
A study on repeat offenders' experience in society between prison sentences in Iceland



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“[...] Criminals are a part of our society and will probably always exist. Although nobody wants to be a criminal, it seems that there are new [...] criminals being created and others that are not able to get out of the tire tracks and continue on the path of crime despite being put in prison. These individuals that brake the laws again and again are often called repeat offenders and are very expensive for the society and therefore it must be very important for the society to do everything in their power to lead these individuals on the right path [...]” (Óli, Litla-Haun).

Abstract

Studies have pointed out that incarceration can have various negative effects on the individual that can lead to recidivism. After release, offenders often find it hard to reintegrate into society. In addition, they often come across difficulties when re-establishing their position among family and friends. Other risk factors, such as financial instability and lack of opportunities on the labor market due to stigmatization, could lead to recidivism. During the literature review on the matter, two theories were appropriate to the study subject, social bond theory and labelling theory. These theories and the literature contributed to the interpretation of the results. The aim of the present thesis was to gain a better understanding on repeat offenders' experience out in society between prison sentences, which in their cases led to reoffending. Their experience was examined by interviewing twelve repeat offenders between 23 and 43 years old that were currently inmates at Sogn and Litla-Hraun prisons in Iceland using hermeneutic phenomenology as the research approach. The results of the study revealed that the inmates did not seem to be permanently marginalized from the labor market. It was furthermore unclear to which extent relationship with family and friends affected recidivism. Moreover, drug and alcohol problems seemed to have significant effect on inmates' behavior in society. The repeat offenders generally experienced themselves as outsiders in society. This was due to various reasons, such as the repeat offenders' distorted view on social norms and stigmatization they came across while in the process of reintegration. As a result, it appears that it was easier for the repeat offenders to continue their criminal behavior instead of adapting in society as law-abiding citizens.

Introduction

In the last two decades, the focus within criminology has been somewhat on 'what works' in relation to former inmates after release, when reintegrating into society (LeBel et al., 2008:133-134). Rehabilitating former inmates and researching the causes of crime are beneficial for everyone (Garland, 2001:180). Studies with the topic of re-entry have mostly been focusing on the best way to predict the failure or success of inmates before they are released. In addition, which factors are possibly related to failure or success after release (LeBel et al., 2008:133-135).

When an individual is released from prison, he has finished paying for his wrongdoings. He has completed his formal punishment (Tranæs, 2008:113). Like most determined offenders, he will desert his former criminal lifestyle as he ages (LeBel et al., 2008:131-132). After release a new chapter in his life begins where he has to be integrated into society again as a functional citizen, both socially and in the labor market. How easy the reintegration will be depends on how society perceives the offender after his time in prison and how the offender looks at himself. The society has to be open-minded for his re-entry and accept him as an individual that is ready to become a part of the society again (Tranæs, 2008:113). However, society often struggles with helping individuals to reintegrate after release from prison (Petersilia, 2005:66). The situation can be difficult as *"[i]f the choice is between subjecting offenders to greater restriction or else exposing the public to increased risk, today's common sense recommends the safe choice every time."* (Garland, 2001:180). As a result, offenders' welfares could be ignored (Garland, 2001:180). However, it also depends on if the offender is ready to be integrated into society (Tranæs, 2008:113). After release, individuals often experience a difficult phase of coping with their new status in the society, the status of being a former inmate and convicted offender. Due to stigmatization, the individual is punished for his crime by the society after release as others are alerted by the possible danger (Garland, 2001:181). Moreover, statistics have shown that the risk of relapsing into crime is highest in the first year of the follow-up period (Graunbøl et al., 2010:8). However, in criminology, the general view is that the degree of recidivism is usually smaller in countries with fewer people and culturally integrated countries than in those with a larger population and diverse culture (Gunnlaugsson, 2008:89).

The aim of this thesis was to gain an understanding on how repeat offenders in Iceland experience their time in society between prison sentences. In other words, their perspectives on different aspects of their life in society that led to reoffending. This was examined by conducting twelve semi-structured interviews with men between 23 and 43 that were serving in two of the five active prisons in Iceland, *Litla-Hraun* and *Sogn* (Fangelsismálastofnun, n.d.-b).

Two theories were used in the present thesis that resulted from the literature found on the topic of interest. Further, the theories as well as the literature contributed to the interpretation of the repeat offenders' experience outside prison. The first theory was the labeling theory, which explains society's tendency to label individuals as criminals that show deviant behavior (Bernburg, 2009:187-207). The second theory is the social bond theory that entails that crime occurs because of weak or broken bonds between the offender and society (Hirschi, 2002:16).

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will present literature found on the matter. The literature involves numbers on recidivism in all of Scandinavia. Furthermore, a section on offenders' status after release from prison in both Denmark and in Iceland will be presented. Then recidivism in Iceland will be further highlighted and at last, the correctional system in Iceland will be shortly introduced. In chapter 2, I will present the problem formulation, followed by a short chapter (3) on how recidivism and repeat offenders are defined in this thesis. Then (4), a presentation of the theoretical background where the two theories will be further defined. Chapter 5 entails the various methods used in this thesis, such as the research strategy, methods used to collect the data, research methods as well as information about the research field and the access to it. Moreover, ethical considerations and validity of the data gathered will also be presented. At last, a section on the recruitment process and a short introduction of each participant as well as coding- and analysis strategy will follow. The results of this study are presented in Chapter 6 where they have been divided into several themes. Following a discussion (7) of the results and conclusion (8).

Chapter 1 - Background

A part of the research preparation is to gain an understanding of the issue that was studied. In this chapter, studies and reports on recidivism in Scandinavia will be presented. Furthermore, the offenders' status before and after release in Denmark and in Iceland will be highlighted followed by studies on recidivism in Iceland and an introduction of the Icelandic correctional system. The following studies and reports give a good view of the problem this thesis will attempt to gain an understanding on. It is important to have knowledge of the degree of recidivism in Iceland compared to other countries in Scandinavia to know where the country stands. In addition, to know the circumstances of offenders in Iceland according to reports is essential to be better equipped when gathering data.

1.1 Scandinavian statistics on recidivism

The prison services in Scandinavia created the Northern Recidivism Group. The group's job was to gather information on recidivism (in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) and assemble a report where they presented merged numbers on recidivism. The report was released in 2010, but the numbers in the research are from 2005 to 2007 (Graunbøl et al., 2010).

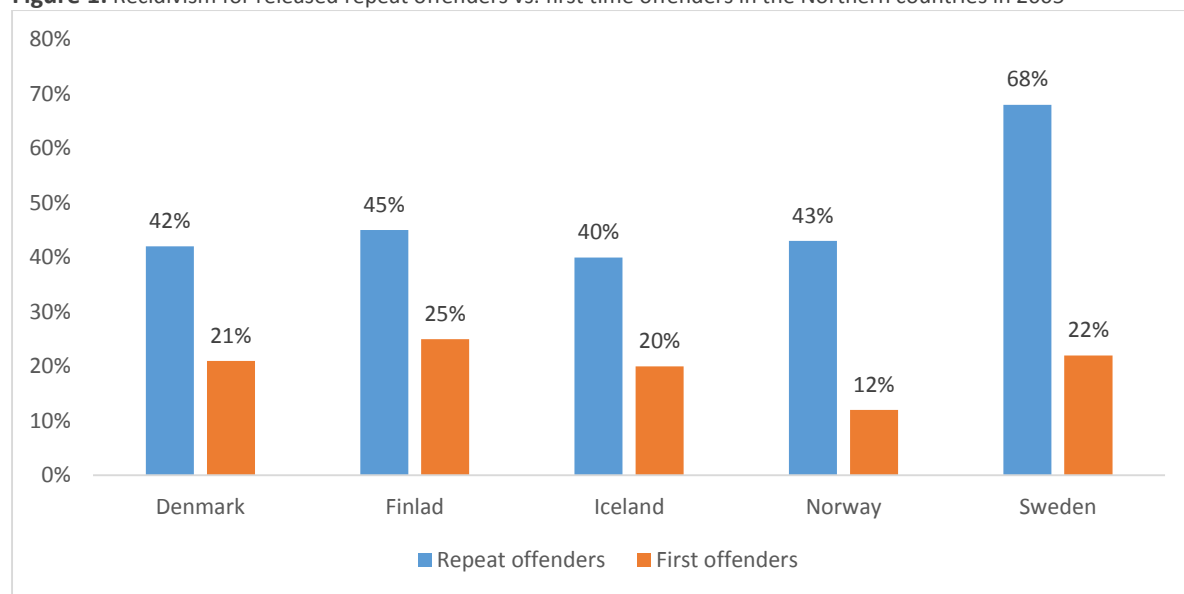
Before gathering data for the Northern countries, the group had to create a definition of the term recidivism that encompassed all of the Northern countries. Thus, in the report, recidivism was defined as a relapse into crime where the individual had a new conviction within two years after release. This included unconditional sentences and supervised probations (*dom med vilkår*) (Graunbøl et al., 2010:9). However, the numbers for supervised probations will not be included in the following section.

In 2005, 185 individuals were released from prison in Iceland. According to the report on recidivism, 28% of the released males were convicted again in Iceland within two years. The only Northern country with a lower percentage of recidivism was Norway with 21%. Denmark was in third place, only one percent higher than Iceland. Then came Finland with 37% and finally Sweden with a whopping 43% that relapsed (Graunbøl et al., 2010:15,26).

According to the Scandinavian report, there was a strong relation between a former prison sentence and the risk of relapsing into crime. Further examination of the numbers for those

that relapsed into crime after release in 2005 showed that 40% had a former conviction compared to 20% that did not have a former prison sentence in Iceland. This number of recidivism is the lowest of all the Scandinavian countries, as illustrated in figure 1. However, the other Northern countries were not far behind, except for Sweden (Graunbøl et al., 2010:27-29).

Figure 1: Recidivism for released repeat offenders vs. first time offenders in the Northern countries in 2005



Note: Numbers received from Graunbøl et al., 2010

After examining the characteristics of those that relapsed into crime, the report presented the ideal individual in risk of recidivism. These characteristics involved having a previous conviction where the individual was between 25 and 44 years old and had served a prison sentence that was less than two years (Graunbøl et al., 2010:28-29,41-42).

Factors that can lead to relapse into crime were not studied while gathering the numbers for recidivism for the Scandinavian report. Nevertheless, the group explained causes that could possibly have an effect on relapse into crime. The offender's circumstances during imprisonment could be a risk factor for recidivism, such as drug abuse or social relationship with other offenders. Other factors could be increased time from prosecution to conviction and/or the police detection rates. A low socioeconomic status, such as education opportunities, income and job opportunities, was also a possible risk factor, as well as social ties to friends and family outside the prison (Graunbøl et al., 2010: 48).

1.2 Offenders' status before and after release in Denmark

Linda Kjær Minke (2012) wrote about the inside life of a prison where she interviewed inmates in her book *Fængslets indre liv*. Her research, which was a combination of quantitative and qualitative research, consisted of more than a year of fieldwork where she examined prison life. Minke pointed out in her research that over half of the inmates that were being released expressed that they would probably not commit another crime. On the contrary, 17% expressed that they would most likely be convicted for a crime again. This number (17%) is lower than numbers for recidivism shown in Denmark, as the number for recidivism in 2010 was almost 34% (Justitsministeret, 2013).

The offenders that were soon to be released appeared to be both glad and stressed by the upcoming event. The stress was caused by being released to the unknown, where they did not have an education or a job and were anxious about reintegrating into society. Those that had families felt they would have to reestablish their position in their family. However, most of them explained that if they, their family or close friends would be exposed to crime, they would without a doubt defend them, even if that would cost them their freedom.

The results from Minke's (2012:273-278) research showed that because of an emotional brutalization that occurs while incarcerated, the offenders often have social as well as psychological difficulties when released. Therefore, it is necessary that psychosocial support is offered to the offenders after release from prison to prevent recidivism because some of the offenders need greater support to cope when starting over.

Moving over to Danish offenders' status after release; in the book *Løsladt – og hvad så*, Landersø and Tranæs (2009:190) discussed that serving a prison sentence and being marginalized socially as well as in the labor market could have a significant effect on recidivism. However, they argued that the relapse could just as well be solely the result of social marginalization because of the people's perception of serving in prison instead of the prison sentence itself. No matter what, incarceration will always have some effect on the offender.

Landersø and Tranæs (2009:206-209) gathered numbers on socioeconomic status, opportunities on labor market and support, as well as education status before and after time in prison in Denmark, where they focused on 40 year-old repeat offenders. They pointed out

that this group of repeat offenders was relatively weak, both socially and on the labor market. Furthermore, there was not a big difference between those in a relationship and those single within the group. Comparing the inmates' educational level to the average in the Danish society only 26% had an education beyond secondary school (9th grade)¹, versus 63% in general. A great difference is also visible on the labor market where the employment rate in general was 85% while it was only 43% for those previously incarcerated. The length of the prison sentence also had an effect on how difficult it was for the former inmates to re-establish. In addition, when they obtained a job, they had a significantly lower income than the average individual. Even five years after release and active on the labor market, they had not reached the same level of income as before the prison sentence. This shows the negative effect a prison sentence can have on former inmates, as they do not receive the same opportunities as others in society. This is consistent with Tranæs's (2008:134-136) research where he studied offenders between 15 to 59 years old. He pointed out that the offenders were a marginalized group that had difficulties holding on to a job when compared to those with no criminal record. Additionally, they were in a higher degree dependent on assistance from the government. It appears that former inmates are exposed to informal punishment by society in Denmark.

1.3 Offenders' status before and after prison sentence in Iceland

When offenders are about to start their sentence in Iceland a personal report is made where they are asked about their social- and drug history. These offenders have different backgrounds and it varies in which condition they are physically and mentally when they start their sentence (Sæmundsdóttir, 2004).

Margrét Sæmundsdóttir conducted two studies where she examined inmates and their status before and after their prison sentence. One of the studies was published in Iceland in 2003. In the study, Sæmundsdóttir (2003:58) gathered information about the social status of offenders and their crimes between 1998 and 2003. In those years, 640 male offenders participated in the research. Of those, 282 (44%) had served a prison sentence before.

¹ The mandatory education in Denmark includes 0st to 9th grade.

Sæmundsdóttir's (2004) other research was conducted from 1999 to 2004 and its sample consisted of 897 inmates with the average age of 31.7 years. Almost half, or 46%, of the participants relapsed into crime. As seen in Table 1 below, the biggest portion of those that relapsed did so within a year after release (36%). Those that relapsed into crime in a year or less were generally between the age of 21 and 25 (almost 25%). Moreover, there was not a substantial difference in how many relapsed into crime after 2, 3 and 4 years or more.

Table 1 The time from release to recidivism

<i>Period:</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
After 1 year or less	146	36
After 2 years	85	21
After 3 years	97	24
After 4 years or more	80	19
<i>Total</i>	408	100

Note: Numbers received from Sæmundsdóttir, 2004.

Sæmundsdóttir also gathered data on inmates' status right before release, such as their education level. Little over half had only finished secondary school (10th grade)², and a quarter had dropped out of high school³, which resulted in a total of 80% that did not have an education beyond what is mandatory in Iceland. However, half of those being released had a steady job waiting or were in school (Sæmundsdóttir, 2004).

1.4 Recidivism in Iceland

In Iceland, the average number of inmates in 2013 was 135, which makes the rate per 100,000 population around 42 inmates (Fangelsismálastofnun, 2014). Prison sentences in Iceland are generally not long or harsh and the use of punishment is more for condemning the criminal behavior than to stigmatize the convicted individual. When incarcerated, an effort is made for the offenders to be involved in their families' lives. Additionally, inmates receive help to be equipped for attaining a respectful job after release in order to minimize the risk of relapse.

² Secondary school in Iceland is up to 10th grade, which is for teenagers that are 16 years old.

³ High school in Iceland is for teenagers from 16 to 20 years old.

There is no significant evidence that indicates that former offenders are exposed to a permanent stigmatization after release from prison. The Icelandic society rather looks at the offenders as having problems that can be fixed. A former Icelandic police chief argued that ex-offenders could clear their name and start over if they truly wanted to, without problems. He continued saying that the level of preconception towards the ex-offenders (label) in Iceland is at a minimum (Baumer et al., 2002:46). Icelanders appear to be highly open-minded and tolerant towards offenders. Furthermore, Baumer et al., (2002:46-47) argued that having a criminal record in Iceland is not a major deal breaker when applying for work. That indicates offenders are not permanently stigmatized for their actions.

Numbers for recidivism in the recent years in Iceland show a reduction in recidivism. Table 2 shows how many served time in prison in the years of 2009-2013. Those serving in prison are divided into two groups in the table; offenders that were serving a sentence in prison for the first time and those that had served before. These numbers reveal that the percentage of those that relapsed into crime declined between 2009 and 2013.

Table 2. First time offenders vs. repeat offenders sentencing in prison in Iceland, 2009-2013

	2009:		2010:		2011:		2012:		2013:	
Convicts:	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
First sentence	121	59.9	107	62.2	153	70.8	146	63.5	145	68.1
Has served before	81	40.1	65	37.8	63	29.2	84	36.5	68	31.9
Total:	202	100	173	100	216	100	230	100	213	100

Note: Numbers received from Fangelsismálastofnun, 2013.

The highest rates for recidivism in Iceland in 2009-2013 was in the age group of 21 to 35, plus the age group 41-50 (Fangelsismálastofnun, 2013). Comparing these numbers to the Scandinavian report above, the age groups are similar. However, in Iceland the offenders seemed to relapse into crime in younger age than the overall average of the Scandinavian report.

1.5 The correctional system in Iceland

A general idea is that the individual has the power to choose his path in life due to free will and therefore, offenders have to take responsibility for their actions. The exceptions are individuals that are not responsible for their actions because of their young age or illness. Punishing those that break the law is perceived as an appropriate action and likely to reduce crime rates in the society. The purpose of the punishment is therefore to punish individuals for their deviant act and as a result, scare others away from committing the same act later on (Gunnlaugsson, 2000).

In Iceland in 2005, a new bill was created on punishment where the government focused on implementing various innovations that had been enforced in other Scandinavian countries. These innovations included rehabilitation and the creation of an overview on the issue (Ríkisendurskoðun, 2010:13). After release from prison, the former inmate has to reintegrate into the society. Therefore, it is beneficial for society and the offender to reduce the risk of recidivism (Fangelsismálastofnun, 2004:1-2).

The main goal of the Prison Services is to ensure that the sentences are carried out securely. When an individual is found guilty, his sentence should start as soon as possible. The sentenced individual should be guaranteed a humane, safe and well-organized sentence. In addition, the communication between the employees and the sentenced person should be based on respect (Ríkisendurskoðun, 2010:13). The inmate's circumstances while serving his sentence should be encouraging in order for him to face his problems. However, in order to achieve these conditions it is important that the Prison Services ensure that an individualized strategy is created for each inmate. This strategy should involve the progression of the sentence for each inmate in the beginning of his punishment. Relevant factors within the strategy would include the inmate's need for treatment, a risk assessment, his ability to study and/or work as well as his need for psychological-, social-, and other support. When the individualized strategy is in place, it would be applied during the inmate's sentence in prison with help from professionals. Throughout the prison sentence, the strategy would be reviewed on regular basis. When it is time for the inmate to be released from prison, the Prison Services would help him find appropriate residence and help him re-establish his relationship with his family and/or friends. Furthermore, the Prison Services want to ensure

that the inmate knows how to seek help and reintegrate into the society (Fangelsismálastofnun, 2004:1-2). Yet, it can be difficult for the individual to recognize the various authorities and to maintain the motivation needed to switch over to a non-criminal path if they are repeatedly referred to others when reaching out for help from a certain authority because of lack of resources. (Jørgensen, Kyvsgaard, Pedersen, & Pedersen, 2012:37). However, there are diverse resources that former inmates in Iceland can apply for and participate in in order to reintegrate into society after incarceration. These resources are, for example, organizations that help them get back to the labor market and rehab facilities to help them get or stay clean of drugs and/or alcohol. Moreover, they have the right to get financial aid from their local authorities and help in finding a residence to name a few. However, there are no official records on how many former inmates use these resources. Therefore, it is neither possible to gain information on the usage of the resources between years nor which types of resources are mostly used. However, many of those on probation are waiting for a social housing from their local authority and many are dealing with insecurity on the rental market. Furthermore, many of those on probation ask for help from the social workers at the Prison Services to get treatments (D. Hilmarsdóttir, personal communication, April 28, 2015).

Chapter 2 - The problem formulation

The risk factors for recidivism vary and it is important to address the problem from different viewpoints to be able to tackle the issue. The dominant factors that predict whether a person relapses into crime are gender, age, criminal history and family background. Moreover, problems with alcohol and/or drugs are also important risk factors (LeBel et al., 2008:133-135). Studies have shown that the length of the prison sentence increases the likelihood of recidivism. In addition, a prison sentence has a negative effect on individuals that are serving for the first time. Therefore, prisons should not be considered as a way to reduce crime. Instead, a prison sentence has counterproductive effect on the incarcerated (Minke, 2012:271).

Former inmates often struggle financially and therefore have difficulties affording their own residence after release from prison. The stigma that follows conviction and incarceration makes it difficult for former inmates to find work. All these factors can increase the likelihood of recidivism (LeBel et al., 2008:133-135). Furthermore, because of this lack of opportunities offenders see more benefit in continuing on their criminal path. Individuals are usually guided by different rewards and penalties. The decision of committing crime again can be seen as the consequence of the offenders' benefits in crime versus the disadvantages they come across in society (Hauge, 1996:304-306). Moreover, after release, offenders often find it hard to re-establish their relationship with their family. Yet, if they are in a good marriage, they have the emotional support and the motivation to abandon former criminal activity after release (LeBel et al., 2008:133-135).

The offenders' way of thinking can also serve as an individual risk factor for recidivism. LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway (2008:136-137) presented four themes to explain why offenders turn their backs on criminal behavior on one hand and continue on their criminal path on the other hand. The first theme is *hope and self-efficacy*, which explains the individuals' perception and self-confidence that they can achieve their personal goals. It entails the desire for a certain outcome and the confidence in their ability to achieve the desired outcome. Secondly, *shame and remorse*; Feeling shame is one of the reasons ex-inmates want to stop criminal behavior. However, according to LeBel et al., (2008), shame does not have a direct impact on recidivism. Thirdly, *internalizing stigma*, which explains that stigmatization, results

in further recidivism. If ex-inmates identify themselves as being outcasts in society, which is unacceptable for their re-entry, they are more likely to continue on their criminal path. Lastly, the *alternative identities*; Stigmatization can also have the opposite effect on the individual, where he could develop a prosocial identity, for example as the good father, husband or the provider.

As a result from the presented literature, I wanted to gain a greater knowledge of repeat offenders' point of view on their time in society leading to reoffending (in Iceland). Thus, the research question is as following:

How do repeat offenders in Iceland experience the time in society between prison sentences?

As the definition of *recidivism* and *repeat offenders* can vary, it is important to establish what they constitute in this study. Therefore, the definition of the two concepts will be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 - Concepts

3.1 Recidivism

The word recidivism is defined as relapse into crime and is used for offenders that have formerly served a sentence in prison and commit another crime. In some cases it is called recidivism when an individual has served a prison sentence at least twice (Reber & Reber, 2001), in other cases it depends on the time between convictions (see Graunbøl et al., 2010).

Recidivism has usually been interpreted as the extent of either programmatic or individual failure. This indicates that either the punishment and/or treatment utilized has been unsuccessful or the individual has refused to change. However, recidivism can also be understood as a measure of social failure. That indicates that the offender is not successfully reintegrated into the society (Baumer, Wright, Kristinsdottir, & Gunnlaugsson, 2002:40).

When measuring recidivism in Scandinavia, the countries do not have the same definition on what constitutes recidivism. They use different methods in gathering numbers on the matter. In Sweden, the concept of recidivism includes those that relapse into crime within one to three years after release. In Denmark, recidivism includes those that relapse into crime within two years after release (Graunbøl et al., 2010:9). However, Graunbøl et al. (2010:9) pointed out that the Prison Services in Iceland, Finland and Norway do not gather statistics on recidivism on a regular basis and do therefore not have a specific definition for recidivism.

When gathering data for the present study, recidivism did not cover probation but only unconditional sentences, which entailed prison. Furthermore, the concept involved those that had relapsed into crime and received another prison sentence, regardless of the time between the convictions. As a result, the group of interest to this study, were men that were currently serving in prison in Iceland and had served time in prison at least once before.

3.2 Repeat offenders

According to the Icelandic penal law, individuals that are considered likely to continue their criminal behavior can receive a longer prison sentence for their actions. In addition:

“If one has made it a habit of committing an offense, one type or more, or he does it for employment purposes, the punishment can be increased, for up to half of the punishment. If the act is repeated, the punishment can be doubled.” (§72 of the penal law).

When defining repeat offenders it is relevant to explain it with the word recidivism (Gunnlaugsson, 2003). As the definition of recidivism in this study covers men that have served time in prison at least once, the definition of repeat offenders are those that have repeatedly committed crime and have therefore been sentenced to prison for their action more than once.

Chapter 4 – Theoretical background

In the following chapter, the theoretical perspectives that contributed to the interpretation of the results, will be presented. As noted in some of the presented literature, it can be difficult for former inmates to re-establish into society, such as attaining a job and reconnecting with their family. Furthermore, factors that increase the likelihood of relapse into crime include difficulties in re-establishing socially because of stigmatization and marginalization, which is a result of incarceration (Landersø & Tranæs, 2009; LeBel et al., 2008). As a result, two theories were chosen to help gain an understanding of repeat offenders' experience in society. The first theory of interest is *the social bond theory* as well as its four elements: attachment, commitment, involvement and belief. I wanted to gain knowledge about the bonds the inmates have with society, such as to their family and friends and to the law, to name a few. The second theory is *the labeling theory*. I will present what it constitutes as well as the process of becoming labeled as a deviant. I will also present changes of the master status when an individual is labeled and participation in deviant groups that also can be a result of labeling. The theory is interesting because it displays society's part in explaining the possible cause of crime. It seems difficult for this group of people to reintegrate into society after their sentence.

4.1 Social bond theory

Travis Hirschi (2002) created the social bond theory in his book *Causes of Delinquency*. He argued that it is in people's nature to break the law, which is a result of them seeking gratification. Instead of wondering why people do commit crime, Hirschi asked; why don't they commit crime? The answer to that question was that society's control over people prevents them from committing crime. When there is a weak control, the likelihood of crime increases (Cullen, F. T. and Agnew, 2011:202). Therefore, an individual engaging in deviant behavior is the outcome of the weak or broken bond between the deviant and society. This weak or broken bond is one of the issues I was interested in exploring. I wanted to see to what extent the bonds were weak or broken between the participants and society, if they were at all (Hirschi, 2002:16).

Within the social bond theory are four main elements that are relatable to criminal conduct: attachment, commitment, involvement and belief. These elements can restrain delinquent

behavior both together and separately. Therefore, when an individual holds a strong bond towards these elements he is less likely to commit crime (Hirschi, 2002:16).

4.1.1 Attachment

The first element is attachment, which refers to an individual's relationship or bond to others. People tend to be emotionally attached to their environment. For that reason, one's behavior is affected by other people's opinion towards him. He is sensitive to what others might think of him. Therefore, he does not violate the shared norm of the society. When an individual shows a delinquent behavior and acts contrary to what is expected of him, he states his carelessness to others' opinions. Moreover, he is insensitive to the wishes of others and is therefore not attached or bound by the norms. He is thus free to act in a deviant manner (Hirschi, 2002:17-18).

For instance, a divorced man is more likely to engage in deviant act after his divorce because his attachments or bonds are weakened. However, when he remarries, his bonds are strengthened and he is likely to get his sensitivity back and stop engaging in delinquent behavior. The attachment to one's family is very important to determine whether he will engage in delinquent behavior. The stronger the attachment or bond is, the less likely he is to commit crime (Hirschi, 2002: 19).

4.1.2 Commitment

When an individual stands before the decision of committing crime, he has to look back and think about the cost of engaging in delinquent behavior. Some submit to the rules and the social norms of the society because they fear the consequences of their action. The idea is that an individual that has invested his time and energy receiving an education, a good job and starting a family will not commit crime because of the risk of losing everything he has accomplished. An individual's decision of engaging in delinquent behavior is therefore based on evaluation of the costs and knowledge of what he could risk losing by committing crime. To some extent, he has calculated the cost (Hirschi, 2002:20-21). The job-, educational- and family status are all topics that I discussed with those that participated in the study to see if and how these commitments were in their lives. The element of commitment presumes that the organizations of society are structured in a way that makes criminal behavior undesirable because individuals could jeopardize losing their goods. Furthermore, *"[m]ost people, simply*

by the process of living in an organized society, acquire goods, reputations, prospects that they do not want to risk losing. These accumulations are society's insurance that they will abide by the rules." (Hirschi, 2002:21). If the cost of engaging in criminal behavior is less than the benefit, the individual is more likely to start or continue on his criminal path. This could be due to the lack of education or work (Hauge, 1996:304-306). This element within the social bond theory can therefore be connected to Cornish and Clark's theory of rational choice (see Cullen & Agnew, 2011:400).

4.1.3 Involvement

The concept of involvement includes conventional activities. If an individual is busy from morning to evening participating in various activities, he simply has no time to commit crime. The opportunity to engage in delinquent behavior rarely arises because of busy schedules that consists of, for example, appointments, getting an education, spending time with the family, working hours, exercise and other hobbies. The individual does not even have the time to think about committing crime. Therefore, those that do commit crime are the ones with too much time on their hands. They do not have the opportunity to participate in conventional activities to fulfill their recreational interests. Conventional activities are seen as diverse delinquent prevention programs (Hirschi, 2002:21-22).

4.1.4 Belief

The element of belief entails the importance of social norms for an individual. When an individual shows a behavior, which is against the common value system and norms within society, it is due to the fact that he either does not believe in that value system or he is a part of a different one where the particular behavior is not seen as deviant. A deviant behavior might be acceptable by the individual because of his beliefs that he shares with another group or society (Hirschi, 2002:23). That indicates that the individual acts according to the social norms of his own groups, which was interesting to examine among those that participated. If an individual believes in the given rules and knows what constitutes violating them, he would never engage in a deviant act. Hirschi argued that an individual will not be able to break the rules if that entails going against something he believes in: *"How can a person believe it is wrong to steal at the same time he is stealing"* (Hirschi, 2002:23). Therefore, the likelihood that an individual engages in a delinquent behavior increases when his belief in obeying the

rules and social norms of the society are weakened. The less he believes in and trusts the social norms of society the greater is the risk of committing crime (Hirschi, 2002:23-26).

4.2 Labeling theory

The labeling theory focuses on the consequences of the societal reaction that a deviant behavior receives. The society labels and stigmatizes the deviant (Bernburg, 2009:188-189). That results in the individual becoming less worthy in the eyes of others. Consequently, his opinion of himself changes because he faces negative images of himself through others. (Bernburg, 2005:120).

The roots of the labeling theory can be traced back to Frank Tannenbaum, where he explained the “*dramatization of evil*”. Tannenbaum argued that people become deviant because others in society see them as one. When they have successfully been labeled and a certain classification has occurred, it is difficult to prove that they are not bad. As I was interested in exploring the inmate’s time out in society, my curiosity was focused on if and how the participants dealt with being labeled as a criminal after release from prison in Iceland. After being arrested, the deviant comes across a different image of himself where he is categorized as a criminal. His whole world changes before his eyes, as he can no longer be the same person as he was before the label. Therefore, Tannenbaum believed that an individual becomes the person others have defined him as being. Furthermore, he pointed out that being labeled could result in the individual moving away from traditional norms of society. Because of the loss of opportunities, likelihood of delinquent behavior increases (Cullen and Agnew, 2011:239-240).

Both Lemert (in 1951) and later Becker (in 1963) clarified Tannenbaum’s idea on labeling. Lemert introduced his concepts of *primary* and *secondary deviance*, which will be discussed further in the next section (Cullen and Agnew, 2011:240), and Becker presented the concept of *master status* in his book *Outsiders*, which will be introduced later in this chapter.

4.2.1 Primary and secondary deviance

Lemert argued that those labeled were victims of an unfair label by others and were therefore pushed into a life of crime. Lemert explained that within primary deviance the individual acts against the social norms and laws of society but has not yet been labeled because his behavior

is rationalized or treated as a part of the social function. However, if the individual accepts the deviant label, he is more likely to move on to secondary deviance. If the deviant behavior is visible and repeated and the societal reaction towards the behavior is negative, the individual's current role will most likely disrupt and change. Secondary deviance is therefore the behavior that occurs after an individual has been labeled. The labeled individual is stigmatized, segregated and punished, which results in changed identity. The labeled individual is already acting in a deviant manner and accepts his new role as a deviant. Thus, labeling is the consequence of the societal reaction from others. It becomes difficult for the offender to hold on to conventional paths; therefore, he is more likely to continue his criminal act (Cullen and Agnew, 2011:249-251). This is consistent to the work of LeBel et al., (2008) where they argued that stigmatization increases difficulties for offenders to reenter into society.

4.2.2 Stigma

The concept of stigma is important to understand when defining the labeling theory. Stigma, which originally came from Goffman (1963), explains that society have attached a certain negative stereotyping to the deviant label. This stereotyping comes from different directions such as films, books and daily conversations. People learn from a young age how the bad guy looks and acts (Bernburg, 2009:188-189). Goffman argued: *"While the stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others [...]. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma"* (Goffman, 1963:2-3). In other words, the stigmatized individual becomes less worthy in the eyes of others. His self-perception changes because he comes across negative images of himself through others (Bernburg, 2005:112). As a result, the labeled individual could find it difficult to hold on to social bonds (Bernburg, 2009:191). Being labeled and stigmatized results in changes in the individual's self, it reduces integration to a traditional social structure and enhances the relationship with other labeled individuals (Bernburg, 2005:112).

4.2.3 Master status

Howard Becker (1963) argued that when understanding deviant behavior within the labeling theory, the reaction of others is the most important. The deviant behavior is both created and maintained. In his book, *Outsiders*, Becker (1963) explained how social groups create deviance

by generating rules that people are to obey in the society. The behavior becomes deviant because the rules state that it is against the law. These rules are applied onto a specific group of individuals, which results in labeling of the group as outsiders. They are labeled as those that do not fit into the small frame the society presents. According to Becker, deviance is not determined by the behavior itself, but the reaction the behavior receives when it is observed through approved and legal point of view (Becker, 1963:9). Within the labeling theory, Becker focused on a concept he called *master status*. It explains that the individual's deviant status becomes higher than other statuses (e.g. someone's work title or educational status). When labeled, the individual becomes known for his deviant status, and it becomes his master status. This can result in people showing fear towards the labeled deviant, which can entail that people hold a certain distance from the labeled individual because they are concerned of being labeled as well (Becker, 1963:32-33). This marginalization of the labeled individual can cause him to find others like him (Bernburg, Krohn & Rivera, 2006:67-69).

4.2.4 Participation in deviant groups

Labeled individual is often isolated from those considered normal in society. When that happens it usually increases the likelihood of the labeled engaging in deviant grouping. Those that are labeled are at risk of being isolated from the society because of a certain image that people have created towards them. In order to escape the marginalization that has occurred they look for others like them. The labeled individuals form groups, deviant groups, which for them serves as a social support and a place where they can escape the stigma. In this group their behavior is accepted (Bernburg, Krohn, & Rivera, 2006:67-69). There they get some of the opportunities society has denied them. Their deviant self strengthens in their interactions with other deviants (Ulmer, 1994:149-150). Becker blamed society for creating deviant groups because it separates the labeled individuals from the opportunities that are available for those considered normal. Examples of the opportunities the labeled find within the deviant group are respect, motivation (to continue their deviant behavior), acceptance etc. (Bernburg, Krohn & Rivera, 2006:67-69). By being a group of outsiders, they create their own sets of rules, which can be related to Elijah Anderson's (2000) concept, *code of the street*. Even though Anderson did not discuss the use of labeling theory, it can be relevant for the theory regarding participation in a group considered marginalized. The concept explains that the social norms and the rules of the street are different from the rules of the "mainstream"

society. It is because this particular group of people has created their own sets of rules, as they feel marginalized for various reasons, such as lack of job and education opportunities and the usage of drugs. Due to marginalization, they have created an eye-for-an-eye way of ruling. This includes using, or threatening to use, violence as the acceptable way to maintain or attain respect. Having respect is crucial to maintain a certain status. Moreover, it reduces the chances of being badgered by others or victimized. The longer individuals are part of this way of thinking, the harder it is for them to change, as it has become their social norm.

4.3 Compatibility

In this chapter, the social bond theory and the labeling theory have been discussed. The social bond theory clarifies the level of strong or weak bonds that occur between individuals and society as the explanation for crime. The stronger the bonds are the less likely the individual will engage in criminal conduct. On the other hand, if the bonds are weak he will most likely commit crime. However, if connected to the labeling theory, one might argue that if the bonds are weak and the individual does commit crime he can face being labeled by others as criminal. Once labeled as a criminal, the individual's identity changes. He starts to see himself like others see him and begins to act according to the label. Furthermore, it is difficult for the individual to restore the bonds because of the label. His opportunities to stability, such as education or employment are blocked, as a result of the label. Sampson and Laub (1993, 1997) argued the comparability between the two theories; "[...] *[L]abeling theory complements the social bonding theory, particularly when emphasizing the exclusionary processes triggered by labeling*" (Bernburg, 2009:191). Sampson and Laub (1997:12-13) presented a developmental model that combines the social bond theory and the labeling theory. They argued that a delinquent behavior could cause the individual to fail in school, be incarcerated and have weak bonds to the labor market, all of which increases likelihood of adult crime. Serious penalties can lead to loss of future opportunities for conventional life for the labeled criminals. I was aware of the difference between the two theories in explaining the occurrence of crime but in my opinion, they complemented each other well.

Chapter 5 - Methods

In the following chapter, I will present the methods used in this master thesis. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodical approach that was used to gather the empirical material as well as considerations that were kept in mind while conducting the research.

First, I will describe the qualitative method and the importance of the method as well as its relevance to this research. Secondly, the theory of science will be presented, where the hermeneutic phenomenology is defined, and how it is relevant for this study. Followed by two chapters about the research fields, first description of the two fields and secondly, the process of gaining access. Next, the ethical considerations and the validity of the gathered data will be presented, followed by a description of the recruiting process and a short introduction of each participant. At last, the coding and analysis strategies will be described.

5.1 Qualitative research

In this research, a qualitative method was chosen to attempt to understand meaning and context for the inmates' actions after release from prison (Patton, 2002:115). The qualitative research strategy in this study focused on inmates' words (Bryman, 2008:366). As a field, qualitative research is concerned with the meaning and interpretation of the chaos of people's lives, by organizing a framework around it. However, it is important to understand that there are multiple ways to make a meaning of the data, which indicates that I was not searching for one true reality. I was rather interested in hearing about the reality of each person I interviewed and the meaning they put into their lives. There are many different stories that the analysis of qualitative data tells. One story is therefore not any less true than the other, they are just different (Braun & Clarke, 2013:20-21). The perspectives of the studied group, in this case incarcerated repeat offenders, was important. Their point of view provided the results of the research. The qualitative researcher seeks to be close to the people of interest to be able to gain a genuine understanding of values, behavior, beliefs and the society through the studied individuals' eyes (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Bryman, 2008:394).

There are many ways to collect data when using a qualitative method as the research strategy. One of the data collection methods are interviews. For this study, I collected data by conducting face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with incarcerated repeat offenders in

Iceland. When researchers conduct semi-structured interviews they are interested in the participants' point of view (Bryman, 2008:436). Therefore, I chose this way of data collection to gain an understanding of the repeat offenders' meanings and experience of their time in society between prison sentences.

When conducting a semi-structured interview, the researcher has an interview guide where he has formed series of questions. Therefore, I created an interview guide before conducting the interviews as a guideline to be able to get answers on topics that could possibly answer the research question (see appendix 1). The questions in the interview guide for the present study were, to some degree, related to the chosen theories, the labeling theory and social bond theory. The guide was formed in a general way in order for me to ask further into certain topics based on the inmates' answers. Thus, creating a possibility to ask new relevant questions while interviewing the participants, depending on their answers (Bryman, 2008:436-438). These types of interviews can be time consuming but the researcher is able to gather productive and detailed data about the meaning and experience from the group of interest (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

5.2 Theory of science

When doing a qualitative research it is important to choose a research method that is, according to the researcher, the best method to answer the research question. In this study, the aim is to gain knowledge on repeat offenders' meaning of their lived experience between convictions. With that in mind, it is fitting that the research method behind the approach for this research is *hermeneutical phenomenology* (Richards & Morse, 2012:49,67). The hermeneutic can be described as the art of interpretation. By using hermeneutics, I will interpret the inmates' social activity as it is explained from their view on their own social actions. However, the phenomenology is the study on people's point of view and their understanding of their experience in everyday life. The emphasis in phenomenology is on each inmate's experience and self-consciousness on their surroundings and how that affects their view on society (Berg-Sørensen, 2010:215-217).

When the two concepts are put together, hermeneutic phenomenology aims to elicit the individuals' lived experience via the clear involvement of interpretation (Finlay, 2011:110). This method focuses on gaining a greater understanding on the individuals' meaning and

perception of the world, which is a result of their experience of society. In order to answer the research question, this will be the focus when gathering data from the repeat offenders (Richards & Morse, 2012:69). The method's approach is described by using the following four principles. First, *commitment beyond science and towards the humanities*; The interest of the researcher is towards the human condition and the need to think in terms that are applicable to the lived human world. Secondly, *explicit use of interpretation*, which involves the necessity of interpretation as phenomenology, is about studying meanings that can often be hidden or implicit. Through interpretation, I attempt to reveal hidden meanings of individuals' lived experience. This specific experience becomes second-hand account of the lived experience because I, as the researcher, will be interpreting the data. Third, *reflexive acknowledgement of the researcher's involvement*; It is not possible to be uninvolved in the research. To some degree, I was required to bring myself into the research because my understanding is based on my circumstances, that is, my personal history. Reflexivity implies that I am obligated to evaluate my own experience actively. If ignored, I could risk letting prejudice and weakness control the results of the research. Lastly, *attention paid to expressive writing using myth and metaphor*, where the researcher focuses on how he expresses the results to make sure he is evoking lived experience. The researcher aims to present the lived experiences in accordance to the sources story (Finlay, 2011:111-114).

By using this approach, I am gathering data that brings me closer to the social reality of those I am studying (Berg-Sørensen, 2010:216). Moreover, I am aware that the interpretation of the data is never the absolute truth. It is important to understand that it is just one interpretation of many possible interpretations, because each individual has his meaning of the truth, which is a result of his experience (Patton, 2002:113-114). My interpretation of the data will therefore also be one of many possible understandings.

5.3 The research field

There are five active prisons in Iceland, where three of them are closed and two are open prisons. Additionally, one is in the making (Fangelsismálastofnun, n.d.-b). The interviews conducted for this research took place in the country's biggest prison, *Litla-Hraun* and within a small open prison, *Sogn*. In the following section, a short description of the two prisons will be presented. It is important to describe the research field in short, both to acknowledge the

difference between the two prisons, and to get a sense of the circumstances the inmates live in every day when serving their sentence at one of these prisons. Being in an open prison like Sogn, indicates that the inmates had either received a short prison sentence or had shown good behavior for a period of time as well as being drug free at Litla-Hraun prison. The state of mind of the participants can therefore be different depending where they are serving their sentence.

5.3.1 Litla-Hraun prison

Litla-Hraun is a high-security prison with room for 87 inmates, which makes it 63% of the total room for inmates in Iceland. Repeat offenders with a long criminal history and offenders that get over three years in prison sentence, almost without exception serve at this prison as it has the best security. However, because of the diverse activity, especially the education offered there, many offenders with a short criminal history seek to serve their sentence at *Litla-Hraun* (Fangelsismálastofnun, n.d.-a).

In 2007, a rehabilitation sector was opened in the prison, where there is room for 11 inmates (Ísland í dag, 2015). In addition, the prison also has a sector for inmates that are sober, which also has room for 11 inmates. The inmates that stay in these sectors get support to stay off drugs, which consists of education on matters related to drugs. They are also able to participate in Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) meetings. Everyone serving time at *Litla-Hraun* can apply for a spot at the sectors and if granted a spot, they stay there for about three months. After that, their status is reviewed and a suitable decision is made. The inmates take part in cleaning and cooking for themselves in order to learn how to take care of themselves, as some have never done that in their lives (Fangelsismálastofnun, 2005; Ísland í dag, 2015).

Litla-Hraun has an active school where inmates can finish a basic education. There are also various tasks that the inmates can participate in, such as working at the prison store, creating license plate numbers, and building whatever comes to mind in a workshop located at *Litla-Hraun* (Fangelsismálastofnun, 2005).

5.3.2 Sogn prison

Sogn has room for 20 inmates in total. The prison at Sogn is an 'open' prison, which indicates that there are no fences or walls that delimit the prison. Therefore, the inmates that get the chance to serve in this prison have to show off their best behavior and show that they can

take responsibility for their actions. If they do not respect the rules at Sogn, they are sent back to Litla-Hraun. The inmates that get the opportunity to serve at Sogn have to sign a form where they accept the rules and are prepared to obey them.

The inmates are obligated to work or study while serving at Sogn. Being in an open prison, the inmates take care of themselves, such as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry and other general house chores. They also receive training in life skills. All of this helps the inmates preparing for re-entering the society after release (Fangelsismálastofnun, n.d.-d).

5.4 Access to the field

The field of study are the two prisons discussed above, which can be considered a rather private/closed field. Therefore, it was important to have a contact person that would aid in gaining access to the inmates. An email was sent to the director of the Prison Services in Iceland where the nature of my study was introduced. He provided me with a contact person, which is the Prison Services' office manager. She explained that I would need to send a statement about my research to *The Data Protection Authority* in Iceland to get it approved. Additionally, she explained the need of an introduction letter that would be sent to the inmates, where I clarified the nature of my study and the importance of receiving participants (see appendix 2). On March 24 (2015), my contact sent the introduction letter to the supervisor of *Litla-Hraun* and *Sogn*, Margrét Frímannsdóttir. To ensure the letter was handed to the inmates as soon as possible I sent a follow-up email to the supervisor. The introduction letter was distributed at Litla-Hraun on the evening of March 25, 11 days before my arrival to Iceland, as I was a resident in Denmark. A week later, the letter was sent to Sogn because of difficulties gathering enough participants at Litla-Hraun. When I arrived to Iceland, I was informed I had twelve participants, six in each of the prisons. The research was met with great interest within the Prison services, which eased the access to the field.

5.5 Ethical considerations

It was very important to consider the ethics in the study, such as how my relationship was with the inmates and how I prepared and conducted my study. Ethics should cover all aspects of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013:61).

BPS (*The British Psychological Society*) formed the *Code of Ethics and Conduct*, which includes four principles that were used as a guideline while conducting this study. These principles are respect, competence, responsibility and integrity. *Respect* includes the need of preserving privacy and confidentiality, which in this study was ensured by emphasizing anonymity both in the introduction letter and in the beginning of each interview. Furthermore, respect consists of the need to attain an informed consent from those participating (the inmates) in the study, to avoid dishonesty and underline that the inmates know they can withdraw their involvement in the study whenever they want.

Competence includes the awareness of professional ethics, “*standards of ethical decision-making, and limits of competence, all of which relate to being an ethical researchers*” (Braun & Clarke, 2013:63). Inflicting no harm explains the principal of *responsibility*. It is my responsibility to protect the participants of the research, which includes minimizing the risk of exposure, as well as informing them about their right to be excluded from the research. To minimize the risk of exposure, I was the only one working on the data. Moreover, conducting interviews in Iceland where “everyone knows everyone” all participants were renamed and their age was not revealed to minimize the risk of exposing their identity. The interviews were also handled as confidential. Finally, *integrity* entails honesty and accuracy. It means that I, as a researcher, did not misrepresent the gathered data or the participants to the best of my knowledge, and I did not use the work of others in the research without acknowledging it (Braun & Clarke, 2013:63).

5.5.1 Receiving permission

According to Icelandic law, when gathering data it is important to explore if it requires approved permit or statement from *The Data Protection Authority* in Iceland. However, it depends on the nature of the data the researcher is seeking. The Data Protection Authority’s role is to monitor that *The Law of Personal Protection and Handling of Personal Information*, no. 77/2000, and the rules within the law, are followed. They approve or disapprove permits and statements and give instructions on safety, technique and structure when working with personal information (The Data Protection Authority, 2006b).

Information concerning individuals that have been suspects, been charged or convicted for a crime are considered to be sensitive personal information according to Icelandic law (no.

712/2008, art. 2) (The Data Protection Authority, 2006a). As I was working with sensitive information that was important to gather for my study, I had to hand in a statement to the Data Protection Authority, which was approved. The statement entailed that I would be interviewing individuals that were serving their sentence in prison in Iceland and they would sign a consent form if they agreed to participate.

The National Bioethics Committee is a system where researchers in the health sector have to get their research approved: *“Scientific research projects in the health sector shall be based upon a research protocol which provides information on the study and its principal investigator. In the application submitted to the Bioethics Committee or to a Health Research Ethics Committee”* (No. 44/2014, Art. 4) (The National Bioethics Committee, 2014). My contact at the Prison Services wanted to receive a copy of my interview guide before I would conduct the interviews to examine if any of my questions needed an approval from the National Bioethics Committee, which was not the case.

5.6 Validity of the data gathered

It is important to recognize possible biases in gathering data from incarcerated individuals and therefore the validity of the interviews. In this chapter, I explain what is good to bear in mind when conducting interviews regarding the validity of the data, both in relation to the group of interest and for me as the researcher.

5.6.1 Gathering information from the incarcerated

Interviewing the repeat offenders gives them an opportunity to explain themselves and their actions with their own words and understanding. Furthermore, they can elaborate on their decisions that led to criminal behavior and *“...the perceived effectiveness of efforts to deter crime”* (Copes & Hochstetler, 2010:49). However, when collecting data from individuals that have been socially stigmatized for their actions, such as committing crime, it is possible that they are unwilling to discuss their criminal lifestyle (Curtis, 2010:142). With this in mind while conducting the interviews, I attempted to collect the information needed to answer the research question by not asking too much into their actions specifically but rather asked around their actions and asked more into their time outside the prison that led to another conviction. That way it was more up to them to share with me what they had done if they felt the need to do so. I was interested in the inmates' perspective and understanding as they

looked back on their time outside in society by piecing the past together. Moreover, by collecting data from the inmates I understood that I was not able to know how others they interacted with, while outside in society, witnessed their period outside. Therefore, I relied solely on their testimony (Downes & Rock, 2011:35), hence the use of hermeneutic phenomenology. However, there are three types of problems the researcher should consider when gathering data from offenders. First is *misinformation*, where the participant does not have access to the material I am seeking, that is, the relevant experience. Secondly, a *misunderstanding* can occur between the participant and me during the interview. He could have given me an answer that was not related to my question without either of us noticing it. Last, the problem of *misleading*. The inmates could have, in some cases, been unwilling to share information with me and therefore misled me by changing the subject by giving me an irrelevant answer (Elffers, 2010:14).

What makes inmates a good resource when gathering data is that they are often interested and motivated to participate and are not obsessed about the time while in the interview, as can happen if I would have interviewed repeat offenders that were not serving in prison (Copes & Hochstetler, 2010:60). Many inmates expressed their adequate time to participate, regardless of how long the interview would take. Thus, in most cases, I was able to receive the information I was interested in obtaining. Furthermore, as the participants were on the road to recovery, many had participated in meetings and discussed their past before. In addition, they have had time for reflective moments, which active offenders would perhaps not have had. As a result, the participants seemed motivated to talk about their past behavior. This is one reason Copes and Hochstetler (2010) mention, why it is better to interview inmates opposed to active offenders. However, some gave answers that were no more than one or two sentences, which resulted in shorter interviews. I cannot be sure if it was because of my gender and age, if it was the lack of will to talk about the past or because of the personality of these particular participants, as it is not given that all of the participants are the chattering type. Conversely, if I would have spoken to the exact same group as active offenders, 2/3 of them (according to their response about their past) would have been influenced by alcohol or drugs, which would have made it difficult for me to collect meaningful data from the participants (see Copes & Hochstetler, 2010:60-61).

5.6.2 The effect of the researcher's characteristics

Fendrich, Johnson, Shaligram, & Wislar (1999:38) present two models on the interviewer's effect on the outcome of an interview. One is called *social attribution model*, which explains that the characteristics of me, as the interviewer alone are enough to affect how participants answers questions in the interview. This model argues that participants make assessments to the interviewer's values, norms and beliefs, solely based on his visible characteristics (such as age and gender). As a result, the participants may give answers that they see fit for the interviewer, based on their presumption of him. The other model is *conditional social attribution model*, where the participants' report on their behavior is affected by their judgment and perception of my norms. It means "...that judgments about interviewers vary according to subject characteristics" (Fendrich et al., 1999:39).

Before conducting the interviews, I considered how my gender could affect how the inmates would talk to me and if they would be comfortable enough around me to speak freely about their meanings and perceptions. According to Jody Miller (2010:164-167), gender matters, but how it matters differs between researches. Therefore, I can never be sure to what extent my gender affected the interviews. Being a woman conducting interviews with male inmates could be positive, as they could see me as having unique ethical qualities. Furthermore, being different from the participants, such as being female or a person that has never committed a crime can also be a positive factor. They could see me as an outsider or a person that is not familiar with their world and therefore wanting to share their stories with me. However, it could also be a negative factor, as they could have the tendency to be careful in how they answer my questions in order to avoid offending me as a female researcher where they could seem sexist and hostile if they would answer in full honesty. In some interviews, this could have been the case, for example one started talking about sex and then stopped and excused himself for being too forward. Moreover, some did not particularly explain their crime, especially when it involved violence. I later learned that some had been sentenced for very serious crimes that did not seem as serious when they talked about it. It was as if they were shielding me from their actions. I cannot be sure if that was solely because of my gender or some of the other factors mentioned above.

5.6.3 Translating the data to another language

Although the present thesis is written in English, the interviews were conducted in Icelandic in order for the participant to speak freely and not having difficulties finding the right words in English. Furthermore, it braces the study because my native language is Icelandic. That way I understood when the inmates used Icelandic phrases or slang and therefore I was better prepared to analyze the data. Additionally, it would perhaps have been more difficult recruiting participants if the interviews had been conducted in English because of their possible lack of knowledge in English. I did not translate all of the transcriptions from start to finish but rather translated the parts that were used in the analysis. Furthermore, a summary for each interview was created in order for the reader to get a sample of the gathered data (see appendix 3, on CD). This decision was made due to lack of time and to ensure that the participants would not be exposed. However, if I would have translated everything, I would not had been able to display the interviews as a whole due to my professional obligation of withholding information that could reveal the participants' identity. When translating, I was not able to hold on to all of the Icelandic slang in the translation process, because many do not exist in the English language. However, I did my best in translating the phrases directly.

5.7 Recruiting participants

When recruiting participants the researcher needs to specify what kind of participants he wants, which in my case were repeat offenders that currently were serving time in prison. In a qualitative research, like this one, participants are likely to be chosen purposefully which is why this sampling method is called purposive sampling. This method of sampling that I used to find participants for my study entails recruiting participants that can offer specific views of the topic of interest (Yin, 2011:87-88). Since the data contained rich face-to-face interviews with inmates, it is important that they were motivated to participate. Therefore, I wanted to combine the purposive sampling with volunteer sampling in order to get participants that were prepared to share their story, which in this case can be a sensitive matter (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2010:33). However, the volunteering method did not go well at first and not all were qualified to participate due to various reasons. Therefore, Margrét Frímannsdóttir, the supervisor of Litla-Hraun and Sogn, decided which inmate she would ask to participate, but within the qualification frame, I had created. She chose possible participants based on their

openness in order to answer the questions I had. This way of sampling is called convenience sampling. That involves selecting participant based on accessibility (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2010:132).

In the process of recruiting participants for the study, I contacted the office manager at the Prison services in Iceland. I wrote an introduction letter, which also consisted of the consent form, where the purpose of the study was explained. Moreover, it included what was expected of those participating as well as the characteristics I sought in a participant. The participants were to be male repeat offenders that were currently serving in prison in the age group of 21 to 40. This age group makes up for 67% of the inmate population in Iceland (Fangelsismálastofnun, 2013). Furthermore, I explained my need of individuals that have served a sentence in prison at least once before the current sentence, as I wanted to gain understanding of their situation between convictions. In the introduction letter, I was very clear on keeping their anonymity and respecting their wishes, for example quitting at any time in the process even though they had signed the consent form. In addition, I underlined that everything would be handled as confidential. In the end of the letter, I asked those that wanted to volunteer to participate to write their signature on the bottom of the letter and give it to those in charge. That was to make sure aspects of the ethical purposes were fulfilled. The prison supervisor was in touch with my contact person at the Prison services, which then informed me about the process. The inmates at Litla-Hraun were handed the letter on March 25, 2015. It was difficult obtaining participants at first, were I only had two positive answers five days later. A possible reason for that was that another research was currently being conducted at Litla-Hraun and earlier, four other studies were carried out at the prison and many of the inmates were not interested in participating in more interviews (according to Frímannsdóttir). Shortly after a follow-up email to the supervisor of Litla-Hraun, three more inmates volunteered to participate. Because of the lack of participants at Litla-Hraun, the supervisor recruited participants from Sogn, the open prison. In total, I conducted six interviews at Litla-Hraun, which makes for almost 7% of all inmates serving there, and six interviews at Sogn, which makes for 30% of those serving their sentence there (Fangelsismálastofnun, n.d.-a, n.d.-d).

5.8 Introduction of participants

Many of the inmates participated because they wanted to do what they could to help others and themselves to become better men. In addition, some saw the participation in the interview as a therapeutic exercise, and some wanted to express the situation of inmates, as they “knew” that many would read this master’s thesis and maybe something would change. Few of those that had said yes were not available for an interview for various reasons, e.g. one had been released and another was not in adequate shape to participate at the time I was there. All of the participants I interviewed were on the road to recovery, where they wanted to change their lifestyle and start over. Most of the participants serving at Sogn had been at Litla-Hraun before at some point and had served in the rehabilitation section as well as all of those I interviewed at Litla-Hraun. The participants were between 23 and 43 years old. As can be seen the oldest participant was 43, whereas I had asked to interview inmates no older than 40. However, the interview had started when I discovered his age. For I had conducted the interview I decided to use it, as the ideal person to relapse into crime in Scandinavia is up to 44 years old (Graunbøl et al., 2010). In addition, I valued the quantity of interviews more than the limited age of the interviewees. Table 3 demonstrates the average age of the participants in each of the prisons along with average prison sentences per participant and the length of the interviews.

Table 3. Average numbers for the participants

	Average age:	Average nr. of prison sentences	Average length of interviews
Sogn	36.33	5	51 min.
Litla-Hraun	32.33	4.33	56 min.
Total average:	34.33	4.67	53.5 min

5.8.1 Participants serving at Sogn

Jón was finishing an old sentence because he violated probation. He had served in prison for violence. The media had revealed his name and therefore it is easier to identify him in the society. Jón had a daughter and a girlfriend (not the mother of his child). He did not have an education (quit in 9th grade). He wanted to turn his life around because of his daughter. Jón wanted to figure out who he was without drugs. He was open and easy to talk to.

Magnús was serving a prison sentence for the fourth time, this time for violence. The media had both revealed his face and name in papers and online. He had two children but was not in a relationship as women were too afraid of him. He wanted to stop committing crime but would do what it takes to take care of his family and friends. The interview was one of the longest as he was open to share his story.

Geir was serving a sentence in prison for the second time for violence. He blamed alcohol and drugs for his actions, where something snaps and he did not remember what he had done. He had three children with three different women. His name and picture had appeared in the media, which made it difficult for him to reintegrate. Geir was very open and willing to answer my questions.

Nói was serving for theft and cover-up. His criminal record mainly consisted of theft. He had a long history of drug abuse but was on recovery. He did not go to AA meetings because he wanted to look at the future and not dwell on the past. Nói was single and had one son and the relationship with him was ok. He was very shy and did not open up, which resulted in a very short interview.

Siggi was serving in prison for the fourth time for drugs. He was a drug addict for 15 years but had now been sober for 13 or 14 months. He was actively attending AA meetings while finishing his sentence and was going to continue after release. Date of release was unknown for he still had a case in the system. Being from a small town made it difficult to start over. Therefore, he did not live there after release. The interview went well and he was open.

Addi was serving in prison for the twelfth time in Iceland. He had also served twice in Denmark. He had a long history of alcohol and drug abuse. Addi had been in rehab 30 times. He was single and had one daughter, whom he met for the first time sober few days before the interview. Addi seemed a little paranoid in the interview and had to be convinced several times throughout the interview that the recording was confidential.

5.8.2 Participants serving at Litla-Hraun

Óli was serving for the fifth time, this time for violence. The media had revealed his name and face, which made it difficult for him to reintegrate. Óli had two daughters, but was only in a good relationship with one of them. He had a wife. It was likely that he had turned his back

on crime but would always help his friends in need (illegally if necessary). He was very open to share his story and opinion.

Tómas was serving in prison for the eighth or ninth time, mainly for unjust enrichment in order to finance his drug use. He was a drug addict trying to get clean and had been for two weeks when I interviewed him. He started doing drugs at 14 after being sexually abused as a child. He was single but had a son, with whom he did not communicate with on regular basis. He was open but a little shy during the interview.

Emil was waiting to be sentenced after violating probation. He had served for drug smuggling and violence. He had not been on drugs for many years. Emil had been in the drug business for 10-15 years and saw it as an exciting and fun job. He was single and childless. Even though the old Emil still lived within him, he had turned his back on the old “job”. The media had revealed his name. Emil was open to answer my questions and sharing his story.

Jakob was very young when he served his first prison sentence. He was serving in prison for the second time for violence. His face and name had been published in the media. Jakob had too much pride, which resulted in fights if not shown respect. He was trying to change in order to live a ‘normal’ life. Last time out in society he turned his life around and received an education and a job. He had a girlfriend but no children. Jakob was open to answer my questions.

Pétur was serving for the second time, now for sexual assault and robbery. He claimed he did not sexually assault anyone. He started doing drugs 12 years old but had been sober for five years. Was on the right path now and was deeply involved in AA, which had changed his life radically. Pétur had three children and a girlfriend. He was eager to explain his new identity after he stopped doing drugs.

Elías was serving for the fourth time, now for drug smuggling. He still had a case in the system for he violated probation. He served time in prison twice before he turned 20 years old. He had been clean since then. Elías blamed the economic crisis for starting committing crime again. He had a wife and a child. Came from a small town where it was difficult to start over with a clean slate. He was very open to share his story and opinion with me.

5.9 Coding and Analysis Strategy

The process of coding started when transcribing the gathered data. That included underlining parts that caught my attention and could be of some relevance to the study. Therefore, when I started coding I had a range of underlined data to narrow down and/or divide even further. This step of coding was to ensure that everything that could be relevant for this study would be sorted away from the rest of the data in order to have an easy access to the relevant matter that could answer the research question. Yin argued that a step he calls initial coding is next in the coding process followed by category coding (Yin, 2011:187-189). In the initial code stage, I was very open to ideas on possible themes. I color-coded the data (both pre underlined and other paragraphs that I thought were interesting), where similar topics were assigned the same color. Then, in the category coding, I narrowed down the relevant data into several themes that formed the results and assigned the colored data to the appropriate theme.

The purpose of this analysis of the gathered data was to provide an understanding of repeat offenders' experience in society between convictions, through interpretive phenomenological analysis. As phenomenology explains, by using this approach in the analysis, the focus is on how the inmates explain and understand their lived experience. Their point of view was important to answer the research question. The interpretive part of this approach involved that I, as the researcher, interpreted the inmates' lived experience through my understanding of their perception. Since I used interpretive phenomenological approach, the analysis was thematically constructed. Furthermore, by using this approach I was concerned with a specific aspect of the inmates' experience, that is, their life in the society after release (Braun & Clarke, 2013:165,181). In this analysis, I divided their lived experience into themes I found through the coding process. The themes were used to capture the repeat offenders' experience and descriptions of life outside the prison through my interpretation, which was, when relevant, connected to the presented literature as well as the chosen theories, labeling theory and/or social bond theory.

Chapter 6 – Results

In the following chapter, I will present the results of the empirical material through four themes that were discovered through the coding process and helped answer the research question. The themes are: *Relationships*, *Way of thinking*, *Occupation* and *The two societies*. The chosen theories (labeling theory and social bond theory) as well as the presented literature contributed to the interpretation of the results.

6.1 Relationships

In this chapter, the inmates' relationships to family and deviant groups will be discussed and analyzed. Within this theme, relationship with family consists of their parents, siblings, children and/or spouse depending and other relatives of relevance. Moreover, when discussing relationship with deviant groups, it entails friends and/or acquaintances that are part of their deviant group.

6.1.1 Family

Over half of the participants were not in a good relationship with their parents between convictions. Furthermore, three participants (Jón, Nói and Tómas) explained how their lives got worse when they lost a certain support when their relationship with their girlfriends ended. They felt that they had lost what was important to them and did not care about what would happen to them. Jón explained: *"(...) [R]ight after I got out, last time, the mother of my child and I broke up and then I fell back, didn't care until I got inside again (...)"* (Jón, Sogn). Where they sought support from appeared to be important as all three had good relationship with their mothers. By combining the loss of support from spouse to the information about their relationship with their parents, around ¾ of the participants did not have a support from people they needed or sought support from during the time outside the prison. Tómas felt he lost everyone close to him at the same time and blamed the loss of support for his downfall:

"When I was released, then, everything crashed, my parents move to other countries, and we broke up and I had a little boy, or I have a little boy that is 8 years old today (...) then I lost the ground under my feet somehow which resulted in a continuous use of drugs." (Tómas, Litla-Hraun).

This is consistent with Hirschi's theory of social bond where he explains that the weaker the bond is to the family the more likely the individual is to commit crime. Therefore it is very important to have a strong relationship with the family (Hirschi, 2002: 19) as Elías pointed out. Just as losing a girlfriend resulted in bad decision to continue their criminal behavior, Elías explained the meaning of attaining a girlfriend when asked where he received support if not from his parents: *"(...) [I]t was the girlfriend that, the ex that did that (...) she is a respectable girl (...) that helped me move forward, pepped me up in school, and you know, build up my self, self-esteem (...)." (Elías, Litla-Hraun).* This support he did not seem to have beforehand, helped him get back on his feet and turn his life around. Many discussed the importance of having some kind of a support system that the inmates could seek after release because many of the inmates had lost all connection to their loved ones, as some of the participants explained from the experience of being in prison. That is consistent with Minke's (2012: 273-278) results where she pointed out that due to the emotional corruption that occurs while incarcerated, it is important that offenders are offered a psychosocial support after release from prison to prevent recidivism because some need a greater support to cope when re-entering the society.

In the cases where the relationship was good, the inmates nearly solely talked about their good relationship with their mother, and not their father. Both Geir and Óli explained how they had only been in relationship with their mother. They both described the relationship to be good but not particularly supportive: *"(...) [T]he relationship with [my mother] was always good, you know what I mean, never any beef between us or nothing like that, just it wasn't much(...)." (Óli, Litla-Hraun).*

However, Siggí and Emil explained having a good relationship with their parents. Siggí's parents always welcomed him warmly, but it was he, who pushed them away whenever he was deep in drugs. Same with Emil, when he was deep into importing drugs he slowly stopped spending time with them and when he was caught, he did not understand the anger and hurt his family felt:

"(...) I thought it was strange, when I went in, how bad the family took it, it was so difficult for them and I didn't get why it was so difficult for them, because it wasn't them in prison, it was me (...) but of course it is more difficult for them, I just didn't get it." (Emil, Litla-Hraun).

He was not the only one that had the support from the family but turned away from them as soon as the criminal behavior started again or got worse. Jakob, who had received support from his uncle, explained that for him it was because of shame:

"(...) [W]hen I got drunk the shame came, you know, I had pulled myself up and had done everything, you know, the boy who could do it (...), then I didn't contact my uncle and his people (...)." (Jakob, Litla-Hraun).

Moreover, third of the participants had children, which did not seem to be enough to keep them away from crime. According to Hirschi, if individuals have committed their time in starting a family they are less likely to commit crime because of the risk of losing what they have accomplished. However, it appeared that the inmates have calculated the cost (Hirschi, 2002: 20-21). Despite having built up a family and having a good support, some felt they gained more than they lost by committing crime. Magnús explained his life after release where he had a good support but the money seemed to be more appealing:

"(...) I got sober (...) and that was a good time (...) I had a woman and we had a child (...) but it is really hard to say goodbye to the old life... really hard to say goodbye to the old life because there is so much money in this (...) when you have this rep, you know, then it's so easy to get money, you know (...) and at that time I was smuggling a lot of drugs (...) and then I got wasted after 6 years and here I am." (Magnús, Sogn).

As he has spent a large portion of his life committing crime, it became difficult for Magnús to hold on to conventional paths. This is what he was good at and knew and therefore, it was more likely for Magnús to continue his criminal behavior (Cullen and Agnew, 2011: 251).

In Elías's case, turning back to crime was his way of dealing with money loss not considering the consequences it might have on his support:

"(...) I had been sober for three, had turned my life around, you know, had a dog and a woman and a car, then when everything started to crash and everything went away, I was broke, then it was so easy to turn back, I don't know what that was, you know (...)." (Elías, Litla-Hraun).

Here he explained how the economic crisis in 2008 in Iceland took his toll on him. He was not able to take his girlfriend out or go see a movie anymore. Therefore, he did what he knew best and started importing drugs again. It seemed that he did not think of the cost of losing

his girl, dog and car. Instead, he saw importing drugs as a way to hold on to the life he had built because that way he had more money. Magnús agreed with Elías:

“(...) I’m not going to starve, you know, or let my daughter starve or something like that (...) I take care of my people and will continue to do that (...). Am I going out with the thought of going straight to crime, no, but would I do it instead of starving, yes... definitely.” (Magnús, Sogn).

As Hauge pointed out, individuals are guided by rewards and penalties. Therefore, if they do not see the reward of continuing on the non-criminal path due to lack of opportunities, they are more likely to choose the more beneficial way, hence committing crime (Hauge, 1996:304-306).

6.1.2 Deviant groups

Some of the participants had a combination of “normal” friends and deviant friends. However, Jón talked about the difficulties of wanting to start over because of his best friend who was not ready to let him go: *“(...) my best friend said that it doesn’t work that I’m in AA or something like that because he is going to take me to Ibiza and get me drunk (...).” (Jón, Sogn).* When asked if he had other friends that were different, he said that they were all the same. Jón had difficulties meeting new people that were not deviants because he did not know how and therefore he went out drinking, which, according to him, is where he meets other “morons”. When asked if that is the easy way to meet people, he answered: *“Yeah, I know myself best that way, I don’t know me when I’m normal (...).” (Jón, Sogn).* He appears to be shy towards people because being sober is new to him and letting go of the other self, the deviant self, appeared difficult for him as it had been his master status for so long (see Becker, 1963). Pétur was on the same page as it cost him blood, sweat and tears to cut away from his deviant group of friends.

Many of the participants explained how they started spending time with deviant group of friends when they were on drugs and/or committing crime.

“(...) [A]fter I got out last time, everything was going very well, but in the end I had become such a drunk (...) I had begun to hang out with the same crowd as me (...) just turned my back on the crowd that was in good shape (...).” (Geir, Sogn).

Here Geir explained how he switched his group of friends when he started showing criminal behavior (being drunk also entailed doing drugs). By turning to former deviant friends the

inmates can act in a criminal matter and it is seen as the social norm of the group (Hirschi, 2002:23). Furthermore, Jakob argued that the same second he started doing drugs again he went back to the old group of friends. He had been a part of society for a year and it had taken him months to re-establish, but once he fell off the wagon it did not take him long to go back to his old lifestyle:

“I went straight to town to meet my old friends, a lot had happened, you know, one of my friends (...) was seriously assaulted, broken leg and more, and I just went straight to that, just yeah let’s tackle this, let’s kill these guys, you know, it took one second to remember everything, while it took maybe many years to obtain the other back, you know, the normal life, this is not something that is forgotten, this is something that waits for you.” (Jakob, Litla-Hraun).

It seemed that they knew what it entailed to obtain the “normal” life, and what they could and could not do to be a part of it because as soon as they started their deviant behavior again they were back with their old friends. By interacting with his old deviant group of friends Jakob’s deviant self, strengthened (Ulmer, 1994:149-150). As Jakob argued above how he helped a friend in need, Óli also explained to me what is considered a helpful friend in his world:

„That is not the norm of your society, if some guys are going to beat up Joe, a friend of yours, your friend Joe would just call the police [...] he would not show up with three of his friends and participate in some fighting [...] but with me, yeah of course I would go with him [...] I don’t see another solution [...]. The help, in my opinion would be to go with him and some fighting starts and someone gets hurt [...] and if someone charges me I get convicted.” (Óli, Litla-Hraun).

When being a part of this other society, where the norm is different from the “mainstream” society, other rules seem to apply about friendship and what it entails to be a good friend. This is consistent with the labeling theory, which argues that individuals that have been stigmatized or labeled as criminals or as bad, tend to find others that are in the same position in order for their behavior to be the norm and accepted (Bernburg, Krohn, & Rivera, 2006:67-69).

This is also relevant to the replies from five inmates that discussed how their prison sentence was a good way to meet other deviants and become an even better criminal once released. Óli expressed that the prison was a crime school for young men:

"(...) When I was released in '98 I didn't have a dime and what do I do? I go straight to [importing drugs] (...) when I came into prison that young, then I, of course was introduced to others that were in importing, so this is just a crime school." (Óli, Litla-Hraun).

This is one of the reasons a prison sentence has a negative effect on individuals, especially those serving for the first time. Therefore, prisons should not be considered a way to reduce crime. Instead, the prison sentence has a counterproductive effect on the incarcerated (Minke, 2012:271). Prison is a place where labeled men are gathered and in order to feel less as an outsider they form groups with new sets of norms (Bernburg, Krohn & Rivera, 2006:67-69). Siggí also argued that when released he was in a way better shape to continue on his criminal path because in prison he got new connections to get cheaper and better drugs. Magnús also described the situation in and after prison:

"From the time I was in there for the first time, 15, you know, things change a little bit for me, then I was introduced to all the old drunks and all that crowd and I went from being a small thief and criminal to become a dealer (...) because then I knew all these people you know." (Magnús, Sogn).

Both Jón and Jakob also had the same story to tell. They felt good in prison because there they had friends, therefore it did not matter if they were inside or out of prison, as they had a group of deviant friends they could turn to. Consistent with the Scandinavian report on recidivism, which argued that one of the risk factors is the offender's circumstances during imprisonment, such as drug abuse or social relationship with other offenders (Graunbøl et al., 2010).

6.2 Way of thinking

In this section of the results, I will present their way of thinking between convictions, such as their personal traits and their argument for committing crime. I created five sub-themes that are related to their way of thinking. These sub-themes were created in order to have a better overview on the theme, *Way of thinking*. The sub-themes are; *Showing who is the superior*, *What is crime?*, *Not ready to stop*, *I tried* and *I don't care*. It is important to keep in mind that the results from the same participant can be relevant in more than one sub-theme as some had different stories to tell depending on which time they were out in society.

6.2.1 Showing who is the superior

Óli explained thoroughly to me the difference between the way of thinking in his world compared to my world:

“If someone does something on your part, your first thought is not: yeah, I’m going to beat up him, Paul, he did this to me (...). Your first thought would be to go to the police and file charges. The first thing I would think of would be to beat up the son of a bitch (...). We come from different places, therefore we have different approaches on how we react (...)” (Óli, Litla-Hraun).

He explains that his problem has to do with unethicity and that is why he does not feel remorse when committing crime. This way of dealing with things is the norm for him (and other participants) and has been his way of living for a long time. As mentioned, when labeled, people tend to form a group or society where their behavior is accepted (Bernburg, Krohn, & Rivera, 2006:67-69). In this deviant society the labeled inmates get some of the opportunities the society has denied them (Ulmer, 1994: 149-150). By showing this violent behavior, he gains a certain reputation, which helps him holding on to a superior status in his society. Jakob explained his self as he had been part of this other society for so long:

“(...) I just think it’s silly to, you know, to go somewhere to do something and then you show up, and tough meets tough, then you no longer can, you know what I mean,, it’s just this life, you know, you wouldn’t be much of a man if you would always back out, you know, then you would just be something... something blah.” (Jakob, Litla-Hraun).

This eye for an eye way of thinking is relatable to Anderson’s concept, code of the street, where he explained that marginalized individuals tend to have their own sets of rules and codes where violence or threat of violence is the way to stay on top, and to receive respect (Anderson, 2000). This seems to be the approach for him and others like him, as Óli explains. *“(...) I dislike people that are robbing someone, (...) the typical me would be to go to his house and clean the place for robbing someone else.” (Óli, Litla-Hraun).* Jakob also talked about his way of handling issues that arose and was aware of it not being the right way:

“I’m so damaged, you know, in the head, there are a lot of things that I think are ok that, you know, I don’t want to share with you, you get me, that I would think that you would not at all see ok, but I’m trying to change that” (Jakob, Sogn).

He wanted to shield me from his bad habits and way of life. It could both be because I was a female that would not understand this way of showing masculinity or because I was not from his world. However, I asked him to give me an example: *"(...) I would always knock down those that would not talk to me with respect, or talk down to me (...) this has somehow become a part of me."* (Jakob, Litla-Hraun). When he explained that it had always been a part of him it can be connected to Becker's concept of master status, which entails that the individual's deviant status becomes higher than other statuses (Becker, 1963: 32-33). It means that his way of showing that he is superior in his society where violence is accepted has become the way he defines himself. Jakob continues saying that he would never show that he was weaker: *"(...) I'm just that determined and angry that I do everything to win, you know, I would never be under, that's for sure (...)"* (Jakob, Litla-Hraun). Both Magnús and Siggi also discussed this way of showing who is in charge. Siggi described his way of thinking: *"(...) [I]t has just been like this through time that if I have to beat someone up, then I'll just beat him up, I don't care what others say, I'll just take the consequences (...) I've always been ready to go as far as I need to (...)"* (Siggi, Sogn).

Moreover, Magnús explained that people get tougher in prison and do not see things with the same eyes as normal people, such as what is normal and what not. They appear to have different ways of handling problems that may arise. Their way of showing who is bigger and stronger with violence is considered the way to be on top. Again, this shows how well Andersen's (2000) concept; code of the street is fitting to explain their actions. Geir, who is serving for the second time in prison for violence, agreed with this: *"My last time in prison, then I was just so young, with a lot of testosterone going on (...) and then you were somehow, you had to prove yourself."* (Geir, Sogn). By showing violence behavior, they are proving that they are men. This feeling of having to prove yourself is something that Jón is familiar with as that is the reason for he started his violent act in the first place. After being bullied when he was younger, Jón decided to turn it around:

"[I]t was crazy good, good feeling that people were scared of me, very comfortable [and after that] people just hand me their money somehow and I thought that was somehow comfortable, even though it is bad to say it, but that is just the way it is (...)" (Jón, Sogn).

The longer they are a part of this way of thinking the harder it becomes to change (Anderson, 2000).

6.2.2 What is crime?

What constitutes crime seems to be different among the participants. Magnús discussed two scenarios where he committed a crime but did not seem to see it as crime. First, he explained why he once received three years in prison:

“I was selling this guy drugs and he asks if he can shoot up there with me and I said no you can’t shoot up here at my mom’s house (...) so he got angry and attacks me (...) so I punched him in the stomach because I didn’t want to beat him up, he was such a loser (...)” (Magnús, Sogn)

Soon after this, the police came and arrested Magnús but he did not know why: *“(...) I was a suspect of an assault (...) I hadn’t done anything, I just punched him in the stomach because I didn’t want to beat him up (...) and for this I get three years.”* (Magnús, Sogn). The man was seriously injured after the punch. In this scenario, Magnús had both sold drugs and assaulted a man but, at the time, did not seem to see his wrongdoings. He started committing crime at a young age and his definition of what constitutes a crime could be different from what is considered a crime in society. He appears to have been a part of the other society for a long time where the norms are different (Hirschi, 2002).

Further, last time Núi was out of prison, the police stopped him because he was driving intoxicated and without a driver’s license. He had lost it because of drugs and therefore was not allowed to drive. He violated his probation and went back to prison. What he did was a crime but he did not see it that way: *“I was just stopped intoxicated behind the wheel, but that is a big downside to this all, you are stopped once without a driver’s license and then you’re back in here.”* (Núi, Sogn). Núi was driving under the influence of drugs, but did not consider it to be enough of a violation to go back to prison. Núi and Magnús’s way of thinking can be related to secondary deviance as they have both been labeled for their actions in the past and are acting according to their deviant role (Cullen & Agnew, 2011: 249-250).

Elías had a similar story to tell about his wrongdoings. He had spent several years to change and turn his life around but still when the time came to start committing crime again, it did not take him long to act according to his old deviant self. When he started importing drugs

again, he did not see anything wrong with it and argued that if he was not doing it someone else would:

“(...) [I]t was just normal for me (...) to import drugs and be in this kind of stuff, I didn’t feel I was doing something wrong, (...) it was just so normal at the time (...) I had done it for 5 years you know, and everything was about this (...).” (Elías, Litla-Hraun).

Emil agreed with Elías and did not see anything wrong with importing drugs, as it had been his way of living for a long time and had become his norm:

“(...) [T]his was just something that I was doing, didn’t see anything wrong with it, I knew what could happen and I was totally prepared for that and [when I was found not guilty] I felt untouchable and went on double speed after I was released then (...).” (Emil, Litla-Hraun).

This is relatable to Hirschi element of belief where he argued that if an individual knows that it is wrong to steal he would not do it. At the time, many of them were not aware of they were doing something wrong, which can be a result of weak or broken bonds towards the rules and social norms of the society (Hirschi, 2002: 23-26).

6.2.3 Not ready to stop

Many of the inmates I interviewed were not considering giving up their criminal behavior after release from prison. When Emil was asked about if he had ever considered stopping and turning his live around he said that very few are determined to stop next time they get out:

“(...) I wasn’t completely firm on it, that I would never do anything again, but of course you try to think that you are not going to do it as reckless as before, it’s more like that, because I’ve been working in this for many years, like 10-15 years” (Emil, Litla-Hraun).

After Emil was arrested and found not guilty, he expressed that he doubled the speed and felt untouchable. When he later was convicted, he was determined continuing importing drugs: *“(...) I wasn’t going to stop, you know, I didn’t care that I got caught, I was just gonna work up the loss later (...).” (Emil, Litla-Hraun).* According to Minke’s (2012) research, only 17% expressed they would probably continue on committing crime. Minke’s results are therefore lower than this study displayed as half of the participants argued that they were not ready to change after one (or more) of their prison sentences and went back to their old lifestyle after

release. Others did not particularly discuss it but most of them started committing crime again shortly after release from prison.

Tómas explained that he was not considering stopping after release from prison, as he was glad to get out of prison to be able to continue his drug use. He always knew what would happen when he got out and thought he could control his use. Geir was on the same page regarding having control over his use: *"(...) I was so stupid then, so young and stupid, so I was like, yeah you know, I will just use now and again, and never thought of stopping."* (Geir, Sogn). Furthermore, Núi never considered stopping using drugs even though he was in rehab every time he was serving in prison: *"I have been using for many years, I was using a lot before I came in now (...). This time I've spent in prison, I've always been in rehab, but I'd always been in rehab for others, but I always thought it was ok to use."* (Núi, Sogn). Both Pétur and Elías agreed with the others as they both went back to using drugs after their first sentence. Pétur felt sorry for people that did not allow themselves to be intoxicated every day and felt they were missing out of so much, which is why he was not ready to give up that lifestyle. It had been his norm: *"(...) You know, my society has always been the other society that is not accepted, and has always been like that for a long time."* (Pétur, Litla-Hraun). Jakob started young committing crime and had therefore, like Pétur been a part of this other society for a long time. These individuals have been stigmatized by society, which makes it difficult for them to change. It can therefore be the easier choice for them to continue on their criminal path (Garland, 2001).

For Núi, Emil and Soggi it appeared to be a matter of gain vs. cost. Núi was stealing for many years and only received a sentence that was short in his opinion. Therefore, he did not consider stopping committing crime. He wanted to continue because the money was good, hence the benefit, and the cost of going to prison was not severe in his mind (see Hauge, 1996: 304-306). Soggi and Emil knew what could happen if they continued in the drug business but did not care: *"(...) It's not the end of the world if you are caught, of course it's bad, but there were of course a lot of missions that worked out, but then, of course, are times where everything doesn't work out, its just a part of it (...)." (Emil, Litla-Hraun). He felt the gain of importing drugs was much higher than the cost, also because he was only caught a few times compared to the times the missions were successful. Soggi agreed with Emil: "I just thought of it this way, it's just a part of it, you know, to be selling drugs, be caught, go to prison."* (Soggi,

Sogn). He had no intension of quitting: *“I had no interest [in quitting], especially not when I went to Litla-Hraun for the first time.”* (Siggi, Sogn). He felt he gained more after he was released from prison the first time, as was mentioned above; he had much better connection to the underworld. Therefore, in his mind, the benefit of selling drugs only increased after serving at Litla-Hraun.

6.2.4 I tried

At some point of the inmates' criminal lives, seven of the participants tried to stop committing crime and start over. However, that did not go as planned as all of them went back to prison. Both Addi and Pétur wanted to change and stop using drugs (and committing crime to finance their drug abuse) but it was too hard. Addi had only been able to stay sober in rehab and Pétur had tried to escape his problems by moving abroad.

Magnús, Geir and Elías each had a house, cars and girlfriends. In addition, Magnús and Geir had children. However, that did not work out as they had planned:

“(...) I was out for 5 years and you know, I had a kid right when I was released (...) and then it went really well for like 3-4 years or something (...) I was working and doing my thing and something like that and I bought an apartment and lived with the mother of my child, and my child (...) then somehow, I don't know what happened, I just got wasted and all of a sudden I was drinking a liter of vodka a day (...) and I woke up somehow in here again, and had received 8 years in prison again (...).” (Geir, Sogn).

He had also started using cocaine and amphetamine but did not realize how serious the situation had become. For Magnús, as has been mentioned, he had a girlfriend and a child but it was simply too easy for him to continue on his criminal path. He had been sober for six years when he started using drugs again and a short while later he was back in prison. It took Elías a long time to reintegrate and getting used to being alone and establishing a home. He had to overcome many issues on the way. However, as has been presented above, he started committing crime again because of the economic crisis in Iceland in 2008. Then he started to see it as a way to gain money and not a way to use drugs, as he is still clean to this day. Due to the loss of opportunities because of labeling (his prison sentence) he did not see another way out of his financial problems than to commit crime (Cullen and Agnew, 2011:239-240).

For Óli the problem was that he did not change fast enough:

"(...) I've been sober for 7 years, but I still came in last time here despite being sober (...) and I was really trying (...) but then I'm convicted for my presence, as before I would definitely had participated, you know, (...) where I grabbed someone's neck and slap him, there I would definitely had punched him down, so I'm certainly changing, but I'm not changing enough, or you know, not fast enough." (Óli, Litla-Hraun).

Óli has been known for being the person who takes care of things, which has become his master status. Therefore, it can take a long time to start over as this has been his way of living for a long time (see Becker, 1963: 32-33). He argued that he was once convicted for being present when something happened:

"I have never been as calm as I was the last time I got out (...) another case, I was basically convicted for my aura, or you know, (...) in trial they said that I hadn't done anything but I increased the intensity of the attack because of my presence (...) and I got fully convicted even though it was proven that I didn't do anything." (Óli, Litla-Hraun).

Óli argued that he received higher sentence than others would have received for the same act simply because he is who he is. It appears that Óli has been labeled as bad and is punished according to the deviant image that has been created. This makes it even more difficult for him to start over (Cullen & Agnew, 2011: 249-251).

After Jakob had two chances of starting over he decided enough was enough, and did not want to end up in prison for the rest of his life. When he was released, after serving his sentence completely, he turned his life around.

"I wasn't gonna be some fucking loser that always comes back in [to prison] and I got sober and went to AA and turned my life around completely... I was sober for a year here inside and then I got out and was sober for a year outside, I studied to become a personal trainer (...) and everything was going really well, and I was all in weightlifting (...) and life was good (...) but then I stopped following the AA program (...) and I was surrounded by a lot of normal people, that I forgot that I needed some of this extra support" (Jakob, Litla-Hraun).

Unconsciously, he got drunk and a year later, he was back in prison. He had invested his time and energy in getting an education and a job with his uncle. Therefore, according to Hirschi, he should have been less likely to relapse into crime. However, because he had been a part of the society for a while he felt he had been reintegrated:

"I had gained everything back, you know, I was a part of my childhood friends that were still playing soccer and I was playing (...) and laughing and having fun you know, going to some river rafting trips with my old class or my group that I had separated from(...)" (Jakob, Litla-Hraun) .

Jakob felt he was no longer a criminal or a former drug addict and forgot the importance of a support due to his drug and alcohol problems to continue as a part of the society.

6.2.5 I don't care

At some point in the interviews, all twelve participants expressed that they did not care about what people thought of them or if they were breaking the law. Magnús and Emil even expressed that they did not care about themselves. Magnús explained to me that this way of thinking is normal for inmates: *"(...) [A]n inmate is different from normal people, you know, he has much cruder humor and in higher degree doesn't give a damn about anything (...)"* (Magnús, Sogn). It appears that Magnús and other participants are insensitive about the wishes of others, which results in weak attachment to the norms. Therefore, they feel free to act in a deviant manner (Hirschi, 2002: 17-18).

Emil expressed his thoughts: *(...)[Others] opinion (...) I don't care, and I have never cared, I have never been in this norm, so, or sought after some kind of acceptance or some pat on the back from people I don't know, I don't care about that."* (Emil, Litla-Hraun). According to the element of attachment, people tend to be emotionally attached to their surroundings, which results in individuals caring what others might think of them. Therefore, when showing deviant behavior the individual is stating his carelessness to others' opinions of him (Hirschi, 2002: 17-18). To show society that he did not care about others' opinion, Jakob took it a step further:

"(...) [W]hen I, for example, came before a judge, then we didn't cover our faces, and you know, and that is very rare, I just thought, if it has gone this far, then I'll just take it all the way and you know, with that attitude and I didn't give a shit what people thought (...)." (Jakob, Litla-Hraun)

When people are charged for a serious crime in Iceland, the media is very quick to publish the names of the offenders and often pictures of them when in trial and that is what Jakob is referring to when he explained that he did not cover his face.

Siggi also expressed this carelessness when he knew he had been caught breaking the law again:

“(...) [W]hen I had been arrested once and you know you have violated probation, than you don’t give a shit, you know, I think [the police] picked me up like 30 times on a car, and I didn’t care, I was already on my way back in here, you know, it doesn’t matter.” (Siggi, Sogn).

Many of them lost their driver’s license and when on probation they went back to prison for driving. This way of thinking is relatable to the labeling theory and to the social bond theory. Siggi, and others, have been labeled before and know therefore what they can and cannot do. However, once caught, they keep violating the law. As a result, they establish their deviant role by acting according to it (Cullen & Agnew, 2011). Moreover, by continuing breaking the law they express their carelessness to others’ opinion (Hirschi, 2002: 17-18). Tómas agreed with Siggi, once he knew he would be convicted again he did not care:

“(...)You are maybe clean outside and feel you have a lot to defend, and you try not to violate probation and stuff like that, but as soon as you’ve violated [the probation], and you know you are on your way back in then it’s like, doesn’t matter, you know you’re going in. (...) [Y]ou just feel like that, that you have nothing to lose somehow, and yeah, just fuck it.” (Tómas, Litla-Hraun).

It appears that both Siggi and Tómas are acting in a deviant matter knowing that they have been labeled as criminals. As Tannenbaum explained, labeled individual becomes the person others have defined him as being (Cullen & Agnew, 2011: 239). Therefore, Siggi and Tómas were acting according to the label as criminals the police had given them.

6.3 Occupation

Within this section of the results I will present their occupation while outside in society between convictions. That entails both job and/or education status.

When asked about their occupation between convictions, half of the participants expressed that they received a job through family or friend. Elías received a job through his aunt:

“(...) They didn’t make you turn in your criminal record, and I got it through my aunt, so it was very easy (...) otherwise I would never had gotten a job, (...) I had something like 12 convictions on my back when I was 20, you know, even though I’ve only served twice in prison, it looks bad, I probably wouldn’t have received a job like this then, the society doesn’t allow it.” (Elías, Litla-Hraun).

Elías's perception is relatable to LeBel et al., (2008) where they argued that it is difficult for offenders to reintegrate into the society, such as obtaining a job, after stigmatization. This can increase the likelihood of further criminal behavior. However, Magnús argued that when he was released he was surprised how easy it was for him to obtain a job:

"It was such a surprise for me because I was like naaah, there is definitely nobody that wants me to work for them and stuff like that (...) and everyone wanted me in everything and, I thought there was way more prejudgement against people that are coming out of prison (...)." (Magnús, Sogn).

Magnús's comment and the fact that most of them could obtain a job through family is consistent with Baumer et al., (2002: 46-47). They argued that having a criminal record in Iceland does not necessarily result in unemployment. That indicates that offenders do not appear to be permanently stigmatized for their actions. Up to some degree, Baumer's point is valid as Geir, Óli, Emil and Elías had their own company between convictions. However, it went well for Geir, Óli and Emil but it was difficult for Elías (will be further discussed in Society chapter). Emil's company was doing well, but he always made sure that he was never registered as the owner or as a board member. He was afraid that if his name were googled, the company would appear alongside his convictions, which could result in people boycotting the company. It seemed that Emil felt that he was being labeled for his actions and being stigmatized could result in becoming less worthy in the eyes of others. Emil's measure of precaution is likely to be a result of coming across negative images of himself through others (Bernburg, 2005:120).

Most argued that they could obtain a job if they wanted but many had no interest in that, as they rather wanted to sell drugs or do other illegal activities:

"I've always been able to get a job, no problem (...) worked for my stepdad (...) or I know someone, I can always get into something (...) but I usually don't bother to work because I'm usually just selling drugs or some shit and beating people up (...)." (Jón, Sogn).

Both Addi and Siggi also did not care for obtaining a job as they were both receiving benefits because of disabilities and that was enough for them, in addition to committing crime: *"I'm disabled so I could always pay my rent but of course you had to sell drugs to have money."* (Siggi, Sogn). He had no interest in obtaining a job as he explained that drugs and work do not match. Tómas and Pétur also talked about this inconsistency between job and drugs.

Before Emil decided to stop importing drugs, it had been his job for over a decade and it was imprinted in his head that this was just his job. In this job, he gained a lot more than he would have through a legitimate job:

“(...) I had a lot of other businesses that were legal, so it wouldn’t look suspicious, I gained a lot of things and a lot of cars and a summerhouse and some yacht and a ship and all kinds of crap but still in fact, what I was doing in my [legitimate] job, that people saw, it could have helped me gained these things, but it was way way more than I could have ever gained normally, in such a short time (...).” (Emil, Litla-Hraun).

The decision of committing crime again can be seen as the consequence of the offenders’ benefits in crime versus the disadvantages they come across in the society (Hauge, 1996: 304-306). Emil gained way more by importing drugs and said what he enjoyed the most about this kind of job was the thrill.

Elías and Jakob were the only ones that completely turned their life around and said goodbye to their old life after release. They both went through drug treatment and went to school after release where Jakob finished his education but because of the economic crisis, Elías quit after a year. Addi also tried obtaining an education but the drug and alcohol abuse took over. As Hirschi has pointed out in the element of involvement, individuals that do not have the opportunity to participate in conventional activities to fulfill their recreational interest are more likely to engage in crime (Hirschi, 2002: 21-22). Elías did not have the opportunity to receive an education due to financial problems and could not earn enough through work and therefore he went back to what he knew best, importing drugs. He, among others, had a low socioeconomic status, such as education opportunities, income and job opportunities, which, according to the Scandinavian report, is a risk factor for recidivism (Graunbøl et al., 2010).

The educational level of the participants was not high, as over half did not finish more than what is mandatory in Iceland. Only Emil finished high school out in society and he planned on going to the university but the drug business took over:

“I finished high-school and the plan was to go to the university, to learn economics (...) usually I regret it, you look at your childhood friends, you know, and classmates and they are of course, many well educated, you know, are in this norm, or what we call the norm, with a family and wife and children and all that, so, sometimes you want it, but then again not” (Emil, Litla-Hraun).

This is consistent with the results of Margrét Sæmundsdóttir's (2004) study, as little over half of inmates in Iceland had only finished secondary school (10th grade).

6.4 The two societies

In the following section, I will present the results about how the participants perceive their position in the underworld and in society, that is, how others see them. These results present how people, media and the authorities identify the inmates in their opinion.

6.4.1 The underworld

Around half of the participants discussed their status within the underworld. Jón, Óli, Magnús and Jakob expressed their use of violence or threat that kept them on top: *"(...) I don't pay for stuff you know, I'm like: give me 10 pieces, give me it (...) and yeah are you gonna pay? And I'm like are you gonna make me pay (...) you know, I don't pay for anything, it's so easy for me to be using (...)." (Magnús, Sogn)*. This identity has become his master status, as he is known for doing what he has to do in the underworld. This status has become higher than other statuses (Becker, 1963: 9). However, he argued that it had gone too far: *"It has become too much, it's too, my name was some underworld name but now I've become some kind of a devil, nobody dares to talk to me, you know, I don't like it."* (Magnús, Sogn). He argued that before he only had to snap his finger and he could get any woman he wanted but now, no woman wants him. His label as a criminal appears to have become too powerful. Óli had also a high status within the underworld as the person who takes care of things. When asked if people are scared of him he answered: *"Yes, especially in my society, I've been very ruthless, beat up many people and (...) if someone talks back somewhere then I show up and if someone is going to beat me up I show up and usually beat up that person."* (Óli, Litla-Hraun). He continues saying that he always gets his ways. As has been pointed out before, Anderson's (2000) concept of the code of the street is relevant, where the use of, or the threat to use, violence is the key to withhold respect; as Óli expressed that if someone messes with him or his people, then he messes with them first. Moreover, Jón also explained that he had worked on it for a long time being the bad, scary man:

"People think you are crazy, which is understandable, I've been working on it the whole time making people scared of me, and living in fear and have this name, but I'm seeing it now that it was the wrong way and not that easy to back out and turn it around (...)." (Jón, Sogn).

Jón wanted to be labeled as the bad person for many years and he wanted his self to change from being the boy who was bullied into being the man who strikes back (Bernburg, 2005:112).

However, when it comes to wanting to clear his name and change, the stigmatization seems to be powerful, making it difficult to start fresh. Jakob already had a certain reputation in the underworld when he was a teenager as he was the youngster that was never afraid to attack the big guys. However, his reputation changed and just as Óli, he became the person people called to take care of things:

“Usually I’m called when somebody owes someone something and since I became sober I’ve said yes a few times, but I don’t need to say more than just; hey you, he was talking to me and it’s this thing you know, and then that is just taken care of, but then there are idiots here and there that answer me back (...) then I’ve put myself into a situation, and if I start something then of course, I’m not gonna back out, and if that came up I would have to follow through (...)” (Jakob, Litla-Hraun).

His pride was too much that even though he had turned his life around, he had difficulties backing out if he saw that the situation was getting serious. This eye-for-an-eye way of dealing with things appeared to be well imprinted into his mind. He continued saying that he thought that maybe two or three individuals would dare to go up against him in the underworld. Elías discussed the importance of having a certain image in the underworld to be able to thrive:

“(...) I was always importing a lot of kilos [of drugs] and always dealing with all these idiots and you need to have a certain image and you know, I built up my image, (...) and the image was always that I had a lot of money and if you don’t pay, you won’t get anything from me you know, I wasn’t the guy who was blackmailing or beating up, but you know, I built this up, and it was some kind of a character (...).” (Elías, Litla-Hraun).

Labeled and stigmatized individuals often create their own sets of rules as their behavior is not accepted in society (Hirschi, 2002: 23). Being a part of that other society, such as the underworld, it seems to be important to have a certain reputation or image in order to have power.

6.4.2 The “mainstream” society

All of the participants expressed that they had felt labeled as bad at one time or another during their time outside prison. Most explained that their perception on how society defined

them was mostly as the devil, very dangerous, violent and crazy individuals that people should not interact with and when asked they mostly understood why people had this impression of them.

Jón explained that he felt stigmatized by the people living in his building as they called the police on him very frequently:

"(...) [I]t had become insane in the end (...) the police came to my home 57 times in my last 60 days outside (...). The girl that I'm seeing has a boy that is 6 or 7 years old and he was playing videogames and crashing cars and then there was a complain that I was beating up a person with a sledgehammer in my home (...) People, I don't know, have googled me or something, I don't know, a lot of panic going on." (Jón, Sogn).

Because of all this commotion, he was glad to get a break by going to prison. However, he thought about teaching them a lesson: *"(...) I had thought of [letting my friends] smash their windows once a week and all the windows in the building and I don't know what, but then why bother."* (Jón, Sogn). His neighbors had labeled him as a criminal. This is relatable to the labeling theory where Jón appears to come across negative images of himself through his neighbors (Bernburg, 2005:120). He then considered acting according to this deviant label by smashing the windows (Cullen & Agnew, 2011). As a result, Tannenbaum argued that an individual becomes the person others have defined him as being (Cullen and Agnew, 2011: 240). This is exactly what Elías expressed when discussing being labeled by others: *"(...) If you are always punished for being bad, then you just become the best in being worst, you know, that's just what you do, you are always being punished then you become the best in being worst, you get it (...)." (Elías, Litla-Hraun).* However, Emil understood why offenders are stigmatized as he would do the same: *"(...) You're no different, about criminals, I would not be happy you know, if I lived next to some big criminal or violent person if I had children for example, I would think it was completely normal that I would have prejudice against him."* (Emil, Litla-Hraun).

Five discussed being from a small community where it was more difficult to start fresh after being labeled as a criminal. Jakob argued that people showed fear and distrust towards him but was convinced that anything was possible. He was able to change his life in his small community as with time people saw he was not the same person anymore. However, he was

the only one that felt this way. Elías tried to start over in his old community but people were not welcoming:

“When I lived in X, a label was put on my house: Here lives Elías drug dealer and loser, and it was some woman (...) because her boy had been using drugs and I was a drug dealer or importing drugs,... or you know I had been convicted there, and it was all over the news so they just labeled my house and I was blamed (...).” (Elías, Litla-Hraun).

The labeling theory argues that after arrest, the deviant comes across a different image of himself where he is categorized as a criminal. His whole world changes before his eyes, as he can no longer be the same person as he was before the label (Cullen and Agnew, 2011:240). Like Elías, Nói argued that he was blamed for something he did not do. He had been labeled before as a thief:

“(...) There was some bank robbery in X, an ATM was robbed (...) and I was blamed or they tried to blame it on me, I was supposed to go to debt prison, owed 1.5 million ISK or something (...) so I hid and the police was always looking for me because of this ATM robbery and I didn’t do it.” (Nói, Sogn).

However, Elías continued sharing stories where he felt labeled as a criminal two years after he had changed his life:

“(...) I was going to turn my life around and open a bar with my friend and we renovated it by ourselves (...) I was in the local weekly paper: ‘Drug dealer wants to open a bar’, then I had already opened (...) first it was a nice advertisement but then came the next and the next and the next, you know, headline in the paper, it ended up with, the university students that knew me and many others that knew me came to me and said that they couldn’t be there anymore because there was this rumor that you could buy drugs there (...).” (Elías, Litla-Hraun).

Elías had become known for his deviant status, as the drug dealer and it became his master status as Becker explained. This can result in people holding a certain distance from the labeled individual because they are concerned of being labeled as well (Becker, 1963:32-33). Siggi also experienced that people held a certain distance in his small community: *“(...) People know who you are (...) and they are more cautious, are careful of what not to say to you so you don’t take it badly.”* (Siggi, Sogn).

Óli, Elías and Jón argued that it could be difficult to get rid of the deviant label *“(...) [Y]ou don’t take away a reputation so easily, then I would have to start wearing monk clothes and become*

extremely religious (...) it's easier said than done." (Óli, Litla-Hraun). Landersø and Tranæs (2009:190) argued that recidivism could be solely the result of social marginalization because of people's perception of serving in prison. Jón did not know how he could clear his name and if he even deserved a second chance: *"(...) I haven't contributed anything good to society so I don't deserve something good there, I mean it's a lot of work and I don't know how to tackle this (...)."* (Jón, Sogn). Furthermore, Elías argued that after two years of trying, he did not succeed to clear his name but it took him less than six months to create a deviant image. Their perception is consistent with the labeling theory that explains that when individuals have successfully been labeled, it is difficult to prove that they are not bad (Cullen and Agnew, 2011: 240). In addition, many argued that the media does not help in minimizing the stigmatization but rather tries to exploit the situation:

"Yes, they have published my name, and many times, and certainly they have photographed me, you know, in trial when I'm being led in handcuffs and then they have been calling family members and tried to get some scoop and now through this case, they are always bringing up the old cases, always when I'm arrested, they are very quick digging that up." (Emil, Litla-Hraun).

According to Óli, the media is always trying to write the most exciting news and often exaggerate. This is not good as the Icelandic people are very gullible and believe everything they read, as Óli explained. He also felt the legal system frequently labeled offenders if the system thinks they have done something. He was not the only one that felt this way towards the system as almost half of the participants argued that the police or authorities in general were out to get them and were stigmatizing them when they were out in society. Tómas' perception of the police was not positive as even though he was the victim of a serious assault once he felt the police were working against him in that case:

"My opinion towards the police is not high, especially because of their work ethics (...). I had documents because of my injury and I went into many hours of surgery and they are basically working against me in that case (...) there are good men there in between but my opinion of them is not high (...)." (Tómas, Litla-Hraun).

Further, Geir and Magnús perception of the police was that they lie and do everything in their power in order for them (offenders) to receive higher sentences:

"You know, the police does everything they can so people get the highest sentence, or I think so, I have certainly not been popular with them since I fought with the special force unit, or you know, punched someone or something, but they always

behave like this, they are just on the other team and they want the worst for you, they don't care if it's fair or not (...)." (Geir, Sogn).

Magnús was on the same page and did not think highly of the police:

"(...) My attitude towards the police and the court is certainly, not good, I think they can just fuck themselves. They make up lies about me and put everything on me and do everything they can to screw with me even though they have to turn tricks (...) or break the law to get me, they will do it." (Magnús, Sogn)

According to LeBel et al., (2008), when individuals are stigmatized the risk of recidivism increases. It appears that Magnús and Geir (and others) feel that they are labeled as criminal by the authorities. If former inmates identify themselves as being an outcast in the society and sense that they are not welcome to re-enter, the likelihood of them continuing on their criminal path increases. This is what LeBel et al. (2008) called *internalizing stigma*. Both Elías and Jón also felt the police singled them out. For that, Jón decided to do an experiment:

"The police haunts me, I'm not exaggerating (...) I decided to check the other day, (...). I was talking to my friend on the phone Sunday night at 2 o'clock and decided to tell him that I was getting half a kilo of drugs at the latest on Monday the next day at 2 o'clock and I wanted to see what would happen (...) I wake up with the special force unit coming up with guns in my face 10 minutes past 2 (...)." (Jón, Sogn).

He felt the police was always coming to his house expecting that he was doing something illegal. He felt stigmatized by the police and therefore decided to act according to their expectations. Elías acted in the same matter as he felt he was convicted for a crime he did not commit. He confessed that he had been doing similar things but in that particular case he was innocent. Because he was convicted for that crime, he felt the police were in debt to him: *"(...) The feeling of being convicted when innocent and finishing that sentence innocent, I felt I wasn't done, I felt they owed me (...)"* (Elías, Litla-Hraun). He felt wrongly labeled and for that decided to continue committing crime because he had already been convicted for a crime he did not commit. This is consistent with Tannenbaum's definition of the labeling theory where the individual becomes the person others have defined him as being (Cullen and Agnew, 2011: 240), in this case, the court and the police.

Chapter 7 – Discussion

In this section, I will discuss how the themes presented above, along with the social bond theory and labeling theory can be interpreted along with the relevant literature. The chosen theories have different approaches when explaining the cause of deviant behavior. However, as has been noted, they do complement each other in my opinion and thus work well together. It can be seen as a cycle the offender can be stuck in: if social bonds are weak or broken, it increases the likelihood of criminal behavior. Once the offender has committed crime he comes across negative images of himself, hence he has been labeled. When labeled, opportunities for conventional life decreases which, as a result, makes it more difficult to restore the weak bond (Bernburg, 2005; Hirschi, 2002). Both theories were relatable to various responses from the inmates as has been presented in the result chapter.

There did not seem to be a difference between the answers depending on the prison the inmates were serving their sentences in. It could be because at the time of the interview, all participants were trying to turn their life around and wanted to turn their back on their old lifestyle. Having participants that all had their mindset on crimeless lives after release was in my opinion positive as they all had been through the process of looking back on their lives and deciding that it was a time for a change. Therefore, they appeared to have been in better shape to discuss their past openly as it was something they had put behind them. They all explained that they had problems with drugs and/or alcohol at one point in their lives; however, four were sober before they went into prison again. It is important to consider the drug and alcohol problem, as an explanation for their behavior because it appeared to be of great significance regarding recidivism in addition to other factors.

7.1 Relationships

Having support when released seemed to be important for the inmates. However, where that support should come from differed between them, as the impact of having a relationship with for example, parents, varied between the inmates. Some did not appear to gain enough support from their parents, which was either due to the inmates' initiation or vice versa. Two of them had a good relationship with both of their parents but were responsible for driving their support away when that mattered. For some, losing a support from a spouse resulted in a setback in their lives. In these cases, it did not matter whether they had support from

parents or not. Thus indicating that a support from a spouse was more important than from parents. In addition, being a father did not appear to have a great effect on the inmates regarding abandoning their criminal life. It seemed that whether it was a good relationship with their families or not, the bond itself was not enough to determine their behavior as a portion of the participants had a good relationship with their family, but still continued committing crime. This indicating that strong or weak family bonds cannot be a sole factor for recidivism.

In my opinion, regarding their relationship with deviant groups, it was important for the inmates not to seek out their old deviant group, in order to stay on track. Whether it was before setback or after, the inmates appeared to be a part of a deviant group just before incarceration. However, it is not clear if the participation in a deviant group is the reason for their continuous deviant behavior or a result of it. A possible reason for seeking out a deviant group of friends is the potential stigmatization from society (such as from “normal” friends). As a result, they felt less labeled and more accepted in the deviant group (Bernburg et al., 2006:67-69). In addition, being incarcerated appeared to have a negative effect on the inmates as many became further integrated into deviant group, thus even better prepared for continuous criminal behavior after release.

7.2 Way of thinking

Anderson’s (2008) concept of the code of the streets was relevant to the answers from the participants regarding how they showed their power. The importance of violence seemed to be one of the main rules in the underworld in order to gain respect. Using an alternative method to deal with problems that might occur might have been difficult for the inmates, as violence had become a part of their social norm and their identification. These distorted social norms also reflected on the inmates’ different views on what crime was. The line was vague between what the participants considered to be deviant behavior and what is according to society. In addition, it was difficult for the inmates to abandon the value system they believed in and begin to follow one that they did not respect before (Hirschi, 2002:23). This was emphasized by the inmates’ lack of interest in turning their life around and discarding their deviant lifestyle. They had settled down in this underworld society. Moreover, for many of the participants it was considered more beneficial to continue on a criminal path in terms

of both money and status (Hauge, 1996:304-306). The inmates that tried to start over failed to do so mainly for three reasons. First, because of their drug and alcohol problems, which led to further criminal behavior. Secondly, because of the difficulties abandoning their deviant norms and adopting to different set of rules (Anderson, 2000), and thirdly, because they experienced negativity towards them from the society.

All twelve participants expressed their carelessness regarding others opinion of them (Hirschi, 2002:17-18). In my opinion, this viewpoint could be a result of deviant labeling, and the careless way of thinking could be a way for the inmates to shield themselves from this stigmatization. Additionally, the incarceration itself could also be a factor in supporting this way of thinking. The main problem with this carelessness is that it could increase the risk of ongoing criminal behavior.

7.3 Occupation

Some of the inmates feared stigmatization on the labor market. However, the participants did not seem to be excluded from the labor market in Iceland, which adds to the results from Baumer et al. (2002). Iceland is a small country where “everyone knows everyone”, which made it easier for the inmates to find someone that was ready to help them obtain a job. Those who sought a job did in fact receive one. However, some of the inmates felt that they could gain more money through criminal activities.

Regarding the inmates’ education level, only two had finished an education beyond secondary school outside in society, which is consistent with the results of Sæmundsdóttir’s (2004) research on inmates’ status before release. Therefore, the variety of jobs with high income decreased, which resulted in crime being the more desirable choice. Additionally, some of the inmates’ perspective on what constituted high income seemed distorted, as many of the jobs available to them are not considered low-income jobs in the Icelandic society. Therefore, the problem seems to lie within the income and not solely on the job opportunities. It appeared that having high income was more important than having a legitimate job and the easier, or only way to receive that was through crime.

7.4 The two societies

In the inmates' discussion on their image within the underworld, many expressed having a high status where their image had become powerful. Having this high status was often due to their brutal expression of violence to receive what they wanted, which according to the inmates was important to thrive in the underworld. Again, Anderson's (2008) concept is fitting as many of the inmates used, or threatened to use violence in order to stay on the top of the hierarchy in the underworld. The inmates had been a part of this underworld society for a long time where the social norms and value system are different from the "mainstream" society. The inmates' criminal behavior, such as drug use, violence and/or drug import, was accepted. Therefore, it was easier to continue being a part of society that accepted their criminal behavior instead of being a part of a society unwelcoming towards them (according to the inmates). All of the participants felt they were stigmatized and labeled by society as dangerous and bad. Therefore, reintegration became harder for them. Furthermore, being from small communities increased the level of stigmatization as many of the inmates experienced firsthand marginalization in their community. The media also played its part in stigmatization, where they publicly displayed who the criminals were. As a result, it became increasingly difficult for the inmates to re-enter the society after release from prison. Additionally, in the inmates' opinion, the police was doing everything in their power to label them as criminals by working against them in order to lengthen their prison sentences. Because of the inmates' understanding of how people look at them, they come across negative images of themselves from the society. As a result, the likelihood of acting according to this deviant label increases (Bernburg, 2005:120).

Chapter 8 - Conclusion

The aim of this master's thesis was to gain an understanding and information about repeat offenders' experience on the time outside in society between prison sentences. The research question was as following:

How do repeat offenders in Iceland experience the time in society between prison sentences?

Four main themes (as well as sub-themes) were created to summarize the topics that were particularly prominent in the interviews. These themes were used to help answer the research question. They were the following: *Relationship* (with the sub-themes: *Family* and *Deviant groups*), *Way of thinking* (with the sub-themes: *Showing who is the superior*, *What is crime?*, *Not ready to stop*, *I tried and I don't care*), *Occupation* and finally, *The two societies* (with the sub-themes: *The underworld* and *The "mainstream" society*). These themes provided an insight of the participants' perspective of how they experience being in society, whether they felt a part of it or not. The chosen themes provided a certain image of how repeat offenders perceive themselves as well as the society between convictions. Their answers were relatable to both the presented literature and the chosen theories.

It is important to bear in mind that drug and alcohol problems appeared to have significant effect on inmates' behavior in society, as all of the interviewees were dealing with that problem at one point in their lives. However, third of the inmates were not using drugs before starting their last prison sentence and therefore other factors are important to recognize as well. Support from a close one seems to be important for the inmates. However, where the support they need comes from and what it signifies differs. The support from a spouse appears to be most effective as three explained the negative effect of losing that support and one the positive effect of gaining it. However, the support itself does not seem to be enough to reduce the risk of recidivism as all did commit crime again regardless of their relationship with their family.

Most of the inmates discussed how they sought out their deviant group of friends once they started showing, or continued showing, deviant behavior. In their deviant group of friends, the inmates' criminal behavior can be seen as a part of their social norm and is accepted. This

is the inmates' way of trying to escape the potential stigmatization or labeling from the society. Additionally, many argued that their deviant self strengthened after a time in prison as they came across others like them that embraced this deviant behavior.

Given the answers from the participants about their way of thinking, it appears their social norms are distorted compared to what is considered the norm in the society. They appear to be a part of another value system where the rules are different, such as how to be on the top and what is considered a crime. For the inmates, showing violence or importing drugs is not necessarily categorized as crime but rather an accepted way of behaving in the underworld. This different way of thinking can be established even further by looking at those that did try to reintegrate into the society but did not succeed due to the distorted idea on what is an acceptable behavior. Moreover, their drug and/or alcohol problems and stigmatization from the society played a certain part in their relapse into crime. In addition, being careless appeared to be the norm for them as they expressed their carelessness regarding others opinion of them. However, given that they all felt stigmatized and labeled by the society this carelessness can be seen as a way of trying to shield themselves from the stigmatization, whether if it is done unconsciously or not.

When discussing their education status, only two had received an education beyond what is mandatory in Iceland, outside in society. Due to this low education level their chances of a high-income job was reduced. As many earned a lot of money by committing crime, continuing on that path appeared to be more appealing to them. This is a decision based on gain versus cost, as it is more beneficial to continue committing crime. Therefore, not all wanted to be a part of the labor market. Although, those who did want to obtain a legitimate job did not have a problem finding work.

It is important to have a certain image to thrive in the underworld. This image many had built up, did not seem to fit both in the underworld and in the "mainstream" society. Therefore, being a part of the underworld for many years, as the inmates had, makes it that much more difficult to reintegrate into a society with an image that is not seen desirable. Moreover, the inmates perceived the society as unwelcoming. They experienced being labeled as dangerous and violent criminals and many argued that clearing their name would take a very long time. Therefore, choosing between the underworld, where their deviant behavior was accepted, and society where they felt unwelcomed was not difficult.

To sum up, the repeat offenders experienced their time in society between convictions as outsiders. In general, most did not feel a part of the society and when trying to reintegrate they came across negative images of themselves through others, they felt labeled as criminals. Furthermore, because of their distorted social norms it was difficult for them to change and start following another value system, which they did not believe in before. Some had never tried to start over, and their experience in society mainly consisted of being a part of the underworld where they could continue their criminal behavior without being labeled. Due to the inmates' negative experience of society; it seems that continuing on their criminal path is the more desirable choice as in the underworld society they are accepted.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide

1. Information:
 - a. How often in prison?
 - b. For how long each time?
 - c. How long out between convictions?
2. Feeling when you knew you were being released? Ready/not ready, happy/nervous?
Why? How was it each time?
3. What were your circumstances right after release (vs. before conviction)? (each time if many times)
 - a. Relationship with relatives/friends/spouse/children?
 - b. Job status/education
 - c. Financial status
 - d. Residence
 - e. The overall environment you were starting your life again in?
 - i. Such as group of friends, what is the norm?
 - f. Better or worse than before conviction?
4. How long took it to re-establish?
 - a. Relationship with relatives/friends/spouse/children?
 - b. Job status/education
 - c. Financial status
 - d. Residence
5. The attitude/feeling you had towards the society after release?
 - a. Different from before the first conviction?
 - b. Different between releases? (if the person has been more than twice in prison)
6. The attitude/feeling you got from the society after release in your opinion?
 - a. Different organizations/ people in general /when finding job/education
 - b. Why do you think that is?
7. Your state of mind regarding crime after release?

8. What were your goals/dreams after release?
9. Did you receive any sort of help after release?
 - a. Did you participate in activities that are available for former convicts?
 - b. Did you receive any help from your local authorities? What kind of help? If no; why not?
 - c. What kind of help would you have needed/wanted?
10. What do you think happened that led to another conviction/ why do you think you committed another crime?
 - a. State of mind when you committed another crime/right before you committed another crime?
 - b. Relationship with friends and family better/worse?
 - c. Job status/education/drug/alcohol abuse?
 - d. Where do the difficulties lie in relation to stop showing criminal behavior?
11. Did you want to stop committing crime after being released?
12. How did you feel after you knew you had broken the law?
13. How did you feel when you knew you were going back to prison?
14. What will be different next time?/how do you see yourself starting over next time?
15. Did you/do you believe you have what it takes to stop committing crime?
 - a. Likelihood of not committing crime vs. committing another crime after release?
16. How do you describe yourself?
17. How do you think friends/family/others describe you?
18. Do you have something you would like to add in relation to the questions I asked or anything else you feel is important to share?

Appendix 2: Introduction letter

Good day,

My name is Sara Ósk and I'm a master's student in criminology at the Aalborg University in Denmark. I'm on my final semester and in relation to that I'm writing my master's thesis in criminology.

My thesis involves individuals that have served prison sentences more than once. I want to learn about your view on how it is coming back into society after prison sentences and your time out in society that led to another prison sentence.

Therefor I wish to conduct interviews with individuals between the ages 21-40 that are currently serving time and have that in common to have served time in prison more than once.

The interviews will be sound-recorded but the names of each participant will never be relieved in data analysis, and will be completely anonymous. No characteristics that could reveal once personality will be used so it will not be possible to connect the answers to the participating individuals. The recordings are solely meant for me and will never be published or played. The recordings will be handled as confidential. As a researcher, I am bound to confidentiality towards you who would participate and your answers. Even though you accept to participate, you are free to withdraw from the study at any point.

For further information, please send an email to saraosk87@gmail.com

The thesis main purpose is to draw a light upon prisoner's recidivism after serving a time in prison. I hope that my results will show the circumstances for individuals who are coming back to society and how they need to get back on track, but somehow fail, just to find themselves incarcerated again.

If you accept to participate in this study, I would like to ask you to write your signature below and afterwards hand it to your prison ward, where I can access it. The interview will be conducted in collaboration with you, between the 7th and 18th of April.

I have read the introduction letter and I am fully aware of the purpose and nature of this study. By signing this letter, I hereby confirm that I have received a copy of this letter and offer my informed consent of participating in an interview for this study.

Date

Participant's Signature

Thank you,

Sara Ósk Rodríguez Svönuðóttir

Appendix 3: Summary of transcriptions (CD)

Appendix 3, which consists of summary of all transcriptions of the 12 interviews can be found on the attached CD.