Towards a more Profound Understanding of the Problem of Criminality and Recidivism in Terms of Consumption and Fashion

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Abstract

The overarching aim of this article is to explore the recidivism sequence as one of the largest problems for correctional ambitions in Western countries. Criminals are identified by a qualitative method called 'thick description', which is a deep and detailed description of those criminals. This is also a method in the identification of unaffected fashion, which is generally based on change, group identification and art. The results show that the effects of perceived threats to identity and self-esteem are associated with group membership and fashion statements. The recidivism frequency and its reality are due to an authenticity and the true self, which is not subject to ambivalence in the case of criminals and their role in the society as such. The conclusion is that we cannot, as paradoxical as it may seem, cure the recidivism problem in the world of criminals. This is because an authenticity based on the true self (a self-concept), anchored in the definition of fashion and the wider society as such, cannot easily be changed.

Introduction

The overarching aim of this article is to explore reasons behind the recidivism sequence, one of the largest problems for correctional institutions and thus ambition in Western countries. In particular, we aim to provide a partial explanation as to why correctional ambitions worldwide frequently have such a low success rate and, therefore, provide an explanation for why difficulties arise when trying to deal with this problem of recidivism in general. Moreover, we also assess *authenticity* and the *exposed-self* (in contrast with *true-self*) as a concept to identify criminals as a group in society. Finally, we provide a clarification why the correctional institutions in and of themselves still have great difficulty in lowering the criminal recidivism rate since they themselves can be said to be part of the problem. The tentacles of these institutions stretch out in society, as well as their social meanings, anchoring this very problem. This study is done from a social–anthropological perspective on a social problem that has huge worldwide economic consequences. The idea behind this paper is to develop an approach which makes it possible to display explanations regarding the recidivism problem that might construe the problem in its profundity for an individual criminal of flesh and blood. Accordingly, in the study we combine literature from two fields of

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enquiry, sociological fashion studies and ethnology studies, i.e. two fields within the scope of cultural studies. Both of these fields help us to identify the authenticity of the criminal self as it is exposed. Further, the connecting of these two fields of enquiry helps us to consider practices in *presence* and *expression* when we raise the question of recidivism as part of a societal phenomenon and as a societal process. This means that we are able to give a theoretical contribution to the discussion of recidivism from a cultural perspective.

Further, this study focuses on the problem of frequent recidivism into criminality as a self-concept, illuminating the travel path of an individual identity to a criminal authenticity. Worldwide, this problem is highlighted in statistic figures, whereas for this study the source is The Swedish Crime Survey, 2015. As the identity is drifting into the form of authenticity borne out of those figures, it is crucial to investigate the authenticity in and of itself, of a criminality in a communicated way, by way of dress and demeanor. Criminality has so far no common definition in and of itself, even if criminality can be said to have a specific meaning partly because of common language definitions and partly because criminality pertains to criminal law, where a definition arise out of the body of legislation. We do not however focus neither on the problem of defining criminality nor on discussing legal and law-giving issues. This study concerns itself with consumption practices for social groups of people that has to do with the decorating of the body itself. Thus bodily references are at the fore here in assuming a criminal identity, more and more over time. From indicators provided by Emile Durkheim (1895, Chapter 2), Martin Hollis' book, *The philosophy of social science* (1994, p. 100) and Michel Foucault (2003), together a platform emerges for a view that crimes consist of an act that offends very strong collective sentiments, without which social solidarity would be lost in society. In this sense, collective sentiment mirrors society as a whole. In those terms, criminality serves as a balancing point at which citizens can distinguish themselves from an *other* category.

This *us–them* dichotomy provides an explanation for the world much in the same way that the mythical pairing of concepts that Lèvy-Strauss uses when he concerns himself with tell-tale stories (see for instance Lèvy-Strauss 1966 or 2003). The idea of mythical dichotomies to explain the world—that we use dichotomies as a frame of understanding—is of course not unique to Lèvy-Strauss. Kieran Egan puts forward a similar idea when he speaks of forms of understanding (Egan 1997). The idea can be traced at least to the system of the Italian philosopher, Giambattista Vico, where he speaks of three phases that human societies pass through: the Divine, the Heroic and the Human. The first of these, in Vico's terms, is characterized by a metaphorical understanding of the world which levels the divine with the natural, and in so doing dichotomies are utilized, even created. Egan argues that the first level of understanding comprises the following dichotomies: short vs. tall; far away vs. nearby; heavy vs. light; and furthermore, male vs. female; nature vs. culture; sender vs. receiver; producer vs. consumer; and thus criminal vs. law-abiding, which might be interpreted in its turn as building upon the pair good *vs.* evil. In the context of dress, authenticity is at the fore, a kind of *true-self* concept. This *true-self* concept is easily juxtaposed with *untrue-self*, however we would propose that the *true-self* concept be paired with an *exposed-self* concept, so that the dichotomy consists of a true vs. exposed dichotomy (often enough in itself paired with the profound vs. superficial pair, which we will not discuss here). The young man we describe later will be a case in point. Furthermore, the statistics we will show below depict a trajectory from relapse onwards to repeat relapses. Accordingly, we propose a third step, then rather a trichotomy, or maybe not even a dichotomy or trichotomy at all. We introduce *process* as an explaining concept, but then in terms of an adjectival process, a person's being moving from positive through to superlative, passing comparative on its way: *authentic*, *more authentic*, *most authentic*, in its turn based on the assumption that authentic can be understood as a synonym for *true-self*, as in *being true to oneself*, one's *self-concept*, if you will, which then brings us back full circle to *exposed-self,* the term we prefer to use since it encapsulates the idea of dress as a means of being true and exposing oneself to oneself and to others as the person one is and wants to be.

The concept of authenticity in this article is derived from sociological studies which focus on a wide agenda of applications, such as fashion and crime. For instance, Elizabeth Wilson (p. 231, 2003) in her book, "Adorned in dreams: fashion and modernity", illuminates the core problem created when we aim to elaborate *authenticity* in society and so, in fashion, this is a striking example: "The hippie, for example would be 'authentic', the punk, as I suggest, 'modernist' because they are preoccupied with the creation of an image, not the discovery of the 'true'-self." Thus we here also find rationale for our concept of *exposed-self*, rather than *true-self*, as a means of explaining the dressing of the body and its demeanor— in our case being-in-the-world as an entity of meaning. This means that authenticity is connected to "true" (exposed) pictures of the individual in this case, and not an image-driven personality, which can switch more or less easily and frequently from appearance to appearance. Thus we prefer to conceptualize *the self* in terms of *exposed* and in the process of becoming, understood in adjectival terms, the person adding on things to create a personhood. In sum, it is about the individual recidivism in apprehending the authenticity of criminality. This means that the individual is *drifting into* and in this fashion take the form of a criminal authenticity, adjectivally more and more, over time. The study boils down to a statement which can be identified as 'The longer a person is in prison, the greater the probability of recidivism into criminal activity for that same person,' which boils down to the following research question: How can this be?

Literature Review

The idea that periodic involvement in abnormal networks, or in prison, leads to increased levels of criminal activity has been widely studied by criminologists (e.g. Akers 1985; Hagan 1993; Hagan and McCarthy 1997; Haynie 2001; McCarthy and Hagan 1995; Thornberry and Krohn 1997; Thornberry *et al*. 2003; Warr and Stafford 1991; Hagan 1993; Bernburg and Krom 2006; Pyrooz 2014). Certainly, the causal effect of associating with delinquent peers and their behavior has been well documented empirically (e.g. Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton 1985; Jessor and Jessor 1977; Kandel and Davies 1991; Thornberry and Krohn 1997; Warr and Stafford 1991). From those sources, criminal embeddedness refers to immersion, or involvement, in ongoing criminal networks, the longer the exposed time in such networks. These links can consist of deviant family members, peers or other acquaintances. The important point is that these individuals comprise a distinct network of which an individual is an *active* member and that this particular set of relationships is oriented toward criminal values, acts, and opportunities (Bernburg *et al*. 2006). It is generally hypothesized that criminal implant can directly increase delinquent behavior, perhaps through the learning of definitions favorable toward deviance and through modeling and reinforcement (e.g. Akers 1985; Warr and Stafford 1991). Another focus is on criminal peer associations, which constitute criminal implant.

An additional form of criminal embeddedness is membership in a delinquent gang. Thornberry *et al*. (2003) found that youths who are members of a gang have higher levels of delinquent activity, both during and after the period of gang membership. Although there is ample evidence supporting the causal role of deviant networks in the development of delinquency and crime, research on the potential role of deviant networks in translating official labeling into subsequent deviance and crime is both limited and inconclusive (Bernburg *et al*. 2006). In a study of English working-class males, Farrington (1977) examined whether criminal conviction affected subsequent contacts with delinquent peers. In contrast to these inconclusive findings, the studies by Adams (1996), Heimer and Matsueda (1994), and Matsueda (1992) mentioned above, found that delinquent peer associations mediated the effects of subjective labeling on subsequent delinquency.

Finally, a study from David C. Pyrooz (2014), "From Colors and Guns to Caps and Gowns", which is a study that shows the effects of adolescent gang membership, which vary by demographics (in terms of gender, race/ethnicity and, particularly, age), dosage (in terms of length of gang membership and gang member implant), and ecological context (in terms of cultural and economic resources, inside and outside of school grounds). However, these queries are not in themselves limited to gang membership and educational attainment, but are general to a variety of criminal and noncriminal domains. Later on, these are legitimate questions which vary with the authenticity of the individual, as presented in this study. So it is from this point that this study starts towards an explanation of the problem of criminality and recidivism, which is obviously the leading question in this field.

The Identification of Crime and the Recidivism Problem

The observation in this study is primarily on individual dressing and behavior as something to give authenticity in society. In Emile Durkheim's, "The Rules of Sociological Method", (1895, Chapter 2) he noted that the most fundamental rule is that individuals are always in a set of social constraints, which cannot be explained by reference to the individual alone and hence to consider social facts as things. As we have no direct access to the mind of social actors we are bound to look at evidence that gives hints on social changes to be the base of our interpretations. That type of interpretation is brought up in James Martin Hollis' book, "The philosophy of social science" (1994, p. 100), which gives an important view of the approach by the following quotation:

> "[…] Crimes 'consist of an act that offends very strong collective sentiments', without which social solidarity would be lost. Such sentiments cannot flourish in the abstract. They can be kept vigorous only through provocation by offenders against them and punishment of those offenders. Hence the greater the success of the 'collective consciousness' in eliminating crime as currently defined, the more sensitive and exacting it becomes in defining fresh activities as criminal."

This is the sociological perspective, which is here giving the criminals a certain role in society. The environment gives them, by force, the identification of a strong unified group having their own adversaries. This view is also strongly established in the era of postmodernism, as per Michel Foucault (2003, "The essential Foucault: selections from essential works of Foucault", *1954–1984*), whose theories address the relationship between power and knowledge, and how they are used as a form of social control through societal institutions.

Social control can be seen in different ways (cf. Davis 2015; Kirsch *et al.* 2010; Elden, 2002), and likewise being social, part of a social entity, if you will. One way of looking at the social aspect is through the concept of the Deweyian *individual mind* (Dewey 2008; see also Tiles 1990: p 61 ff). An *individual mind* is not the same as a person with a mind, explains Dewey. Rather, a person with a mind can be a *token* person of a *type* mind. An individual mind is then something that overreaches individuals so that individuals in terms of persons of flesh and blood are part of this overarching mind. Others have presented similar ideas, but then on a larger societal level, like the aforementioned Durkheim's concept of *Collective Consciousness*, or Maurice Halbwash's *Collective Memory*, Karl Marx's *Collective Intellect* and Martin Heidegger's *Das Mann*, all of which point to cultural factors that constrain and thus exercise control over the thinking and behavior of individual flesh-and-blood humans. All of these descriptions of a societal overarching factor can be said to boil down to a *generalized other* (Mead 1934, see also Linell 2009), which then is the controlling factor, a fantasy–factual figure that from within a person's mind exercises the control, a sort of self-control or, in Foucauldian terms, *governmentality*. Dewey's point is that this not only operates on a societal level but on a lower order organizational and group level (not only, for that

matter, on a personal, individual, level, but rather on a over-individual level, internalized and executed in the mind and thus in effect on the personal level, in the token person) . The individual mind manifests itself in a token being of which our example is but one instance.

However, to illuminate the recidivism issue in the world of criminality it is not enough to logically accept the criminals as a strong solid group, as the recidivism brings in new aspirants to the world of criminality. The recidivism problem is here illuminated by The Swedish Crime Survey, an annual survey of the attitudes and experiences of the general population of Sweden (aged 16–79 years) regarding victimization, fear of crime and public confidence in the justice system (Appendix No.1., page12) the figures show a high recidivism rate, particularly within three years of the previous occurrence of criminal activity.

The statistics on recidivism show: the number and percentage of people reoffending; time to first recidivism; number of recidivisms during the follow-up period; and risk of recidivism. With recidivism referred to in the statistics of new legally valid crimes, which follows a person's input event during a special follow-up period. Input events are defined as releases from prison; discharges from youth detention centers; completion of intensive supervision with electronic monitoring; and prosecutions of other penalties by final judgment or a decision from the prosecutor. The statistics reported recidivism within one, two and three years from the date of entry event.

Approximately 41 percent relapse into new crimes prosecuted within three years after a prosecution or release. The greatest risks of relapse are among those crimes charged previously. The most crimes charged runs ten times more likely to relapse than those without a load. That is, the risk of recidivism clearly increases with the number of years in prison. As expected from the recidivism statistics and as we see in this report, the criminals are creating or establishing a certain authenticity that holds the group together even outside prison, which means that we have to look closely at the criminals themselves.

Interpretative Method

In this paper we use two types of data, secondary quantitative data from The Swedish Crime Survey conducted by The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå), and primary observational data, substantiated with interview data, collected over a period of several years, utilizing an interpretative method in the relevant parts, as described by Geertz (1973). Here, we are interested in that part of the culture that manifests itself as dress and demeanor, that is, we are in a way "cutting down culture to size," to use Geertz's own words (ibid., p. 4). Geertz further maintains that he takes "[…] culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of a law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (ibid., p. 5). By *web* Geertz means the web of meanings in which a human is enveloped. So in doing research in a cultural context, following Geertz, is to track this web, and we propose to track it in the exposed body—its attire and deportment. But if we are to look for meaning, we must interpret what we observe, not merely report observations. Following Ryle, Geertz gives the example of a wink, which might be just an involuntary bodily reaction, or a meaningful gesture given in response to another person for some reason. Thus, meanings and reasons are intertwined so as to create a full-blown statement of significance in dire need of interpretation, and the researcher needs to explore such meaningful bodily statements; but this meaning is only constituted in relation to some interpreting other. In this way, by looking at one, the other is made visible, and thus culture in a broad sense. In this study there is an application of the term *thick description*, borrowed from Geertz, who in turn borrowed the term from Ryle. The term refers to an interpretive approach, whereby meanings are excavated from the mere at-hand visible; the meanings show themselves as gestures and the specific combination of these and the dressing. But this does not suffice in and of itself to explain what we are trying to understand. The depth and specificity can only be illuminated in view of the statistics. The numbers also provide a sense of

direction over time so that, in combination, it is possible to say something regarding the more profound structures in the goings-on, the process of becoming, the deepening of commitment to a style and thus a way of being, and of exposition of that way of being. Therefore the description we give here purports to be a so-called *thick description*, at least it is inspired by such ideas (Ryle 1949, 1971; Geertz 1973; Descombes 2002). This means that the purpose of the account of our case is to give as deep and detailed a narrative of it as possible, focusing not only on what meets the eye, which in this context would only amount to a *thin description*, but also on the interpretive (thus contextual, thus cultural) meaning content of our *subject*, i.e. the person being interviewed, his demeanor and attire.

Observational Data

The case

The description here then purports to be a so-called *thick description*, and not a *thin description* (a description without interpretation). (Ibid. 1949, 1971; Ibid.1973; Ibid. 2002). Depth is at the fore, since we need a comprehensive representation of the case in order to make clear the meanings of the way our subjects demeanor (appearance if you like) plays in the role of relations in society.

The case is grounded in secondary data and observation (supplemented with interview data) on the rate of criminal embeddedness and subsequent delinquency, which is illuminated in the identification of crime and the recidivism problem described above. The primary observation and interview is with and on one representative person, a young adult in his late twenties. We will subsequently call him *Emm*. He has been a criminal for a little over ten years, and has been involved in robbery (banks and jewelry stores), possession of illegal arms, abuse, extortion and other illegal activities. For this he has been incarcerated off and on, for longer or shorter periods. He has also been involved in substance abuse but mostly for his own consumption, mainly drugs to enhance his abilities to be effective in robbery situations and to boost his muscles, i.e. bodybuilding.

Emm wears a tattoo that covers most of his back; the tattoo says 'Pocos Pero Locos', a criminal gang that is loosely connected with the motorcycle gang Bandidos (also known as Bandidos Nation, deeply involved in organized crime). On his shoulders there are other tattoos that portray a flame-like pattern, and tattoos that enhance his upper arm muscles. The tattoo on his back is multicolored, those on his shoulders are both mono-colored and they mirror each other. His face is scarred, giving a rough appearance, and he sports a short blond beard on his chin. Apart from the beard, his head is shaved. He is about six feet tall (180 cm), and his body looks fit with a typical V-shaped back and the muscular arms and legs of a strong, well-built body. Lack of any substantial body fat is apparent. In this way he differs from a more common man, even a bodybuilding man, who might have some body fat visible. This young male looks alert and ready.

A quick look at the way Emm handles his body will enrich the description of this young man. Body movements can be said to reflect one's gender, or at least reflect one's own perception of oneself (Heinämaa 2003: page 21 ff; Hufschmidt *et al.* 2015; Kannen 2012; Levinsson *et al.* 1986; Powell and Hendricks 1999). Females, or those who identify as female, have a tendency to hold their body carefully gathered (in the sense of closely held together), whilst men have a tendency to have a wider way of handling themselves (cf. the present discussion on 'the male spread'). When walking, males tend to move their arms in a wider circle from the body than women, with legs further apart, alluding to power, control, and sway—even command. This sway and dominance posture is highly exaggerated in the case of Emm, the young adult in focus here. He moves with ease and assurance, as if prepared but calm, holding his upper body slightly broader than usual, his arms slightly farther out from his torso, creating a broader deportment together with his shoulders, which add to a *slightly more* in his appearance; just slightly,

enough to make visible but not so much as to make him conspicuous, but recognizable if you know what to look for, and certainly enough to make almost anyone give way in a chance encounter or if blocking his path. His movements are smooth, as if to show that he knows how to handle his body. Nice-looking, good-looking, rough-looking, powerful-looking, altogether an able-looking male—or maybe one can say, a person that is a male-plus. It is clear that Emm has been in several fights and has survived. Overall, he exudes a you-don't-want-to-mess-with-me presence in his movements and appearance. Says Emm, "I don't mind physical pain, I have endured so much, I know it doesn't hurt for very long. Mental pain is much worse, it never leaves you."

When incarcerated, Emm is dressed in prison-issue sweaters, T-shirt and baggy, trainer-type pants, all in different shades of gray. Shoes are in the form of flip-flops (indoors) or sneakers (outside). Out of prison, he wears garments that enhance his body and hence communicate his ability to look after himself, but more importantly he dresses in a similar way: baggy, trainer-type pants; T-shirts; sneakers for shoes, preferably white or semi-white; and the only significant difference between his prison attire and his out-of-prison attire is that his sweater is a so-called hoodie, and that on his upper body he wears a short jacket which enhances his upper body shape and muscular arms. On questioning, Emm says that he dresses this way because he feels comfortable. He likes his T-shirt to fit tightly around his neck, and his hood is an easy-to-wear head garment. In this way, Emm rationalizes his dress-code

> I became interested in this way of dressing when I was a teenager and had the artist 50 Cent as my idol," says Emm. "I like to listen to music where I can understand and relate to the lyrics", he further points out. He has listened a lot to the rap band Kartellen (The Cartel), whose lyrics deal much with criminality and life in suburban, criminality-impregnated, ghetto-like environments. Continues Emm, "After some time in the criminal world I became a member of Pocos Pero Locos, it felt natural at the time to become a member. I became part of an important group of people I felt at home with."

Around him are the people he relates to, dressed the same way as he is, individuality only expressed through color—different shades of gray and blue. He also relates to people in two-piece suits, who could be called foremen in the criminal group; they would be perceived as advanced, whereas Emm is not, so he is then the blue collar worker, if you will, which is reflected in his clothes in the way described. Emm says he feels comfortable around people dressed like him; he can speak their language and he knows how to behave in those circles. "Others," says Emm, "like those … (he points his finger at people dressed quite differently) … I can't relate to them, I don't understand them and I feel uncomfortable around such people."

His way of dressing is clearly conscious, not only as he signals his status through his outfits, but at times when he has wanted to get out of his criminal identity he has also dressed in regular pants (non-trainers) and a regular sweater or either a shirt or a T-shirt, although he keeps his hoodie, even though, as he says, he does not feel really comfortable and, as soon as he can, he changes back. Thus he identifies himself as a criminal or as a non-criminal by way of dressing. His general movement styles, like walking and the handling of his arms, change somewhat too, even if his body shape does not. Emm says he likes to identify himself as a rebel, as an outsider. His way of dressing, he maintains, is a way of displaying this rebel identity. "I'm not like them; I am Emm."

To summarize, his demeanor seems well suited for the kind of activities in which he is involved. Strong, fast, well equipped and always prepared: his clothes are made for reacting fast, allowing ease of movement rather than hindering in any way. For those who recognize the signals, all this communicates a can-do competence and instills fear; and it displays his rebel identification of himself. He is Emm.

Analysis and Discussion

Emm is Emm, and he communicates this to himself and to the world. He likes to be around people he understands, and the people he understands signals this to him by way of dress. He believes he can appreciate and speak the idiom of the people he likes. He recognizes his comfort zone, if you will, by way of dress. This stresses the fact that recidivism has more to it than meets the eye. And statistics just further show what there is —a way of life manifesting itself in a way of dress.

We can demonstrate this by stressing the initial statistics on the recidivism problem derived from penitentiary authorities that show a high rate of recidivism, particularly within three years of criminal activity. We further demonstrate this by identifying individuals by a qualitative method called *thick description* (Ryle 1949, 1971; Geertz 1973; Descombes 2002), which is a deep and detailed description of those criminals. In this analysis it is also shown that an individual can be taken to *drift into* and thus assuming the form of a criminal *authenticity* (*self-concept*), *adjectivally* more and more over time, which is evident by several observations of and interviews with the same individual in the current case. A*djectivally* we, in this context, propose to mean a process, first, that specifies the meaning of the subject, much like a noun is specified by an adjective, second that this process is a process of furthering the intensity—much, more, most—thus deepening the commitment and becomes a supervenient property of that person, in our case Emm.

Furthermore, statistics makes it clear that the longer the criminal is in prison the more criminal he or she seems to be. This means that the *drifting into* occurs as an ongoing phenomenon, starting off the criminal career long before an actual encounter with the justice system and continues throughout. This might not seem like a very novel or even surprising conclusion, but we here show that this *drifting into* has to do with consumption practices that concerns itself with fashion in the form of attire and also in the decorating of the body itself. Thus bodily references are at the fore here in assuming a criminal identity, *adjectivally* more and more over time.

We want to stress these five points in our empirical findings:

1. Whether incarcerated or out of prison, Emm wears similar clothing, but more importantly, he dresses in a similar way, according to our study
2. His tattoos connects him to Pocos Pero Locos and thus *transitively* to Bandidos— a permanent sign of community
3. He differs from the common person, even a bodybuilding person, who might have some body fat visible. Emm seems to be always prepared
4. It is clear that Emm has been in several fights and has survived. Overall, there is a you-don't-want-to-mess-with-me presence in his movements and appearance
5. Around him are the people he relates to, dressed the same way as he is, any individuality expressed only just so slightly—different shades of gray and blue

These observations show the individual *drifting into* and thus assuming the form of a criminal authenticity, *adjectivally* more and more over time, which is shown by the *thick description* summarized by those five points above (Ibid. 1949, 1971; Ibid. 1973; Ibid. 2002), which together show how the body with its cover and decorations forms the individual as a community member and a fashion conscious person in his own right. Or, to quote Heinämaa (2003, p. 38), "It is a game where the body forms a stylistic unity, which cannot be captured by the laws of natural sciences." Nor is it in its entirety captured by statistics. We here want to point out that there are two processes at play, both of which has to do with consumption. One being the ad-on process that we have called an *adjectival* process. This process of course has to do with the becoming in *drifting into* that can be said to start off with music and fanship, it

then continues into clothing and the recognition of oneself as belonging to a certain style. The other process is one of *transitivity*, i.e. belonging to a belonging. By *transitive* we mean a relation between entities that form themselves into a pathway, A connects to B which connects to C, thus A connects to C. (However, this connectivity is not logically necessary, merely logically possible, and so going down a specific pathway is an empirical possibility, not an empirical necessity, at least we cannot show anything like that, and that is not our point either, only that as long as there is a possibility it can be realized, in this way a logical and empirical possibility.) Emm obviously belongs first to the general crowd of fans of Kartellen, then to the general criminal community, but also to Pocos Pero Locos, which in turn belongs to Bandidos: fan of Kartellen, via the Criminal community, and further via PPL to Bandidos. Both the *transitivity* which is an immediate possibility when identifying yourself as a Kartellen fan, and the slow, bit by bit, adjustment of your consuming habits in terms of the fashion in which you dress and decorate your body are at play here; both processes are characterized by a *moving-thru* logic that deepens the commitment. A commitment best described as a pledge to a general *fantasy-factual* performance of *being-who-you-are*, deeper and deeper over time; a come-be-with-me factuality that becomes visible through the method of qualitative observations and interviews, but only through interpretation does the profundity of the goings-on appear discernible, thus objects of scientific scrutiny.

Conclusions

By the interpretative approach to answer the RQ *How can this be?*, the longer a person is in prison, the greater the probability of recidivism into criminal activity for that person, the statistics clearly show this, we can show the qualitative characteristics of the processes. The How-question can be given at least in part a more grounded answer: identification of course has to do with the answer, but much more important is consumption as an expression of that identity, or as we prefer to call it, authenticity, a term that we mean to contain both the process of becoming as well as the processes of *adjectivity* and of *transitivity*, the *moving-thru*.

The results show that the effects of perceived threats to identity and self-esteem are associated with group membership, as perceived through the personal fashion statements. Our research shows that the recidivism frequency and its actuality might be due to an *authenticity* and the *exposed self*, which is not subject to ambivalence in the case of criminals and their role in society as such. This of course needs further inquiry. The conclusion is that we cannot, paradoxical as it may seem, cure the recidivism problem in the world of criminals, since an *authenticity* based on the *exposed self*—anchored in the definition of fashion and society as such—cannot be changed without curtailing the processes. At the least one has to take the described process into account.

It has to do with the actuality of the *doings* that pertains to consumption and fashion, the dressing and redressing, the decorating and redecorating of the body and not just of rational *thinking* or just envisioning yourself as something or someone. The conclusion that becomes apparent is that the *doings* manifested through consumption is crucial, but not just any consumption, style consumption, thus fashion. This means that we also need to consider consumption practices and fashion when we discuss the problem of recidivism.

At the onset, this paper had the aim of answering a 'how'-question, but the paper now seem to have given a two-pronged answer: one of them being the straightforward answer to a *what does Emm do* question and—in accordance with the *thick description* ambition—also a *why does Emm do what he does* question in terms of a meaning construct, the other being a methodological answer, an answer to a *what do you need to do to make the processes of recidivism visible*-question. This last question is answered by the practical utilization of the *thick description* model of enquiry, where interpretation as a tool for creating a profound understanding is used.

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			2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Appendix No.1. The Swedish Crime Survey, 2015.							
Number and proportion of recidivists within 1, 2 and 3 years among all persons with an initial event in 2004–2008,							
By gender.							
			Year				
Sex			2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
All	**All individuals**		**73 315**	**74 021**	**78 759**	**79 755**	**84 640**
	1 year	No. of relapses	19 089	19 253	20 241	20 143	21 015
		%	26	26	26	25	25
	2 year	No. of relapses	25 838	26 199	27 476	27 626	28 876
		%	35	36	35	35	34
	3 year	No. of relapses	29 828	30 236	31 737	31 793	33 483
		%	41	41	40	40	40
Female	**All individuals**		**14 929**	**15 128**	**16 051**	**16 153**	**17 503**
	1 year	No. of relapses	2 650	2 775	2 791	2 815	3 003
		%	18	18	17	17	17
	2 year	No. of relapses	3 654	3 798	3 899	3 936	4 251
		%	25	25	24	24	24
	3 year	No. of relapses	4 247	4 450	4 573	4 553	4 982
		%	29	29	29	28	28
Male	**All individuals**		**58 386**	**58 893**	**62 708**	**63 602**	**67 137**
	1 year	No. of relapses	16 439	16 478	17 450	17 328	18 012
		%	28	28	28	27	27
	2 year	No. of relapses	22 184	22 401	23 577	23 690	24 625
		%	38	38	38	37	37
	3 year	No. of relapses	25 581	25 786	27 164	27 240	28 501
		%	44	44	44	43	42