

**Prisons in Paradise or Purgatory:  
A Comparative Analysis Between Criminal Justice Systems and Recidivism Rates in  
Norway and the United States**

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**ABSTRACT**

This honors thesis is a comparative analysis of criminal justice and prison systems between Norway and the United States. Norway has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world, because of their rehabilitative methods, while the United States has one of the highest recidivism rates in the world, because of their methods of punishment. The arguments presented here could help the United States in its efforts to decrease recidivism rates by working to rehabilitate and restore offenders, instead of punishing them. Providing resources like education and employment skills to offenders would help them assimilate to the outside world and keep them from recidivating. If the United States were to adopt a criminal justice system like Norway's and provide resources to offenders to better prepare them for reentry into the outside world, then sociologists would see a decrease in recidivism rates as a result of more humanistic prisons that focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### *Defining the Problem*

In the United States, mass incarceration has become a major problem for the past five decades. Prison populations have increased to the point of mass overcrowding and lack of resources for the prisons. Over 2.3 million people are currently in prison in the United States, which has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Around 700 per 100,000 people are incarcerated in the United States every year. To contrast this, Norway has an incarceration rate of 70 per 100,000 people (Bjorkly 2014). Along with having the highest incarceration rate globally, the United States also has one of the highest rates of recidivism. For the purposes of this paper, recidivism will be defined as "...a relapse into previously criminal behavior by a person known to have committed at least one previous offense..." (Anderson and Skardhamar 2015). By contrast, Norway has one of the lowest rates of recidivism in the world. There is a reason why these countries have such vast differences in the amount of people that recommit crimes once they are released back into the real world. It has nothing to do with geographic location or if the society has a capitalistic or socialistic approach to its government. The answer lies within each country's criminal justice and prison systems.

Rates of recidivism in countries demonstrate how well a society is able to rehabilitate and restore its criminal population. The high rate of recidivism in the United States is a signal that prisons there are not as successful in rehabilitating criminals and preventing future crimes as its Norwegian counterpart. Norway focuses on normalizing an offender's prison experience as much as possible. Spending time in prison is the punishment itself for an offender, so the conditions the offender is kept in should be as rehabilitative as possible because prisons are still a part of society and should not be isolated from the rest of the world (Pakes and Holt 2017). The United

States has deep historical roots in punitive approaches which is why they tend to focus on punishing the offender. Studies have shown that a reason for increased rates of recidivism stem from an inadequate preparation for release into the real world (Palmero 2015).

The prison population in the United States continues to grow every year. In the 1990s, the population was around 1.14 million and in 2003, the population grew to be more than 2 million. Along with this growth in incarcerated individuals came overcrowding in prisons. At the federal level, prisons are operating at 39% above capacity (Sirakaya 2006). The incarceration rate of the United States continues to overshadow every other country in the world. The massive amount of people entering the criminal justice and penal systems coupled with high recidivism rates creates an on-going public safety issue. With so many offenders being released back into the public each year, it is important to look at rehabilitation in these systems to see if they are functioning correctly. So far, it is very unclear as to whether individuals are receiving any rehabilitation while incarcerated because the rates of recidivism are still so high (Hall et al. 2015). Before the mid-1970s, when political shifts started to happen, rehabilitation had been a main goal of the penal system in the United States. However, it has since then been replaced to focus more on the incapacitation and containment of what society perceives as dangerous individuals (Weinstein 2010). Having over 2 million people in prison does not mean society is any safer, it just means more people are being incarcerated each year.

The United States uses prison institutions as a way to socially control individuals and maintain disciplinary power over them. The prison system in the United States benefits economically from having an increase in its prison population because this provides them with free labor. Once a prisoner enters the criminal justice system, they are seen as a “slave of the state” (Rhodes 2001). With free economic gains in its sights, the United States continues to

incarcerate individuals at a high rate so that it can maintain and expand this system of free labor. Norway treats its prisoners in an egalitarian way and trusts them to make good decisions while in the care of the criminal justice system. They educate, rehabilitate, and employ these offenders which in turn gives them the skills they need to successfully reintegrate into society.

### *A Sociological Approach*

When prisons were first established in the United States, they were perceived with a Calvinist philosophy. Offenders were seen as inherently evil and incapable of rehabilitation. Retribution was seen as the way to exact revenge on those that had broken the norms of a society (Whitney 2009). Eventually, this view was disregarded as people discovered that deviance and criminality were taught and not part of a person's genetics or predestination. Today, prisoners in the United States are sent to prisons as a way to fix how they interact with society and to teach them the norms and rules that need to be followed. However, because of the United States' high rate of recidivism, this approach is ineffective.

Norway focuses on rehabilitating prisoners through socialization and social interaction so that when a prisoner returns to the outside world, they know what is expected of them. Punishment and cruelty are not ways to communicate to prisoners that what they did was wrong. They need to be taught how to interact in society in an appropriate way through the rehabilitative efforts of the prison. If an offender is not taught how to successfully integrate into the social world of a society, then they will simply keep returning to prison until they potentially die there. This is why the function of prisons and how well they prepare prisoners to be released into the social world is best seen through a sociological approach both in the United States and Norway.

When looking at the United States and their recidivism rate, it is also important to look at other countries in comparison to see how it compares. The United States has one of the highest recidivism rates in the world at around 77% and Norway has one of the lowest with a rate of around 20%. In comparison, Sweden has a rate of around 40% and England has a rate of about 70%. It is not an easy task to make comparisons between countries and their recidivism rates because of differences in laws, population, sentencing, and criminal justice systems as well as several other conditions (Farrington 2015). Cross-national comparisons are made so that results and theories can be made generalizable. These comparisons are also made so that people can gain a deeper understanding of offenders and what makes them offend in the first place. Sometimes, findings in one country are applicable to other countries but most of the time, there are inconsistencies. For example, males are most likely to hit peak crime-committing years in their teens across multiple countries. On the other hand, the prevalence of committing crimes differs because of the different policing laws and policies amongst countries (Farrington 2015). It is important to make comparisons across countries when it comes to rates of recidivism so that sociologists can see which policies work, and which don't work when it comes to rehabilitating an offender so that they can rejoin society. However, there remains an important context that differences can occur mainly from the different laws, policing strategies, and population from each country. For example, drug laws are strictest in the United States, which accounts for mass incarceration and high rates of recidivism. Scandinavian countries, such as Norway and Sweden, have lax laws regarding drugs, which is why they have such small prison populations and lower rates of recidivism.

A study by Fazel and Wolf in 2015 (Table 1) investigates recidivism rates of offenders from around the world and looks at time periods anywhere from one year to 9 years to see what



the rate of recidivism is for each country. The study contained 18 countries in which rates of recidivism were available. The United States and The United Kingdom had the highest recidivism rates in this study with rates anywhere from 13% to 78%. On the other hand, Scandinavian countries have a vastly lower rate. Norway has a rate of around 20%, Denmark 23%, and Sweden is a bit on the higher end with a rate of 43%. In this study, the most common reported outcome was to look at recidivism rates at the 2-year time period for offenders.

Country	Selection Period	Sample	Period	Rate
Canada [16]	1994–95	Prisoners	2 years	41%
Denmark [12]	2005	Prisoners	2 years	29%
Finland [12]	2005	Prisoners	2 years	36%
France [17]	2002	Prisoners	5 years	59%
Germany [18]	2004	Prisoners	3 years	48%
Iceland [12]	2005	Prisoners	2 years	27%
Ireland [19]	2013	Prisoners	3 years	51%
Netherlands [20]	2007	Prisoners	2 years	48%
Norway [12]	2005	Prisoners	2 years	20%
Singapore [21]	2011	Prisoners	2 years	27%
Sweden [12]	2005	Prisoners	2 years	43%
US [22]	2005–2010	Prisoners	6 months	13%
	2005–2010	Prisoners	1 year	23%
	2005–2010	Prisoners	2 years	36%
	2005–2010	Prisoners	3 years	45%
	2005–2010	Prisoners	4 years	51%
	2005–2010	Prisoners	5 years	55%
	2000 [1]	Prisoners	1 year	46%
	2000 [1]	Prisoners	2 years	59%
	2000 [1]	Prisoners	3 years	66%
	2000 [1]	Prisoners	4 years	70%
UK – England/Wales	2000 [1]	Prisoners	5 years	72%
	2000 [1]	Prisoners	6 years	74%
	2000 [1]	Prisoners	7 years	76%
	2000 [1]	Prisoners	8 years	77%
	2000 [1]	Prisoners	9 years	78%
UK – Scotland [24]	2013 [23]	Prisoners	1 year	45%
	2009–10	Prisoners	1 year	46%
UK – Northern Ireland [25]	2005	Prisoners	6 months	9%
	2005	Prisoners	1 year	25%
	2005	Prisoners	2 years	47%

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Table 1: Fazel and Wolf 2015 – Rates of Recidivism in Different Countries

A common finding in criminal justice research in the United States, is the correlation between past and future deviant actions. Those who commit crimes at some point in time are more likely to commit crimes at a later date than those who have never committed any crimes. This correlation is the result of two factors in the criminal justice system, state dependency and population heterogeneity (Fazel and Wolf 2015). State dependence occurs when an offender's life choices are influenced by the crimes they have committed, and this deviant behavior also has influence over any future criminal acts that may occur. The current actions taken by an offender have worsened their life chances, therefore increasing the speed in which they commit later crimes. Another factor that provides a positive correlation between past and future criminal actions is population heterogeneity. This factor "...attributes the correlation to differences across persons in an initial propensity or proneness to commit crime that has various reverberations over time." (Nagin and Paternoster 2000:119). When there is heterogeneity in a population, the probability of an offender showing antisocial behaviors early in life and at future times is very high (Nagin and Paternoster 2000:119). Research has shown that these two factors are determinate in the chance of offenders being rearrested after committing crimes upon release from prison. Their dependence on a state they are familiar with leads them to initially commit and recommit crimes in the future. With population heterogeneity, offenders are given stability through their offending actions and through the anti-social personality they developed early in their lifetime, which provides them stability throughout their life in the form of committing crimes constantly.

Since the mid-1990s, crime has steadily been dropping in the United States. It seems rather strange that the United States still has such a high prison population and rate of recidivism when crime is dropping. Violent crimes, rape, homicide, burglary etc., have dropped in the

United States since the 1990s. More people in prison meant there was less opportunity for violent crimes to be committed. This led the focus to be shifted to drug crimes. With the crack epidemic taking place during the 1990s, more people were being incarcerated for drug crimes. The United States was not the only country to show a decrease in crime in the 1990s. Countries such as England and Wales, Canada, France, Finland, Australia, and the Netherlands also experienced a decrease in crime during this decade (Baumer and Wolff 2012). These countries experienced a decrease in crime partly because of the strict gun laws they enacted (England banned guns in 1997). This decrease also came from a decline in property crimes as well as homicides. It is important to not only look at micro-levels of analysis to explain the crime drop but also macro-levels of analysis to see if sociologists and criminologist can come up with any generalizable conclusions. According to sociologists and criminologists, the crime drop in the United States has continued into the twenty-first century because of the increase complex relationship between prison systems, drug policies, policing, and the ever-changing economics.

### *Thesis Overview*

In this thesis, I will be looking at factors that lead to the differences in recidivism rates between the United States and Norway. The approaches that each country takes to run their prisons have large influences on recidivism rates. Norway uses a rehabilitative and restorative model while the United States focuses on punishment and preventative measures to frighten inmates into behaving. Other factors that influence these recidivism rates are the War on Drugs and ‘tough on crime’ approaches (United States) versus normalization and humanistic approaches for rehabilitative purposes (Norway). The United States tends to incarcerate people for minor drug crimes and views offenders not as people, but as monsters and allows them to be

treated in this way. Norway typically sees offenders as people who have just made a mistake and are serving time as their punishment. Factors such as employment, poverty, and education will also be included as determinants of whether an offender will recidivate. Education and employment are important tools for any member of society to possess, but it is even more crucial for those labeled as an offender. The amount of education an offender has received both in and out of prison and whether an offender can find a stable place of employment determine how likely they are to reoffend. In the theory section, I will bring in some sociological and criminological concepts that explain why the United States has such high rates of recidivism in the first place. These concepts are Deterrence Theory, Rational Choice Theory, Labeling Theory, Differential Association Theory and Strain Theory. These concepts will be scrutinized in more detail, and I will present an argument that they are able to explain why the United States has one of the highest recidivism rates in the world. It is important to note, however, that there is not just one concept that contributes to high rates of recidivism in the United States. Multiple concepts and approaches attribute to these rates and their increasing value. I will conclude this thesis by summarizing my findings, analyzing important results, and discussing the implications.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *The War on Drugs*

When Richard Nixon implemented the War on Drugs in 1971, as a way to crack down on the recreational drug use that increased during the 1960s, incarceration rates in the United States skyrocketed and continue to do so today as a side effect of this policy. The War on Drugs focuses on punitive drug policies and imprisons people even if they only have a minor volume of drugs in possession. The goal of these policies was to reduce illegal drug trade in the United States, but a racist and unjust increase in incarceration and recidivism rates was the real consequence. One of the main reasons prison overcrowding and high recidivism rates are such a problem in the United States today is because of the War on Drugs. During the 1980s, law officers paid much more attention to drug users and offenses by these users increased greatly. Typically, these offenders had to face mandatory sentencing in this new generation of drug crimes. Offenders arrested for drug crimes are typically given harsher sentences to prevent them from recommitting these crimes, but that rarely works. The offenders that are committing less serious crimes (small amounts of drug possession rather than murder or rape) are the ones overcrowding prisons and are likely to be arrested again once they are released (Mauer 2001). The War on Drugs is a main component for the high rates of recidivism among offenders in the United States and continues to cause problems for offenders since its implementation. However, it is only one of the many factors that contribute to the recidivism rate.

During the 1980s, the War on Drugs continued to peak as more and more people became concerned over the illegal use of drugs. In 1986, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 was passed and \$1.7 billion was pushed towards combatting drugs and the crimes they caused people to commit. More policies were passed to show people that the criminal justice system was cracking

down on this plague in American society. One way they did this was by enacting mandatory minimums for drug possession and crimes. The crack epidemic had begun in the 1980s, and mandatory minimums were put in place to eliminate this epidemic. Five grams of crack led to a sentence of five years while 500 grams of powdered cocaine was needed to exact this sentence (Encyclopedia Britannica 2020). This mandatory sentence on crack led to many controversies as African Americans were more likely to use crack. A disproportionate volume of African Americans were then imprisoned for these crimes while their Caucasian counterparts were left to roam the street.

The War on Drugs has done less for public safety and more for making sure offenders are discriminated against for their criminal record and eventually returned to the institution that caused them to be stigmatized against. Offenders are held onto by the criminal justice system for the rest of their lives with little chance of ever being free again. When offenders are labeled in this way, it presents a legal way to create a social boundary between “them” and “us” (Alexander 2020:20-22). This discrimination is especially true for African Americans who are already marginalized against without having a criminal record. With a constant gaze upon them by society, they are more likely to be arrested for drug crimes and to become recidivist offenders in the United States.

Mass incarceration in the United States owes its existence to the War on Drugs and the punitive system the United States’ criminal justice system was built on. To better understand the criminal justice and prison system in the United States, one must be knowledgeable about the War on Drugs and the people it imprisons. The majority of those arrested for drug crimes are African American citizens, even though Caucasian citizens are more likely to use drugs. The discrimination African Americans face in the criminal justice system continues to stigmatize

them even after they are released causing them to likely end up back in the system. These punitive drug laws are used to further isolate and control those who are arrested for drug crimes (Lynch 2012). Offenders are constantly cycled in and out of the criminal justice system because of the harsh drug laws in the United States. If this punitive measure was changed to rehabilitation instead, then mass incarceration would not be as much of a problem and people would not be recommitting crimes at the rate they are now.

In the twenty-first century, the War on Drugs has lost much of the support it had in the 80s partially because of the racial disparities it caused. African Americans are more likely to be arrested for a drug charge than Caucasians. This has led to a significant disproportion of African Americans in prisons across America. While people are trying to combat the War on Drugs by legalizing such drugs as marijuana, the United States still has a long way to go before the War on Drugs is completely abolished. Until then, the recidivism rate in the United States is going to continue to be at a higher level.

Norway does not have a policy in place that even comes close to being the same as the War on Drugs. While most drugs are illegal in Norway, people are not imprisoned for years or decades because of it and typically only receive a fine. When offenders are arrested in Norway, they can get drug treatment in prisons that way they can combat their addiction and go back to society not needing to find their next fix. With their addiction taken care of, they can enter society as a functioning citizen and do not become recidivist offenders.

### *Tough on Crime*

Starting in the 1970s and continuing in the upcoming decades, a 'tough on crime' approach was created to combat the rising crime rate. This was implemented in several different



ways, one of them being the politicization of crime. Before the 1960s, most coverage of crimes were done at a local level and only reached national status once Nixon became president.

Another way this approach was implemented was through individualism, which America prides itself on. American culture tends to focus more on punishing the individual than on the circumstances that lead an individual to commit a crime. Collective approaches to solving problems in America are not as favored. Unlike Norway where emphasis is placed on collective approaches especially when it comes to social welfare and universal health care, which can explain why their prison policies are not as harsh. The final way this approach was implemented was through the growing political climate, which was expanding to be more and more conservative. With this spreading conservative political climate came harsher criminal justice policies especially towards marginalized peoples (Mauer 2001).

Increases in the prison population and overcrowding in jails is partly a result of the 'tough on crime' approach. However, when this approach is used, there is an issue of relative frequency between serious and less serious crimes. Crimes that are less serious happen much more frequently, so we see this approach used more on low level offenders and see more of them end up in prison than those who commit more serious crimes. These strict drug laws and the harsh punishments given to offenders of these crimes do not necessarily prevent offenders from committing them. The only thing it accomplishes is filling prisons well beyond their capacity. At this point in time, prisons and jails are mostly holding facilities for those with addictions (Wexler 2011). However, if the United States approached drug crimes like Norway does, with rehabilitation and not punishment, then overcrowding would be less of a problem as would drug crimes in general. Drug offenders need their addictions to be treated rather than punished in harsh ways to combat overcrowding and recidivism.

Even in the twenty-first century, the ‘tough on crime’ approach continues to define criminal justice policies in the United States. This approach claims that public safety will come about at increased rates of incarceration and detention, which is why offenders are typically rearrested and kept off the streets. When ‘tough on crime’ was implemented in the 1970s, “...a slew of new laws – mandatory minimums, truth-in-sentencing, zero-tolerance, three strikes...” were created (Koschmann and Peterson 2013:189). The focus of incarceration has shifted from protecting citizens of the United States to arresting those deemed undesirable by the criminal justice system. If this was not the case, then these new laws would not have been ushered in.

By the time the 1990s rolled around, the ‘tough on crime’ approach was reaching new highs and more and more people were being arrested for minor drug crimes. With prison populations increasing, the criminal justice system found a way to profit from the increase of prisoners. The use of prison labor started to grow across prisons nationally and corporations profited greatly from the use of prison labor. Punishment continued to become profitable, which led to a rise in incarceration rates and a decrease in what is considered fair labor practices (Sliva and Samimi 2018:153-156). This is another reason why incarceration and prison population rates are so high; the criminal justice system wants to make sure it has plenty of bodies to put to work so that they can benefit and profit. They continue to see punishment as profitable and care little about making sure their offenders are successful in their recidivism attempts.

The ‘tough on crime’ approach fits with the punitive model that the criminal justice system uses in the United States. This approach partnered with the War on Drugs is why the United States has one of the highest recidivism rates in the world. When it comes to incarceration, a ‘tough on crime’ approach is not what is needed. Instead an approach focused on rehabilitation and restoration for the individual is preferable. Having prisons that are focused on

this aspect is why Norway continues to have one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world because it works on helping the offender and lets them keep their humanity. The United States strips an offender of this as soon as they are arrested and never truly gives it back to them.

### *Normalization and Humanistic Prisons*

Unlike the prisons in the United States, Norway's prison system focuses on a normalization and humanistic approach with how it handles offenders. They are not stripped of their identity as soon as they enter the criminal justice system and are treated as humans who just made a mistake in their life. This is a very progressive approach when it comes to the treatment of offenders and has worked to reduce the rate of recidivism in Norway. One of the most humanistic principles they have in place has to do with an "Insanity Law". Basically, this law says that when offenders are hospitalized, they are to be treated in fair and humane ways. This seems like a simple enough law, but the United States has nothing like this currently in place. Another humane approach Norway has in place is that offenders can only be held for a maximum of 21 years in cases of murder (Bjørkly et al. 2014:1387-1388). Norway understands that the punishment for committing a crime is going to prison. They do not see the need to make this punishment even harsher for the offender because they are serving time for what they did. Norwegian prisons make sure that offenders are treated like people and try to make everything seem normal while they are there.

In trying to adopt Norway's approach to the criminal justice and prison systems in the United States, several trips (by directors and executive directors of prisons) have been made to observe how exactly these prisons work. Norwegian prisons focus on the idea that the loss of freedom that an inmate faces in prison is the punishment, nothing else is needed to punish the

inmate. There is no need to be harsh to the inmates and inflict unnecessary punishment because they are already being isolated from their relationships on the outside as well as their freedom. Examples of these punishments include time in solitary confinement, transfer to a higher security prison, confiscation of personal items, job transfer, etc. Inmates in Norwegian prisons are given jobs and an access to education so that they can accomplish something with their prison time and be released with access to the job market. The guards in these prisons develop relationships with the inmates and are frequently observed having conversations with them (Boots 2017). With all of these humane approaches in place, Norway is able to combat recidivism rates and is seen as having one of the most successful prison systems globally.

Norway is one of several countries that can be characterized with the term Scandinavian Exceptionalism. This term is used to characterize the humane conditions that Norwegian prisons have in place while still making imprisonment undesirable. Inmates are never beat or treated poorly by prison staff and instead are treated with recognition of their self-worth, a way to show inmates that they are still a unique individual with autonomy. Prisons in Norway never face overcrowding and are instead placed on a waitlist if there is no space. Norwegian prisons tend to be smaller than the ones in the United States and this is because this is the best kind of condition for inmates. Smaller populations of inmates allow for more attention by staff and let them know that there is always someone for them to go to if they need help (Johnsen et al. 2011). Norwegian prisons have a high quality of life for their inmates which helps them to be a better person once they are released and help keep the low recidivism rate they are known for.



Halden Maximum Security Prison in Norway and an example of the design of the cells



Louisiana State Penitentiary and an example of a cell inside the maximum-security prison

There have been efforts in the United States to adopt this approach of normalization and humanization for prisons and the criminal justice system. Colorado is one such state that is trying to implement these qualities to the prison system. Dean Williams, executive director of the Colorado Department of Corrections, is leading the charge for a change in prison systems. Williams wants to treat inmates with dignity and compassion and include them in the community as a way to increase public safety and make sure they are successful in reintegrating into the outside world. Williams has found that when inmates are treated as humans, prison systems are safer, and they are more ready when it is time for them to be released back into society. He would also like to find a way to help inmates with housing and income once they have been released as he thinks it will be a way to keep them from recommitting crimes (McCarthy 2020). Williams is trying to lead this change in prison systems starting slowly with just a few states and slowly spreading to the entire United States. These liberal ideas are going to be hard to get across when the prison system is very much ruled by conservative policies. The United States is slowly trying to incorporate Norway's approach to prison and criminal justice systems because it can lead to a lower recidivism rate which is what the United States wants.

### *Employment and Poverty*

One of the leading causes for offenders to reoffend has to do with a lack of employment in the United States. When offenders are released back into the world they are discriminated because of their criminal record and if they do not have the proper education needed, then it is nearly impossible for them to obtain employment. Lack of proper reentry into society along with a lack of education and skills make it extremely difficult for offenders to find employment. Without proper employment, offenders typically reoffend because of their lack to financial

means, which they need to succeed in society. With a lack of income to support themselves, offenders will turn to crime yet again simply so they can succeed in a society that is constantly discriminating against them (Nally et al. 2014). Most offenders are born into poverty and not able to escape, especially if they enter the criminal justice system. This means they have no financial support after being released so if they do not immediately find employment, they must turn to crime to survive. This leads to them eventually being rearrested and sent back to prison to start the cycle all over again.

In Norway, those with employment and housing problems when released back into society are more likely to become recidivist offenders just like in the United States. However, Norway works to make sure these problems are not there for offenders when they are released by offering inmates welfare, education, and employment opportunities within the prison. Problems with employment, housing, and drugs are connected to the offender's chances of become a recidivist offender in the future. If a person has no access to the resources needed to succeed in society (education, employment, social interaction, health), then they are more likely to recommit crimes. Offenders who present more of these problems are often the ones who are sent back to prison (Nilsson 2003). While offenders in Norway are more likely to offend because of employment and financially problems, like in the United States, Norway does a better job at making sure they eliminate these problems for offenders. Norway has set up several resources for offenders in the prisons so that they do not have to face the outside world with no skills whatsoever. However, it is the offender's choice whether to use these resources or not and some choose not to which proves to be detrimental to their reintegration.

The Norwegian prison model has offenders participate in labor training, which is one reason they can successfully find employment once they are released. Instead of sitting around in

a cell all day, inmates are working in different environments and developing skills they will use in the outside world. This model focuses on the importance of work, which is key to the success of inmates. If inmates truly want to be rehabilitated and get out of their criminal patterns, then they need to learn skills in prison that will lead to their employment in society (US Official News 2016). Part of an offender's rehabilitation in Norway is to get practice in a variety of jobs so that they know what they excel at and are ready for the task of finding a job once they are released. Offenders are not nearly as stigmatized and discriminated in the job market in Norway as they are in the United States and therefore have an easier finding and keeping a stable form of employment and financial income.

A study done by Skardhamar and Telle in 2012 (Table 2) shows that in Norway, when an offender is released back into society, they are more likely to reoffend when they do not have proper employment. The study contained 7,476 people who were contacted monthly after their release from prison. They found that when offenders are employed after being released, they are more likely to stay out of prison and not reoffend. Having a stable form of employment is essential for offenders to stay out of prison and quit their deviant behavior. Offenders can form social interactions that benefit them and their reintroduction into society. They are accepted into this community, which gives them social interactions that are not focused on criminal and deviant behavior, which keeps them from reoffending. It also gives them the financial stability they need for housing and food, basic necessities, and shows them that they do not need to commit crimes to fulfill these needs. People understand that sometimes mistakes are made and that it would not be fair to discriminate against offenders because they already served their time and were punished for their crimes. The United States has such high recidivism rates because it is hard for offenders to find a stable form of employment after they have been released. They are



discriminated against in the job market and the stigmatization they face forces them back into the criminal justice system.

In the United States, prisons tend to be filled with poverty-stricken people and minorities. These offenders do not have as much opportunity in life as rich or middle-class, white Americans and therefore must turn to crime to support themselves and their families (Whitney 2009). After serving their prison sentences, these offenders are sent back into the world with nothing to show for their time except for a new reason for them to be discriminated against. They were barely provided any resources that would give them the skills that are needed to get a stable form of employment. They typically cannot get help from their families because their families are poverty stricken like them, so they are left to their own devices to financially support themselves. This means often turning back to crime, where they know they can get money they so desperately need. They are eventually caught however and returned to prison where they will continue to not have the much-needed skills to be successful in society. This is another factor that contributes to the United States' high recidivism rate.

### *Punitive Approach*

The United States tends to focus on punitive approaches when it comes to the prison and criminal justice systems. The thought behind this is that offenders need to be punished for their crimes and hopefully this will prevent them from committing future crimes. One-way prisons punish inmates is to put them in solitary confinement. The inmate has no contact with any other human and is forced to sit in a small cell with only themselves to talk to. Prisons are designed to keep inmates away from the social world and make them feel the boundaries between being and prison and being a functioning citizen in society. Keeping prisoners away from the outside world

is how prisons show they have social control over inmates (Baer and Ravneberg 2008). This confinement is used to keep the public safe and to teach inmates a lesson about what happens when a crime is committed. This does little to rehabilitate them however, and when they are released back into society, they do not know how to properly act, which leads them to continue committing crimes. Norway has an opposite approach to how it contains inmates by letting them have an open connection to the outside world. This helps inmates to feel connected to society and makes them more ready to become a law-abiding citizen when they are released.

The large prison size and overcrowding in American prisons is detrimental to an inmate's behavior both when they are in prison and when they are returned to the outside world.

Typically, larger prisons mean more riots because more inmates are at risk and there tends to not be as many guards to keep them in line. With smaller prisons, these aggressive acts are less likely to happen because the staff to inmate ratio is lower, stress from inmates is lower, and there is not as much psychological impairment. Overcrowding in prisons is related to the effectiveness of the prison. If prisons are overcrowded, then they are not as effective at rehabilitating inmates and therefore punish them more than they benefit (Farrington and Nuttall 1980). Inmates are punished by the overcrowding in prisons because it weakens their connection to staff and it puts them more on edge than they would normally be in these circumstances. Like Norway, solutions would be to sentence less people in the first place and reduce the length of an inmate's sentence.

Prisoners are more likely to adopt violent habits when imprisoned, which does not help their chances of conforming to the outside world when they are finally reintroduced. This leads them to continue to commit crimes and they end up back in prison, raising the recidivism rate. Socialization is essential for prisoners to rehabilitate, but in prisons in the United States, punishment is more important than making sure prisoners can successfully socialize with others.

When inmates must leave their old life behind and conform to this new place that is constantly punishing them and forcing violent and antisocial habits, prisonization occurs. Prisoners become more vulnerable when they are imprisoned because of the isolation and alienation they face. Prisoners must adapt to this new way of life and when they are later released, they are not able to adjust back in society (LaFree et al. 2019). The United States tends to focus on punitive approaches when it comes to inmates and does this by isolating them and making them adopt antisocial behaviors. Their reintroduction to society does not help them to adapt to society, which causes them to reenter prison soon after their release.

The United States is not new to this punitive approach to prisons, this approach has been around since the creation of prisons. When prisons were first being created, punishment was done through public humiliation so that others could see what happened when crimes were done. Public humiliation was used to prevent other members of society from committing crimes through shame and embarrassment. Eventually, public humiliation stopped being used and hard labor became the new form of deterrence. Inmates were put to work inside and outside the prison with hard, physical jobs (such as breaking rocks) that were meant to punish them. One of the worst ways prisoners could be punished was through solitary confinement. Inmates were placed in small cells with no contact from anyone. Their meals were given to them through a slot in the door where they could only see a guard's hand. By depriving inmates of social contact that humans so desperately need, they were punishing them and stripping away their identity. Mental breakdowns and insanity were just two results of solitary confinement, which we now know is one of the harshest ways an inmate can be punished (Meskell 1999). With inmates being deprived of contact, they start to change personality wise and become even more antisocial. They are then released back into a world full of social interaction and do not know how to properly

function. This leads them to continue their violent behavior which puts them back behind bars and further diminishes their ability to properly interact and socialize with others.

Prison and criminal justice systems in the United States tend to have a focus on punishing individuals to prevent others from committing the same crimes. They focus very little or not at all on rehabilitative efforts for inmates, which hurts their chances of successfully adapting to the outside world. When they are unable to adapt, they tend to end up back in prison because that is where they know how to act. Norway focuses on a different approach when it comes to inmates. They rehabilitate and restore their inmates so that when they do eventually reenter society, they know what is expected of them. This approach is part of what leads to Norway having such a low recidivism rate. Inmates understand what is expected of them because while they are in prison, they are not closed off from the outside world and are able to socialize with others in a successful manner.

### *Rehabilitation/Restoration Approaches*

Prisons in Norway focus on the rehabilitation and restoration of offenders and get them ready to reenter society and teach them what to expect. One reason the United States has not implemented more rehabilitation programs is because policymakers do not think that it reduces crime and recidivism rates. They believe this because the programs that are already implemented in the United States have not been shown to work and are therefore ineffective. As we have seen from Norway however, that is not actually the case. Individuals can successfully reintegrate into society because of the rehabilitation they received in Norwegian prisons. Colorado's Department of Corrections chief Dean Williams wants to push towards these prisons with rehabilitative efforts and humane approaches. One of the most humane prisons in the world is Halden Prison in

Norway. This prison is located in the Norwegian woods and looks like something out of an IKEA catalog. It only contains 200 inmates and cells look more like a typical college dorm room than a cell with a bed and a toilet. Inmates are responsible for fixing the meals and can eat and socialize with others during designated mealtimes. Inmates are even able to get an education while serving their time and many leave with the abilities that will place them in jobs in the outside world. When people are rehabilitated in prison, they can pursue all sorts of opportunities when reentering the world and this in turn reduces criminality. The goal of these prisons is to get people ready to be released back into the world, the focus is not on punishment and revenge for their crimes like in the United States. When prisons are made worse and in harsher conditions, then the people inside of them are worse and just trying to survive. Williams wants to employ stable housing and jobs before inmates are released so that they do not end up back in prison. Williams is in support of vocational training for inmates so that they have skills that will help them when they are released and has reduced the use of solitary confinement (Bzdek 2019). When prisons are more focused on rehabilitating inmates and helping them generate skills that will help them in the outside world, then recidivism rates decrease, just like we have seen in Norway.

To properly rehabilitate inmates, Norwegian prisons provide education, health care, social welfare, and drug treatments. Norway makes sure their inmates are model citizens when they are released by providing them with every service they can think of. These prisons include more than one way to treat those with drug problems because they understand that every inmate is different and try to care to the individual not a collective group. They do not make the drug treatments undesirable to inmates. In fact, the wings of prisons that are part of drug treatment are nicer than the regular wings so that these inmates have incentive to get treatment and get better.

Societal relations are also important to the rehabilitation of prisoners. Inmates can communicate with both staff and other inmates during their time there. Group sessions are another way in which inmates can socialize with others in a constructive manner. They share any problems they are having, what they hope their future looks like once they are released, and are able to take this time to reflect on why they are there in the first place (Giertsen et al. 2015). Originally, the idea that rehabilitation should be the main focus instead of implementing punishment to offenders was based on positive sanctions. Norway being a welfare state meant that this system of sanctions should have more to do with rehabilitative efforts than just punishment. With this idea in place, offenders were able to gain their share of the welfare in Norway through the treatment and rehabilitation they received while incarcerated (Papendorf 2006). Rehabilitative efforts in these Norwegian prisons help inmates to be better prepared for what they are going to experience in the outside world. The prisons also help to treat those with drug problems so that once they are released, they do not turn back to this dangerous addiction.

Maximum security prisons in Norway also focus on rehabilitation and restoration instead of punitive approaches. They are typically surrounded by forests and wildlife and concrete is scarcely found with exception for the concrete wall that surrounds the compound. There are no large towers that guards sit in, no barbed wire, and certainly no guns. These prisons see their inmates as people who made a bad choice in life, but just because they are there does not make them bad people. They are human beings first and foremost. The staff of these prisons treat them as human beings too, sometimes they are even playing games like badminton with inmates. Everybody has respect for one another and, equally as important, there is a sense of trust between everyone (Weekend Edition Sunday 2015). Inmates in Norway are free to walk around in the outdoors and receive sunlight and fresh air or go down to the cafeteria and learn how to cook a

meal. They are given the trust to do so by staff because the system is built on this. If someone was locked up for a whole day in a cell that only contained a bed and a toilet, then they are going to be full of anger and are more likely to attack someone. This is the case in the United States. Some prisoners have not even seen nature since they have been locked up and they are given no trust and no autonomy. Norway shows its inmates that they can be trusted which provides more opportunities for inmates and better prepares them for how the world works, leading to a reduction in the recidivism rate.

### *Education*

A study done by Skardhamar and Telle in 2012 explains Norway's recidivism rate and the factors that contribute to this rate. They gathered data from 7,476 offenders that had been released in 2003 and followed them monthly until 2006. Skardhamar and Telle's objective was to see how factors, such as employment and education, affected an offender's likeliness to commit crimes once they had been released from prison. From this study, it was found that when offenders have reliable employment once they were released, only around 32.6% of these offenders were likely to recidivate. If offenders were educated, either in prison or before they were arrested, 41.1% of the offenders were likely to recidivate. Males were more likely to recidivate than females regardless of if they were educated or not.

Skardhamar and Telle found that recidivism rates are highly correlated to the employment and education that an offender has. If an offender can gain employment once they are released, then they are more likely to stay out of prison and not recidivate. The likeliness of an offender recidivating is even lower if an offender is also educated upon their release from prison. If an offender has little to no education when they enter prison, they can gain it during

their sentence. With this new skill that they possess, they have better odds of gaining a stable form of employment and are likely to remain out of prison because they are introduced back into society as a functioning member with something to contribute.

In 1998, Norway implemented the Education Act which stated that all citizens have a right and an obligation to receive comprehensive school. Prison education for offenders also falls under this act. Within Norwegian prisons, there are two main areas of concentration in education, these are business administrative studies and engineering and mechanical trades. These areas of study are seen as having both education and vocational knowledge that will help an offender with finding a place of employment once they are released. There are also courses that can be taken for fun such as arts and crafts, music, drama, etc. If little is done to prepare an offender for release back into the real world, then they will fail to be reintegrated and end up back in prison (Schenck et al. 2005). That is why Norwegian prisons provide offenders with education, so that they can successfully be reintroduced into society as a productive member and not end up back in prison.

The results of prison education in Norway show that offenders feel more stability when they are given access to education and can communicate in socially acceptable ways with other offenders. If they were simply left in isolation all day every day, then they would regress socially and would not be prepared to enter the world. While pursuing education within prison, offenders are less likely to dropout and more likely to gain a diploma. While statistics are unclear as to if offenders continue to pursue education once they are released, it seems that there is good evidence to suggest that offenders go on to form contacts with state schools so that they can continue their education (Schenck et al. 2005). Offenders are not only receiving knowledge about courses and vocational training; they are also learning how to be social with others and



using skills like cooperation to help them better readjust to the outside world. When offenders are able to properly socialize with others, such as employers or school officials, they have better life chances and are more likely to stay out of prison.

One of the most important resources Norway provides its prisoners is free education and Norwegian prisons make it a priority to provide formal education. Norway focuses on the rehabilitation of their offenders, which means education is key to their rehabilitation efforts. When offenders are provided an education, they are able to become employed and stay employed, which leads to Norway having a low recidivism rate. Offenders who can get and maintain a job once they are released because of the education they received in prison are able to return to society as a functioning citizen. Offenders are complex individuals that contain many social problems within. Education provides a helpful way for offenders to conquer these problems. The education offenders receive is meant to be equivalent to the education they would have received outside of prison. This is part of the effort to normalize prison as much as possible for offenders. There is an 8:1 ratio between offenders and teachers so that teachers are better able to focus on every one of their students and make sure they are getting the necessary one-on-one time that is needed. In efforts to make sure offenders are educated when returning to society, Norway has programs in place that let offenders attend follow-up classes if they are released in the middle of getting their education (Tønseth and Bergsland 2019). The education of prisoners both inside and outside of prison is important and predicts whether they will be able to function in society.

Previous research has shown that education is directly tied to employment, finances, and health. If a prisoner receives an education within prison, then they are more likely to have stable employment, can make money and get rid of debt, and they seek help for mental and physical

health. Rehabilitation and education are treated as one and the same in Norway and one cannot exist without the other. Vocational education is another type of education that Norway finds essential to rehabilitative efforts. If offenders are able to gain skills and knowledge for jobs when they are in prison, then they are better prepared to get a job in the real world. Vocational education, just like regular education, keeps an offender from relapsing when they are released, which adds to Norway's recidivism rate. If offenders are without these skills and knowledge, then they are reliant on others for everything, even basic tasks (Tønseth and Bergsland 2019). If offenders do not have education as well as a network of people for support when they are released, then they are not able to cope with the outside world and may end up back in prison.

Offenders who have been offered education in prison are better able to show that they did something in prison other than just being in prison. They can show employers that they are not just an offender, but that they learned valuable skills that can make them an amazing employee. Education is able to take the stigmatization out of prisons and offenders because it offers a skill set that is not only needed by society, but also by the offender. This is important for offenders when they are finally released back into society. Offenders can show others that they are doing something with their lives and that they are not just a labeled offender. Education allows offenders to reflect on their lives, control what they do, and can be socially responsible (Tønseth and Bergsland 2019). Education in prisons is essential for an offender's rehabilitation as well as their re-entry into the world.

In 2016, Lockwood, Nally, and Ho conducted a study that observed education and employment with regards to recidivism rates in the United States (Table 3). These demographics were looked at because they are considered the most influential to determining if an offender will recidivate once released from prison. This study lasted for 5 years and focused on 3,927

offenders. Lockwood and Nally found that both African Americans and Caucasians had lower rates of recidivism if the offender was educated upon their release. If the offender had a college education, they were even more likely to not recidivate. Within African Americans who were college educated, 17.7% recidivate within a year. For Caucasians who were college educated, 12.9% recidivated within a year. African Americans who had below a high school education were 28.4% more likely to recidivate within a year and Caucasians who had less than a high school education were 28.8% more likely to recidivate within a year. Regardless of an offender's race, offenders that obtained higher levels of education had a lower unemployment rate and a lower rate of recidivism.

Education and post-release employment are two of the biggest factors that influence the recidivism rate in the United States. If an offender has not received at least a high-school diploma by the time they are released back into the real world, then they are more likely to be unemployed and end up recidivating. The higher the level of education an offender has, the lower their rate of unemployment is for them. Education that an offender receives in prison plays a crucial part in improving their job skills before their release from prison. The amount of job opportunities an offender has increases as well, which causes a decrease in the recidivism rate. The stability of an offender's employment is also an important factor with regards to recidivism rates. If an offender is consistently changing jobs because of a lack of job stability, then they are more likely to end up back in prison (Lockwood et al. 2016). If prisons in the United States were to add more education programs, then offenders would be better prepared for the outside world. They would have the skills needed for employment and would most likely not be contributing to the recidivism rate.

Education is an important factor that is a large determinant on whether an individual will become a future offender. Of those in prison, 68% of state inmates and 50% of federal inmates did not obtain a high-school degree. When a young individual drops out of school, they are 74% more likely to be unemployed. Without money to support their necessities, they turn to a life of crime and end up in the criminal justice system. Typically, those who have poor school records are the ones to drop out of school and turn to crime because they feel they are not getting anything out of going to school and would rather spend their time on something else. The connection between dropping out and criminal involvement seems to develop at an early age in youths and this connection can be seen through antisocial behavior as well as difficulties in school. However, if someone drops out of school to work more at their job or because they must assume a new identity (mother, wife, etc.) then they are actually less likely to commit crimes (Sweeten et al. 2009) (Table 4). This would probably have to do with the fact that they would still have social ties to their community which would prevent them from committing any crimes or acts of delinquency. The connection between dropping out of school and delinquency is a very strong positive correlation. Without having a formal education provided to them, offenders start their life of crime and end up in the criminal justice system. If the offender continues to not receive education when they are serving their sentence, then they will end up in the same spot they were in when they are released and end up committing more crimes which leads to a high rate of recidivism.

The United States tends to focus on punishment over rehabilitation when it comes to prisoners and how to deal with them. This is what accounts for why the United States has the highest prison population in the world (716 per 100,000 people) and one of the highest recidivism rates in the world (76.6%). It is not enough for the United States to take an offender's

freedom, they also must punish the offender for what they have done. When the ‘tough on crime’ approach was created to combat crime, many of the programs in place in prisons that focused on the rehabilitation of offenders were cut, education being one of these. Offenders having a lack of education is an extreme problem in the United States and leads to societal consequences. A person without any type of education has few options in American society, which leaves them with the option of prison. This type of program was cut even though an offender’s education is one of the biggest determinants in whether an offender recidivates (Reese 2017). To combat the lack of education offenders receive in prison, a program called the Prison Education Project was established.

The Prison Education Project is volunteer-based and is the largest program of its kind within the United States. This program educates, empowers, and transforms offenders and gives them life skills that will help them be successful in their lives. The main goal of this project is so that offenders have a “prison-to-school pipeline” and to transform offenders into functional members of society. When looking at this goal in the long run, this education program reduces the rates of recidivism and leads to prisons saving money. However, this program faces many difficulties within the prison that leads to inmates not being able to participate in it. A large difficulty this program faces has to do with the correctional administration which does not always believe that programs like this work on offenders. It can be difficult to implement a program like this when its effectiveness comes into question by those who run the prisons. Another difficulty stems from the correctional officers who can have negative views towards rehabilitation. This education program does have rehabilitate results however, and even provides an inmate with education once they are released. Offenders are provided with transportation vouchers, vouchers to purchase clothes, meal cards, and even a laptop to make sure they can

continue with their education in the real world as well as making sure the offender has a proper reintroduction into society so that they do not end up back in prison. This program believes in second chances, which is exactly what it provides its participants with (Reese 2017). This education program gives the disenfranchised a second chance and transforms their lives for the better. Without being provided the tool of education while an offender is incarcerated, they cannot be properly rehabilitated and will not have a proper reintroduction into society which could lead to them being reincarcerated.

So far, research has shown that the reasons Norway has successful prison systems and a low recidivism rate is because they focus on rehabilitation, normalization, and humanistic approaches. Norwegian prisons also have several available resources for inmates that prepare them for reentry into the outside world. The United States approaches its inmates in prison systems by using punishment and harsher crime policies, which is why it has a higher recidivism rate. The United States also does not have as many programs in place to help offenders with their reintroduction to society, which causes offenders to return to prison. The many factors discussed that contribute to the high recidivism rate in the United States and low rate in Norway can be connected to several sociological concepts and theories. These theories can also explain why the United States and Norway are so different from each other as well as the policies they implement. This next section describes and analyzes four sociological concepts and theories that relate with criminality and can explain these differences in recidivism rates between Norway and the United States.

### CHAPTER THREE: THEORY

#### *Deterrence Theory*

The deterrence theory is a preventative method that the United States uses as a way to prevent citizens from committing crimes. These preventative methods could be something small such as having a security system's flag in the front of a house so that potential offenders know the risk in place if they were to rob that house. These methods could also be something large such as public punishments for current offenders in the criminal justice system so that potential offenders can see what could happen to them if they committed a crime. One idea behind this theory is that in order to reduce the number of crimes committed, the justice system must punish offenders harshly so that others are turned off by the idea of committing crimes (Ellis 2003:337). Throughout the history of the United States, punishments have been used because society saw it as a productive way to prevent and reduce the level of crimes committed.

The criminal justice system uses deterrence to prevent crimes from being committed by future offenders. Punishments started being doled out to offenders because that was seen as the best way to prevent future crimes from happening. The moral justification given to these punishments was that it prevents crime so it would be accepted no matter how cruel and unusual the punishment might be. As long as it prevented crimes from happening, then it was seen as a useful and effective way to stop potential offenders from committing crimes. In a way, the theory of deterrence preys on the fear of others in order to be successful, but most of the time, it does not succeed because of the cost-benefit analysis (more on this later). The punishments given out tend to be disproportionate to the crime that was committed because the criminal justice system wants to show potential offenders that they will crack down on crimes in a tough way and will not be taken advantage of (Lee 2017). The recidivism rate in the United States continues to rise

because the use of deterrence to prevent potential crimes from happening does not seem to have as much promise as the criminal justice system believes it will.

When a formal criminal justice system was created, preventative measures (including punishments) had to also be created in order to keep society functioning effectively. The preventative methods used then were different from what we tend to see in societies today. Originally, the focus was on public humiliation as the main source of punishment. This could mean anything from spending time in the stocks to having to wear a scarlet letter around to inform others of the crimes they had committed (Meskell 1999:841-842). People would see what would happen to offenders when they committed a crime and this in return kept others from committing crimes because they did not want to end up like that. As societies continued to grow and develop, so did the criminal justice and the tactics they used to deter potential offenders and prevent future crimes. Public humiliation as a preventative measure became less effective because of population growth, which meant that the criminal justice system had to come up with new ways to prevent potential offenders from committing crimes but that would still be severe enough to punish offenders that had committed crimes.

In today's society, Americans have a high expectation when it comes to the crackdown of crime. To meet this expectation, the criminal justice system uses deterrence and punishment to deal with crime. However, there is evidence to support that the link between deterrence and crime is not as strong as people like to think it is. There are two main reasons for this. First, it is difficult to measure how much effect deterrence has because a chain reaction has to happen before deterrence can come into effect. Also, the criminal justice system is unable to exploit human beings in a rational way, which leads to a weaker deterrent system in place. Second, the theory of deterrence expects humans to be rational when it comes to crime, but some people are



unable to possess this quality which is partly why they commit crimes. If people do not possess this rationality, then there is nothing in their way to commit crimes and sanctions seem to have no effect on them whatsoever (Paternoster 2010). These two ideas can lead offenders to commit crime and eventually become repeat offenders when they are released from prison. When the criminal justice system in the United States was developing, it focused on humiliation to prevent people from becoming future offenders, which meant that deterrence seemed to have a greater effect on people. However, this preventative measure seemed to lose its effectiveness over time.

Today, the criminal justice system in the United States mainly focuses on punitive measures, rather than preventative ones, in order to discipline offenders and keep others from entering the criminal justice system. Instead of focusing on humiliation like their predecessor did, these punishments now focus on sentencing practices and laws to keep offender in prison longer. In turn, people in society could see how harshly offenders are being treated and would be deterred from wanting to commit crimes and end up like them. However, these newer, more ruthless punishments do not seem to be having the effect that the criminal justice system intended for them to have. In fact, the overcrowding of prisons and the rise in the prison population can be explained by these punishments. The length of the merciless sentences given to prisoners continues to be raised, meaning more people are being kept in prison for longer amounts of time (Pizzi 2012:210).

Norway's criminal justice system focuses on rehabilitation for its offending population, which means they do not use punitive approaches and deterrents to reduce their level of crime. Instead, Norway sees the act of being in prison as enough of a deterrent and punishment for the offender and others in the society. Offenders serve their time for the crimes they have committed and are not punished even more during their imprisonment. It should also be noted that the

lengths of these sentences are not continuously being raised so that offenders have to spend even more time in prison. The people that are in prison are not inherently bad people, they have just made bad mistakes. Despite these mistakes, they are still human beings and are deserving of respect (Weekend Edition Sunday 2015).

In addition to focusing on rehabilitation, Norway also does not implement a lot of preventative deterrents as a way to reduce crime because prison itself is enough of a deterrent to keep people from committing crimes. This society has no use for deterrents that would scare its citizens, cause more pain for the offenders, and would probably not deter people from committing crimes. The United States could adopt an approach similar to this and stop using harsh punishments and preventative deterrents. This could prevent more crimes from taking place and possibly reduce the rate of recidivism. It has been established by scholars around the world that the way that the United States uses deterrence is ineffective in deterring potential offenders and reducing the crime rate. If the United States focused on a more rehabilitative approach to preventing crime, then not only would we probably see a decrease in the number of crimes committed, but we would also likely see a reduction in the recidivism rate.

### *Rational Choice Theory*

Another approach that the criminal justice system in the United States uses to prevent crime is the rational choice theory. The criminal justice system believes providing sanctions, will deter crime. The thought behind this, is that the harsher the penalty given, the more someone will think about if the crime is worth it. When the crime is thought about more than just the initial thought, then it is supposed to be less likely to occur (Pratt 2008:43). The costs in performing a criminal action outweigh the benefits that would be provided from it; thus, crime would be

reduced. The individual is reacting based on their own rational self-interest, which means they see the action of committing a crime as outweighing the consequences that would follow if they were caught. This cost/benefit analysis is central to the rational choice theory and over time has changed to fit the complexity of criminal behavior more accurately.

Some people see rational choice theory as the most compelling theory to explain the increase in crime and recidivism rates from the stance of unemployment. With this economic lens an offender has expected gains from committing certain crimes. For example, there would be no economic gains from jaywalking or smoking a joint. The motivation for an individual to commit crimes is unique, but the incentives to commit crime are universal (Siwach 2018). Some people are in situations in which they are very desperate for items they need to continue to live, such as food. The rational choice theory is in effect here too. If the criminal needs a basic necessity, then it would benefit them more to steal than to remain hungry with a chance of starvation. The threat of jail time is nothing in comparison to the death they could face. There are many people in America that are in poor economic standings and have to resort to stealing food in order to survive. If they are arrested and jailed for this, then when they are released, they will continue to steal because they still do not have what they need to survive. Some people may even get arrested on purpose for this reason because at least they would have guaranteed food and shelter. This is another way in which the recidivism rate continues to rise in the United States.

The criminal justice system wants to show offenders that it does not pay to commit crimes, which is why the rational choice theory was created. Like the deterrence theory, this theory wants to show that the crime is not worth the punishment. If the intensity of the punishment is increased, then the behavior itself will decrease (Cullen 2011). However, some people have no choice but to commit these crimes because the other option could be death. This

contributes to the United States' high recidivism rate because punishment in prison is preferable over death.

In Norway, the criminal justice system does not use the punishment to combat crime. Being in jail itself is the punishment, so while the rational choice theory could still be used here, it would not be as effective because the price to the crime committed either stays the same or barely increases. When a Norwegian offender ends up in prison, they are released less stigmatized, as an offender in the United States. It is also easier to be a citizen of Norway because they have policies in place like universal healthcare and ways to reduce poverty. With the reduction of poverty, offenders do not have to commit crimes to survive and could avoid imprisonment. In turn, they are also less likely to recommit a crime which brings the recidivism rate in Norway down.

### *Labeling Theory*

In the 1960s, a new theory emerged that explained that offenders were not born to be deviant. The reason that deviance exists is because of the social norms created by society. With this in mind, the theory goes on to say, "... that deviance is not the result of breaking rules per se, but rather the result of a social audience defining and labelling specific cases of perceived rule-breaking as deviant..." (Tierney 2009:91). By labeling someone as deviant, even before committing any deviant acts, a predictive occurrence happens in which that person eventually can become deviant. The offender becomes deviant because that is how society has come to see them, not from a predisposition to be deviant. With limited life choices, they turn to what people predicted they would be, a criminal.

Being labeled as deviant can have lasting effects on the offender as well as the offender's family line. The child of an offender is more likely to inherit the deviant label even with a clear record. This is detrimental to the child because they start to think that they have limited potential and could start to commit crimes as a way to live up to their name. They could become a professional criminal because they spent their childhood surrounded by crime and criminality (Barmaki 2017). This creates a cycle of crime and punishment within a family, which is very hard to break out of. This family is now trapped within the cycle and will continue to commit crimes, leading to an increase in the recidivism rate.

The labeling theory has two types of deviance in play when defining a criminal: primary and secondary. Primary deviance refers to the initial deviance the offender committed and has little consequence on the individual and their status within society. Many people commit some type of minor crime within their life, and it does not label the person as deviant. These crimes are small offenses such as jaywalking, running a red light, etc. and are not serious enough to warrant the label deviant to the person. Secondary deviance refers to an individual being labeled as deviant because they acted in a way in which society deemed them to be deviant. This type of label has lasting effects on a person, their lifetime social status, and could even be passed down to their children (Skaggs 2020). Secondary deviance is the type that leads to increased recidivism rates while primary deviance has little impact on crime or the criminal justice system.

Offenders in Norway do not have to deal with these stigmatizing labels like offenders in the United States. Norwegians do not label their citizens based on appearance or on the relationships one might have. Even when an offender is released after serving their sentence, they do not go back into society with a giant metaphorical letter A attached to them for the rest of their life. They are welcomed back, now seen as a functioning citizen, and their offender

status is left behind, allowing no chances for them to later be stigmatized against. The label of offender seems to be forgotten and lets the offender lead their life without any lasting social consequences. Their children are also spared this label and are not condemned to a life of crime like their counterparts in the United States. If an offender were to be socially stigmatized for committing a crime, then they would not be able to be a functioning member of society which would hurt Norway. For these reasons, Norway does not apply these stigmatizing labels to their citizens and once an offender serves their time, they are welcomed back into society.

When a society puts a label on a person, especially one like deviant, they are not only stigmatizing this person, but they are also ruining any chances of this person having a normal life. This deviant label means they are potentially cut out of their family and other relationships while having little employment opportunities creating a need to keep associations with other offenders. All of these variables put together makes for a deviant person who may eventually end up in jail. It is also noted that those who receive formal labels recidivate at a much higher rate than their counterparts (Cullen et al. 2011:58). Once these offenders are released back into the real world, as deviant individuals, they will likely end up back in prison.

### *Differential Association and Strain Theory*

The Differential Association theory focuses on how criminal behaviors are learned from the society in which one is born and that these behaviors can also be passed down from generation to generation. Social interaction is the key piece in this theory as it controls whether or not someone will adopt deviant behaviors. In this theory, offenders see crime as a way of life and as a favorable act in comparison to what would happen to them if they did not adopt these behaviors and actions. This is why people are pulled into crime, as this is the only way of life

they know and are expected to follow it if they want to fit in their social circle. Anomie is found everywhere they look and so they adapt to this way of life instead of becoming a functional member of society. While this typically takes place in communities with lower social status, it can also take place in higher social communities (Zembroski 2011). When offenders are released back into society, they go back to the social interactions they had before they entered the criminal justice system. Since their system of social interactions depends on anomie and deviant behavior, they soon return to the behaviors and actions that put them in prison in the first place. This means that they are likely to reoffend and reenter the criminal justice system.

Differential Association Theory has several components to explain how crime is a learned trait for an offender. The first component deals with criminal behavior being learned through interactions with others. If an individual starts interacting with offenders, then they will start to develop criminal behaviors that will end up putting them in prison. Another component focuses on this criminal behavior being learned through intimate personal groups. The closer an individual is to the group teaching them criminal behavior, the more likely they are to develop these behaviors and end up in prison as a result. A third component deals with the fact that once criminal behavior is learned, individuals also learn how to justify it and the techniques needed to complete it. Finally, individuals learn to look at legal codes as favorable or unfavorable depending on what their social group taught them. An individual becomes a delinquent because they are provided with an excess of definitions that are favorable to violating the law instead of being provided with definitions that show violations of the law as unfavorable. These components are what lead individuals to committing crime and what will force them back into prison later on contributing to the high rate of recidivism the United States has.

Strain Theory focuses on a more macro-state of anomie in society and has five different ways people adjust and adapt to anomic conditions. First, there is conformity, "...the most common mode, the acceptance of both cultural goals and institutionalized means; retreatism, a deviant alternative that rejects the goals and means of society; rebellion, an uncommon deviant alternative that rejects and actively substitutes the goals and means of society; ritualism, the means to legitimately guarantee that the cultural goals are respected even though the goals themselves are not realistic; and innovation, a form of acceptance of the goals but rejection of the means" (Zembroski 2011). When anomie enters a society, people are expected to adapt or be left behind. Some people turn to crime as a way to fit into this society while others try more socially acceptable ways to get society back into a society of norms and mores. Those who rebel or retreat against society follow a deviant path that continually leads them to the criminal justice system.

Typically, Norway is able to keep their society functioning in a way so that anomie does not occur. Even if it does happen, it usually is not in such a way that they have to turn to criminal behaviors in order to adapt to their society. Since their society typically remains stable and functioning, people do not have as much of a need to turn to rebellion or retreatism in order to conform. These forms of deviant behavior do not make an appearance because of policies Norway has in place, such as the welfare state and universal health care. With regards to Differential Association Theory, Norway uses this theory to regard criminality as normal. When they show their citizens that crime is normal and that everyone commits a crime at some point in their life, then they are better able to prevent individuals from recidivating once they are released from prison. Those who do conform to these deviant behaviors are able to turn a new leaf in



prison and they come out with the knowledge of how to function in society in a socially acceptable way which keeps them from reentering the criminal justice system.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

### *Summary of Results*

When it comes to recidivism among offenders, it is most common to see men recidivate and rates are higher in urban areas rather than rural areas. Another commonality is that recidivism is higher in property offenses and lower in cases dealing with homicide and rape. Younger offenders are also more likely to recidivate and the more convictions an offender has, the more likely they are to recidivate. Even the court systems treat offenders more severely, giving a recidivist a stricter sentence rather than a lighter one (Andenaes 1968). These factors seem to be common in both Norway and the United States when it comes to recidivism. Women have lower rates of incarceration and recidivism than men and recidivism among offenders happens in more populated places like cities. Even though courts treat recidivists in stricter ways than a first-time offender, this does not prevent the offender from committing more crimes when they are released which means they reenter the criminal justice system. However, the United States incarcerates more people than Norway, which is one reason why the United States has a higher recidivism rate. This high level of incarceration and recidivism in the United States stems from multiple areas, but mostly has to do with the War on Drugs and the ‘tough on crime’ approach.

The War on Drugs and the ‘tough on crime’ approach that the United States has implemented since the 1980s can partially explain the high incarceration rate as well as the high rate of recidivism that the United States has. People are imprisoned for minor drug crimes and are kept there because of policies like the ‘Three Strikes’ laws. This tough approach to handling crime leads to more and more people being arrested because of drug crimes. With this increase in prison populations, overcrowding starts to happen. When there are too many prisoners for a

prison, conditions within the prison start to take a turn for the worst. Typically, more prisoners lead to an increase in prison violence because of the close proximity inmates are kept in and the fact that it leads to inmates having a feeling like they cannot breathe or think with the mass amounts of people surrounding them. This stress that inmates develop can lead to impulsive and aggressive behavior. That, plus the fact that overcrowding means less resources like drug addiction programs, leads an offender to recidivate after their release from prison. Norway does not have these problems because individuals are not typically arrested for drug crimes. Since these individuals are not arrested and held in prison, Norway does not have to worry about overcrowding within their prison system because they do not want to punish people for the addiction they might have and would rather see the individual rehabilitated. This leads to lower rates of recidivism in Norway because of Norway's focus on rehabilitation for offenders.

Another reason for the differences in recidivism rates between Norway and the United States is their approach to handling criminals. Norway focuses on the rehabilitation and restoration of offenders before they are released back into society. The Norwegian prison system does this by providing resources for offenders that will help them integrate back into the real world. They do this by offering educational programs, vocational training, keeping relationships with the community, health care, and several other programs that prepare the offender for the real world and make sure that they do not recidivate. The punishment that offenders receive in prison has to do with a loss of their freedoms, but not a loss of their basic needs as human beings. Offenders are not stripped of their identity and reduced to a number instead of a name. They are treated as a regular human being who just happened to make a mistake for which they are being punished for by being in prison (Ward et al. 2012). Norway focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders to reduce their rate of recidivism. This rehabilitation comes in many forms because not

every offender is the same and different types of people need different kinds of treatments. The punishment that prisons receive in Norway has to do with a loss of freedom while still maintaining their basic rights as humans.

The United States on the other hand tends to not focus on the rehabilitation of prisoners, but on the punishment instead. The prison institution in the United States is punitive and focuses on getting revenge on an offender for the crime they have committed. Not only are offenders punished by being put in prison, but they are also punished by their room conditions, lack of social connections, lack of educational and vocational training, and violence that may be inflicted upon them by other prisoners or prison guards. Offenders are treated like undesirables and are stripped of their basic human needs because in the eyes of the criminal justice system, they are no longer human. This broken system of punishment and revenge is what mostly accounts for the high rates of recidivism in the United States (Ward et al. 2012). The United States makes sure to punish offenders for the crime they have committed and takes away their individuality until they are reduced to just a number on a page. Not only does the United States tend to punish offenders for the mistakes that they have made, but they also make sure that they are stigmatized for the rest of their lives with the label offender. In other words, instead of normalizing crime and the offenders who commit crimes, they make sure that the offender is now seen as an outsider by society.

The normalization of crime and those who commit crimes is another reason for the difference in recidivism rates. Norway focuses on making their conditions in the prisons as close to what the real-world conditions look like so that the offender does not have to relearn these conditions. The closer an offender is to release, the more independence they are granted. Offenders are kept in open prisons where they are allowed to be outside with nature and can

participate in activities like swimming and tennis. Norway understands that it is impossible to entirely eliminate crime, which is why they normalize it and focus not on the crime, but on the individual (Erbentraut 2015). By normalizing crime, Norway can keep the stigmatizing label of offender out of their society. Offenders who have been released are welcomed back into society with open arms and do not have to worry about this label following them around while they try to find employment, housing, and other basic necessities they need to stay out of prison. By normalizing crime, Norway can keep their recidivism rate at one of the lowest levels in the world.

In the United States, crime and spending time in prison is not something that is normalized by society. Once a person has been labeled as an offender, that is typically all society sees them as. Offenders are put in small rooms that are not only isolated from society, but isolated from other offenders as well. These conditions are nothing like the conditions they would be placed in outside of prison, which makes their reintroduction to society even harder. The United States treats offenders inhumanly because in their eyes, crime is not a normal concept and the offender needs to be punished for what they have done. That means stripping them of their identity, rights, and status not only as a human being but as a normal member of society as well (Pryamurad 2015). The United States does not normalize crime and those who commit it. Instead, they focus on making this offender an outsider who is no longer a member of their society. With this rejection and dehumanization, offenders are never truly welcomed back into their community and an 'us vs. them' concept is brought about. This leads to offenders recidivating and ending back in prison where they will continue this cycle of punishment until they eventually meet their end.

Education and employment are huge indicators on whether an offender will recidivate or not and can also account for some of the differences in recidivism rates between Norway and the United States. Education is one of the highest priorities when it comes to Norway's prison system, and they see it as an offender's right to receive it. Norway focuses on giving offenders an education and vocational training so that they have skills that will help them find employment once they are released. Prisoners can pursue any number of degrees, including college degrees, and the prisons offer degrees at every level of education. Guards are even taught to encourage prisoners to receive an education because they understand how crucial it is for them to get a degree (Ward et al. 2012). Receiving an education is part of Norway's focus on rehabilitating prisoners and making sure they can successfully reintegrate into society.

If prisoners in Norway have already received an education or do not wish to participate, then they are able to take part in vocational programs. These programs are meant to teach prisoners valuable skills that will help them find a place of employment once they are released. Norway encourages prisoners to attend these vocational programs and therefore, also encourages employment for prisoners. With these successful programs in place, Norway is able to discourage prisoners from committing any future crimes which leads to a lower recidivism rate. There is a decrease in crime from individuals who are employed after being released from prison and this decrease stems from the vocational programs the prisoner received while incarcerated (Bhuller et al. 2016). Vocational programs that prisoners participate in help to rehabilitate and prepare them for the outside world. Once an offender can find a stable place of employment, then there is less of a chance of them recidivating.

The United States has faced many challenges when trying to implement educational and vocational programs that will help keep offenders from recidivating. Most prisoners do not even

receive an education while they are incarcerated. Some of this has to do with the cost of education and even though state and federal corrections spend around \$50 billion a year, there still is not an adequate budget set aside for educational and vocational programs. The United States' approach to handling offenders keeps resources inaccessible for prisoners. The United States tends to not focus on the rehabilitation of prisoners and see education as unneeded while incarcerated. Vocational programs not only face setbacks when it comes to the budget of the criminal justice system, but they also face setbacks because some of these programs require a diploma for a prisoner to participate. Without education being provided in prisons, prisoners are not able to complete vocational training (Ward et al. 2012). If a prisoner is released from prison with no diploma and no vocational training, then they are not adequately prepared to reenter society and will end up back in prison because of their lack of education and training. The lack of educational and vocational programs for prisoners in the United States is part of the reason the United States has such a high rate of recidivism. If they were to focus more on rehabilitation, like Norway, and budget for more of these programs, then there would most likely be a decrease in the recidivism rate.

The theory of deterrence is used by the United States to deter and prevent people from possibly committing crimes by using harsh punishments to make crime look unbeneficial and unappealing to the population. The criminal justice system tries to strike fear into its citizens so they will not commit crimes because they are frightened of the consequences. However, studies have shown that harsh punishments and deterrents do not keep people from committing crime. People see that when someone commits first degree murder a death sentence is given to them, yet people are still committing murder and sometimes even worse crimes even though they know what waits for them once they are caught. This theory of deterrence relies on offenders thinking

rationally when they decide to commit crimes, but this is not always the case. When an offender commits a crime, they may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol or may have a mental illness that prevents them from thinking in a rational manner. The rigorous deterrents that the criminal justice system in the United States doles out seem to not prevent current or future offenders from committing crimes, no matter how big or small, and in turn, this plays a role in the increase of the rate of recidivism. Norway does not rely on these punishments or deterrents to keep people from potentially committing crimes because the population of Norway are deterred because of the prison itself. While Norway does have citizens that may not rationally think when it comes to committing crimes, they are incarcerated so that they can learn to understand that what they did was wrong. The criminal justice system in Norway does not implement cruel deterrents in their society to prevent potential offenders from committing crimes, which is one of the reasons they have a lower recidivism rate.

The theory of rational choice, like the theory of deterrence, relies on offenders thinking rationally about crime. Offenders are expected to weigh the costs and benefits before committing a crime and are provided with positive or negative sanctions as a way to prevent crime. The United States expects people to not commit crimes because of the costs that would come upon the offender should they commit a crime. However, some people have no choice when they commit crimes as they do it out of basic necessities. Some people in poverty-stricken areas must commit crimes to eat and see surviving as more beneficial, even if that means surviving in prison. With resources given to citizens like universal healthcare and policies that help those in poverty, citizens of Norway typically do not have a need to commit crimes like people in the United States. Even once an offender is released from prison, they are still entitled to resources to help them land on their feet. Without having to worry about their survival, citizens of Norway



do not commit as many crimes and past offenders do not commit as many future crimes which leads to a low rate of recidivism in Norway.

Through the labeling theory, offenders are stuck with the label criminal for the rest of their lives once they enter the criminal justice system in the United States. This label keeps offenders from being able to find employment, housing, and other necessities needed to survive in the outside world. When an offender is handed this label, they are seen as a criminal by society and are not able to change this view or redeem themselves. If this is all society can see them as, then they continue to commit crimes and end up back in prison, leading to an increase in recidivism rates for the United States. Norway does not label their offenders as criminals for the rest of their lives. They understand that when a person does something bad that they are sent to prison to repent. Once the offender has served their time, then they are welcomed back into society with open arms and without a label of criminal. This means they can gain employment, health benefits, and other resources to help them reacclimate into society successfully. When an offender is labeled as criminal for the rest of their lives, they are stigmatized and eventually end up back in prison as a result. Norway not labeling offenders in this way is why they have a low rate of recidivism and why the United States had such a high rate.

Labeling theory can also lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Those who are seen as criminals from birth because of their economic status, race, or family history have no way of getting rid of this label. With only one way to turn, they end up committing crimes and being incarcerated in jail because they cannot escape this label. Once they are released, this label becomes even more prominent, and the offender will reenter the criminal justice system as a result. This prophecy is seen a lot in the United States because people are frequently labeled as a future criminal based on their attributes and demographics. In Norway, this prophecy is not as

pronounced because citizens do not receive a label of criminal based on the characteristics they display.

The theory of differential association normalizes crime and shows that it is to be expected. This is the kind of stance that Norway takes when talking about crime. Norway makes sure to normalize crime because everyone commits crimes, some crimes just happen to be more severe, like jaywalking vs. murder. Having a crimeless society is impossible, so instead of trying to make it seem like crime is anomic, Norway focuses on normalizing it and shows that criminal behavior is normal and learned from interactions with others. The United States tends to focus on making crime seem abnormal and that those who commit crimes are outliers in the society. They view crime as an inherent behavior and do not see it as learned from peers and interactions with others within the society. Only criminals commit crime in the eyes of the United States. This concept of differential association and normalizing crime and seeing it as a learned behavior can partially explain why Norway has a much lower rate of recidivism than the United States.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### *Important Findings and Implications*

When it comes to looking at criminal justice and penal systems and their approach to handling offenders, it has been found the United States tends to take a harsh, punitive approach while Norway focuses on a rehabilitative and humanistic approach. It is important to note that punishing offenders in harsh ways does not seem to prevent them from committing crimes the way that the United States seems to think it does. Harsh punishment makes an offender more likely to recidivate because they are socially changed while in prison and when they are released, they still have this social behavior of prisoner, not everyday citizen. The offender will still behave in aggressive, impatient, and socially reclusive ways because they have not properly been reacclimated into society. Whereas in Norway, prisoners do not have a shift in behavior. Minor tweaks and changes may be made in order to help a person become more socially acceptable by society's standards, but they are released with the skill of sociality and are able to use it to communicate with others successfully. Research has found that treating offenders in a humanistic way and making their time in prison seem normal is better at decreasing rates of recidivism than taking away a prisoner's rights and punishing them in harsh manners for their crimes.

Looking at recidivism rates shows us which demographics are more likely to make an offender recidivate in the future. Those who have little to no education, are unemployed, have drug problems, and are in poverty are more likely to recidivate than others. This can be seen both in the United States and Norway, but each country handles these demographics differently. The United States does not require education or vocational training in prisons. In fact, most prisons do not have adequate education and vocational programs and even if they do, factors dissuade

prisoners from using these resources such as prison officers discouraging them from applying themselves in these programs. If a prisoner has problems with drugs, there are few treatment options for them once they are incarcerated and there is little variety in any programs offered. If a prisoner can obtain a job in prison, they are barely paid anything and most of that money goes to buying necessities like soap and toiletries. Once a prisoner is released, they are sent several bills that they are required to pay that stem from the fees of their trial and incarceration. This leads the offender into even more poverty than they were originally in. Without the proper resources provided to prisoners, they eventually end up back in prison because they cannot survive in the outside world, which we see in the United States. Norway on the other hand focuses on providing prisoners with a proper education and vocational training while they are incarcerated. Drug programs tailored to the individual can also be provided to prisoners if needed with rehabilitation centers being open to them if the problem is serious enough. Once prisoners are released, they are not drowned in bills and fees that must be paid and can instead focus on starting their new life. These resources that Norway provides its prisoners readies them to be reacclimated into the outside world and helps to make sure these offenders do not reenter the criminal justice and penal systems.

These findings imply that criminologists and sociologists have mass amounts of data to show why a country has high or low rates of recidivism. There are several key factors that influence these rates of recidivism, and there has been plenty of thorough research to provide explanations for why these factors influence recidivism rates so much. That being said, humans are complex, social beings and not everyone is the same. The societies in Norway and the United States contain citizens that are very individualistic, and they may not react in the ways sociologists predict them to. While there is a great deal of research and studies on recidivism

rates and people that are more likely to reoffend, there is still more to be learned because individuals and their thought processes are constantly changing and being shaped by the interactions they have and the community around them. The more societies change over time and are shaped by new norms, the more likely that new research and studies will need to be conducted to accurately describe recidivism rates globally.

### *Future of Criminal Justice and Prison Systems*

Based on all the research done by criminologists and sociologists around the world, the United States needs to review, revise, and change their criminal justice and prison systems. An affluent country such as the United States should not have one of the highest recidivism rates in the world as well as the highest incarceration rate globally. Focusing on the punishment of an offender for the wrong they committed against a society does not seem to be working for the United States. Yet they tend to continue to implement these punitive policies in order to better their systems instead of shifting their focus onto another aspect that could use their attention. Improvements need to be made if the United States is ever going to change their high rates of recidivism and have any hope of rehabilitating offenders to increase their success upon release.

If Norway continues to focus on the rehabilitation and normalization of offenders, then they will most likely continue to have one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world. With the methods they apply to their criminal justice and prison systems, Norway may even be able to lower their recidivism rate even more. Norway has a very successful criminal justice and penal system. Their focuses of humanization and restoration seem to show offenders that they are still people who have a right to be treated well even after they have committed a crime. This “Scandinavian Exceptionalism” with regards to low rates of recidivism is sure to continue for

Norway as long as they keep enacting policies that focus on helping an offender to better themselves and not on the punishment and revenge of an offender for what they have done against the society.

It is important to look at recidivism rates because it shows people what the policies and practices of criminal justice and prison systems are accomplishing. Higher recidivism rates show that the practices and policies in place are not benefiting society because the offenders are continuing to commit crimes. While lower rates of recidivism imply that a society has successful practices and policies in place to rehabilitate the offenders that enter the criminal justice system. By looking at the policies and practices that criminal justice and prison systems have in place, a society can see if they are accomplishing their goals, like diminishing the amount of crime being committed. Societies are constantly trying to lower the overall rate of crime, which is why it is important to look at recidivism rates. People who continue to commit crimes once they have been released from prison contribute to the high crime rates that are taking place. Looking at these rates of recidivism can also help to identify the characteristics of repeat offenders. If societies can identify characteristics that repeat offenders have, then they will have a better understanding not only of the offender but also future offenders.

This thesis shows that recidivism rates are an important trait to look at when studying a country's criminal justice and penal system. Through analyzing several research experiments and literary articles, this thesis shows how important recidivism rates are and why the United States has such a vastly different recidivism rate than that of Norway. These differences can be accounted for because of the way each country was founded and built and where their values lie and continue to stem from. If the United States ever has any chance of reducing their rate of recidivism, then they need to adopt some of Norway's policies regarding the criminal justice and

penal systems. Taking more of a rehabilitative focus with regards to prisoners rather than a punitive one would probably be the most effective place to start. However, an easier, and more realistic, way the United States could better its systems would be to implement more resources and programs for prisoners that would help them after their release into the outside world.

Programs like Goodwill Industries, United Way, and Housing Authority are a few resources the United States has implemented to help released offenders find jobs, housing, and food (Prison Fellowship, 2021). However, most of the programs that are implemented by the United States do not work and are not effective. So, along with implementing more programs, it would be beneficial to also revise and review the current programs in place in the prison and criminal justice systems. If The United States were to invest more time, effort, and money into these programs and resources, then it is likely that the rate of recidivism would start to decrease. In conclusion, if the United States wants to lower their recidivism rate, then they should take a more rehabilitative and humanistic approach to how they run their criminal justice and penal systems.

## TABLES

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## Table 1 Distribution of covariates and bivariate association with recidivism and post-release employment

From: [Post-release Employment and Recidivism in Norway](#)

	N	Percent	Any recidivism	Any post-release job
Total	7,476	100.0	54.2	43.7
Any post-release job				
No job	4,211	56.3	70.9	–
Job	3,265	43.7	32.6	100.0
Number of job spells				
No job	4,211	56.3	70.9	–
One job	2,383	31.9	37.5	100.0
2–3 jobs	811	10.8	20.2	100.0
4+ jobs	71	0.9	9.9	100.0
Job at last observation				
No	5,155	69.0	64.4	18.3
Yes	2,321	31.0	31.3	100.0
Any post-release labor market programs				
No ALMP	5,526	73.9	56.5	45.5
ALMP	1,950	26.1	47.4	38.4
Any post-release education				
No education	6,027	80.6	57.3	40.2
Education	1,449	19.4	41.1	58.0
Any post-release social benefits				
No social benefits	4,441	59.4	44.4	58.7
Social benefits	3,035	40.6	68.4	21.6
Principal offence				
Economic offences	446	6.0	33.6	47.5
Other offences for profit	1,698	22.7	78.0	22.1



	N	Percent	Any recidivism	Any post-release job
Violent offences	1,446	19.3	57.1	47.9
Sexual offences	209	2.8	26.3	46.9
Offences of narcotics	992	13.3	64.9	31.5
Traffic offences	2,323	31.1	36.9	61.7
Other offences	362	4.8	53.6	39.0
Drug-use/possession past 5 years				
Yes	4,467	59.8	37.9	58.3
No	3,009	40.2	78.2	21.9
Time served (mean = 98.3)				
<14 days	326	4.4	42.3	59.8
15–30 days	3,044	40.7	41.6	58.6
1–2 months	1,753	23.4	55.8	41.8
2–3 months	543	7.3	65.6	28.9
3–6 months	852	11.4	74.5	20.2
1/2–1 year	583	7.8	76.2	20.2
1–2 years	265	3.5	65.7	27.5
More than 2 years	110	1.5	51.8	29.1
Time in prison in 2002				
None	5,365	71.8	47	51.7
Up to 25%	1,021	13.7	68.6	28.7
25–50%	411	5.5	76.9	16.5
More than 50%	679	9.1	75.3	19.3
Sex				
Men	6,902	92.3	55.2	44.0
Women	574	7.7	41.1	39.7
Age (mean = 33.4)				
15–19 years	247	3.3	70.4	50.2
20–24 years	1,698	22.7	59.5	57.1
25–34 years	2,538	33.9	58.9	44.1
35–44 years	1,744	23.3	54.9	36.1
45+ years	1,249	16.7	33.0	33.8
Immigrant background				
Other	6,649	88.9	54.5	43.6
Immigrants	731	9.8	48.7	42.8
Two immigrant parents	96	1.3	70.8	54.2
Family type				
Other/unknown	5,260	70.4	57.7	37.5
Married with children	233	3.1	33.5	43.8
Married without children	1,622	21.7	48.6	59.5
Cohabiting with common children	361	4.8	40.4	62.0
Completed education				

	N	Percent	Any recidivism	Any post-release job
Compulsory or less	1,864	24.9	63.6	32.2
High school not completed	3,253	43.5	58.4	42.0
High school completed	1,613	21.6	39.8	61.3
University level	343	4.6	31.5	58.0
Unknown	403	5.4	53.3	27.0
Parents' educational level at age 16				
University level	842	11.3	50.6	55.2
High school level	3,559	47.6	56.1	46.1
Compulsory or less	2,250	30.1	57.7	38.0
Unknown	825	11.0	39.6	36.8
Earnings from work 2002 (mean = 132.000 NOK)				
No income	1,982	26.5	70.4	9.4
Less than minimum pension <sup>a</sup> 2,002	1,820	24.3	61.6	37.7
Min pension to 3 times min. pension	2,623	35.1	45.6	58.6
Above 3 times min pension	1,051	14.1	31.9	81.4
New imprisonment of any kind				
Not reincarcerated	6,729	90.0	51.0	46.5
Reincarcerated	747	10.0	82.2	18.2

1. <sup>a</sup>Earning less than the minimum pension for single persons was NOK 95,460 in 2002

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Table 2: Skardhamar and Telle 2012 – Relationship between Recidivism and Employment

**Table 3. Recidivism rate (in percentage) among African American and Caucasian offenders with a different level of education**

Time Return	African American			Caucasian		
	Below High School	High School	College	Below High School	High School	College
Within 3 months	3.1	3.7	3.8	3.8	2.5	1.2
Within 6 months	11.3	9.9	10.1	11.4	9.5	4.7
Within 9 months	19.9	16.9	13.9	21.0	17.1	8.2
Within 12 months	28.4	23.4	17.7	28.8	24.2	12.9
Within 15 months	35.0	28.9	21.5	36.9	27.9	21.0
Within 18 months	39.9	33.8	26.6	42.9	32.4	22.2
Within 21 months	45.3	38.7	32.9	46.9	36.0	26.9
Within 24 months	49.5	42.0	34.2	49.6	40.1	30.4
Within 27 months	53.0	44.3	36.7	52.5	42.0	31.6
Within 30 months	54.8	45.6	38.0	53.6	43.7	31.6
Within 33 months	55.4	46.8	38.0	54.0	44.6	31.6
Within 36 months	55.6	47.1	38.0	54.2	45.0	31.6
Within 39 months	55.7	47.4	38.0	54.6	45.4	31.6
Within 42 months	56.4	48.0	38.0	54.8	46.5	32.8
Within 45 months	57.1	48.9	39.3	55.2	47.4	32.8
Within 48 months	57.9	49.9	39.3	55.9	48.2	32.8
Within 51 months	58.9	51.5	39.3	57.7	48.9	32.8
Within 54 months	59.8	52.2	40.5	58.6	49.0	34.0
Within 57 months	60.3	52.2	40.5	58.8	49.2	34.0
Within 60 months	60.7	52.5	40.5	59.1	49.2	34.0

Table 3: Lockwood, Nally, and Ho 2016 – Recidivism Rate Among African Americans and Caucasians with Regards to Education

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## DROPOUT AND DELINQUENCY

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**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics**

	Total Sample	Males	Females	Ever Dropout	Never Dropout
Crime variety	.35 (.85)	.45 (.97)	.25 (.69)	.54 (1.09)	.29 (.75)
Crime prevalence	.20	.25	.16	.28	.18
Dropout	.11	.12	.10	.46	0
Years since dropout <sup>a</sup>	1.72 (1.55)	1.69 (1.53)	1.76 (1.58)	1.72 (1.55)	—
Male	.51	1	0	.55	.49
Age	17.77 (2.38)	17.76 (2.39)	17.78 (2.38)	17.77 (2.37)	17.77 (2.39)
White	.72	.72	.72	.65	.74
Black	.16	.16	.16	.22	.14
Other race	.12	.12	.12	.13	.12
Hispanic	.13	.13	.12	.17	.11
Lives with biological parents	.54	.55	.52	.33	.60
Arrests	.11 (.56)	.16 (.68)	.06 (.40)	.28 (.95)	.05 (.33)
Smoking prevalence	.42	.42	.42	.58	.37
Years sexually active	2.42 (2.75)	2.58 (2.96)	2.24 (2.50)	3.50 (2.98)	2.07 (2.58)
Antisocial peer scale	1.76 (1.66)	1.58 (1.61)	1.95 (1.68)	2.18 (1.74)	1.63 (1.61)
Middle-school GPA	2.87 (.86)	2.72 (.87)	3.02 (.82)	2.31 (.86)	3.04 (.78)
Ever suspended	.32	.41	.23	.60	.23
Ever retained	.17	.20	.14	.38	.11
ASVAB: arithmetic reasoning	.03 (.90)	.04 (.95)	.01 (.85)	-.42 (.91)	.17 (.85)
ASVAB: word knowledge	.02 (.91)	.02 (.94)	.02 (.88)	-.40 (.90)	.16 (.87)
ASVAB: paragraph comprehension	.03 (.91)	-.07 (.94)	.13 (.86)	-.45 (.87)	.18 (.86)
ASVAB: math knowledge	.03 (.90)	-.03 (.92)	.08 (.88)	-.52 (.86)	.20 (.85)
Mother dropout	.16	.16	.16	.32	.11
Father dropout	.15	.16	.15	.26	.12
Received federal aid	.35	.35	.36	.53	.30
Outside: nice	.65	.64	.65	.45	.71
Outside: fair	.27	.28	.27	.38	.24
Outside: poor	.07	.06	.07	.15	.04
N (person waves)	45,546	22,990	22,556	12,380	33,170
N (individuals)	8,112	4,129	3,983	2,258	5,855

NOTES: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. All figures are weighted.  
<sup>a</sup>Descriptive statistics for this variable are reported for dropouts only.

measure and a prevalence measure. At each wave, for each offense, a respondent who admitted committing the offense was assigned a code of one. The variety score is simply the sum of the number of different delinquent acts that were committed during a given time period. For example, if a person admitted one of the six delinquent acts, they were assigned a score of "1"; if they self-reported four types of delinquent acts during that time period, then their variety score is a "4."

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