a recipient of the very service I am studying. This helps in the fact that I understand what people are going through, but it can hurt if I allow it to color my interpretation. This gives me a level of comfort with participants in the research and them with me, since I disclose, that might have been difficult to achieve otehrwise. To avoid hinderance of the research and interpretation process I used a form of bracketing. I did not forget my expereince, though I removed myself from direct contact with the service for any personal reasons during the first 8 - 9 months of the study, my wife conducted any contact needed, I only interacted with the service to "study it". I put personal experience aside, I relied instead on my understanding of services and power developed in literature review to interpret what I learned. Toward the end of the data collection and analysis process I began interacting with the serviec personally again to access, personally, my findings.
Literature Review	Prior to collection of data I completed a review of literature of multiple areas of study that I thought might pertain to captive service expereinces. I reviewed vulnerablity , social service , power-dependence, choice, and service literatures. I combined these areas to inform my understanding of consumption while experiencing constraint and what is seen as "appropriate" service delivery. I brought these together to begin to "see" how "service" might vary in constrained (captive) contexts, based on evidence offered in these literatures.
Bracketing	As described before, I left my presuppositions at the door of each interview. I carried into these only questions guided by the "accepted" form of service delivery found in service literature.

Appendix D – Audit Trail (continued)

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework	From the above literatures I developed a picture of what I thought the interaction between consumers and providers might look like. I considered what the characteristics of each might be. I realized that this interaction was in reality a "black box" that I was trying to peer into. This confirmed the need to move forward with qualitative methods, to undertand what was happening to consumers in these interactions. In this process I further deliniated what a captive service is, what service captivity is, and how power and dependence come to play in these service experiences.
Interview Protocal Development/Interview Structure	I developed an interview protocal that reflected concepts important in service literature; however, this was undergirded with the primary questions asking what the consumers' experience is. A variant of the Critical Incident Technique was used to start interviews and probing was used after
Participant Selection	Participants were selected who had interactions with the captive service in question. They were sought out, first, through personal contacts, and secondly through snowballing techniques. Some participants became quite active in the recruiting process.
Data Collection and Storage	Primary data collection was in-depth semi-structured interviews. This was supplemented with site observations. Data was stored in electronic and hardcopy formats.
Raw Data	Voice recordings, Transcribed Interviews, Field Notes
Coding/Memoing/Analysis	Transcriptions were coded using open coding. Note cards were made for each open code. I chose not to use software to perform coding or data analysis, as I feel I can "see" more using cards and "touching" consumers' experience. From open coding, axial and selective coding was conducted. Prior to getting to this point, first round interviews were open coded twice. Second round data were added and this process was repeated. This allowed a crystalization of codes to emerge and from these a priliminary "framework" to evolve. Through this process I utilize memoing to begin to tell the "story". Data coding and analysis were iterative and simultaneous after the first round of data was collected and coded. This allowed for an evolving data collection process, for identification of "gaps" in the framework, and for a grounded theory of consumers' captive service experience to emerge.
Thematization	Themes emerged in the data and these were named based first on participants actual words and secondly on understanding of and connection to established service concepts.
Trustworthiness Techniques	Data were collected from participants and observations were conducted. Data is presented using thick description, allowing consumers to tell their own story. Member Checking was conducted to insure the story is accurate.
Output	A theory of consumers' captive service experince is presented. This is presented from both an abstract and a concrete perspectives. This presents an abstracted view of "service" and what it means theoretically to service researchers. It also presents a concrete view of "service" in captivity that can inform service designers and managers. This allows a holistic understanding of consumers' experience in this service but also how findings in this service might transfer to other captive services.

Appendix E – IRB Approval Letter

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date	Thursday, January 19, 2012
IRB Application No	BU1140
Proposal Title	Social Service Delivery: A Services Marketing Perspective
Reviewed and Processed as:	Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved **Protocol Expires: 1/18/2013**

Principal Investigator(s):

Steven Rayburn	Marye Mason
218 Hanner	418A Business
Stillwater, OK 74078	Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 46 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia M. Kennison

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Steven W. Rayburn II

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: SERVICE PROVISION WHEN CONSUMERS HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO: A GROUNDED THEORY OF CONSUMERS' CAPTIVE SERVICE EXPERIENCE

Major Field: Marketing

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Marketing at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2013.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Business Administration at University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky in 2007.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Marketing at University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky in 1996.

Experience:

2003 – 2008	ALDI Grocery Stores Store Manager
1999 – 2003	Sears Home Improvement Division Sales Manager/Salesperson
1997 – 1999	Kingfish Restaurants Manager
1993 – 1997	Lancaster's, Special Events People Operations and Event Manager

Professional Memberships:

American Marketing Association