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A study on the loss of social media during incarceration

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Spring semester 2023

Abstract

This thesis examines the loss of social media during incarceration and how incarcerated individuals reflect on the abrupt absence of social media in their lives. Based upon eight interviews with previously incarcerated individuals, this thesis studies the emotional process incarcerated people go through when doing identity work. Building upon Erving Goffman's framework of identity and self-presentation, Jack Katz's Seductions of Crime, and Heith Copes and Andy Hochstetler's masculinity in storytelling, this thesis will present the different relations between identity, self-presentation, control, and power. Two main processes are identified in the findings: the process of regaining the social identity one had prior to incarceration, and the process of curating a new identity while being incarcerated. The process of regaining the social identity one had prior to incarceration occurs with access to, for example, contraband phones. The process of curating a new identity while being incarcerated occurs by obtaining new hobbies, such as storytelling. The underlying theme between both processes is power and the battle to regain control over one's identity and communication. Deviating from previous research on social media use inside prisons, the findings of this study show that incarcerated individuals are hesitant towards social media use behind bars as it would defeat the purpose of incarceration. By presenting the interplay between online identity and control behind bars, this thesis will provide an in-depth perspective on the significance social media has in identity work.

Keywords: Incarceration; Social media; Identity; Social reclamation; Control; Power

Popular science summary

Social media plays a significant role in the daily life of most people. It has become an integral part of communication, social interaction, and information sharing in the age we currently call the digital age. Through social media, we are able to present ourselves in any way we wish and connect with others that wish to do the same thing. Research on social media and its many uses is vast, containing perspectives such as why people use social media and how they use it. However, I ask the question: what happens when people abruptly lose social media? How do they process the absence of social media? I answer these questions by examining incarcerated individuals who have involuntarily lost their social media access. I interviewed eight people who vary in gender and age and who have been incarcerated in different security leveled prisons and jails. The main themes and findings that are examined are identity and control. On one hand, incarceration resulted in a loss of control over their identities as their online identities had significant importance in their lives. In some cases, the individuals gained their online identities back by using contraband phones, thus gaining back the power over their communication. These findings are supported by previous research conducted on prison-produced content. On the other hand, the incarcerated individuals regained control over their identity by either creating a new identity or enhancing an identity that they previously were unable to present outside of social media. This was done through, for example, learning new hobbies or building connections with other incarcerated individuals. Lastly, while previous research supports technological advancements behind bars, the respondents argue against it, claiming that it would defeat the purpose of incarceration.

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Introduction

Instead of building walls, we can help build bridges. Instead of dividing people, we can help bring them together.

Mark Zuckerberg

Social media has an influential part in society today and has become an integral tool in everyday life. It has transformed the way humans communicate and interact with each other and made it easier and more accessible to access others. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and TikTok have revolutionized the notion of interaction and self-presentation. Through written text and visuals, individuals are able to express themselves in any way they wish, both privately and on a larger scale. As the quote above states, the founder of Facebook and Meta Platforms Mark Zuckerberg (2016) stated that Facebook's mission is to connect individuals, instead of dividing them. However, easy access to social media does not apply to everyone, for instance, incarcerated individuals. A result of incarceration is restrictions and limitations for communication with the outside world, and that includes digital communication through social media. At current times, incarcerated individuals are prohibited from using cell phones and having internet access, effectively cutting them off from engaging with social media platforms (Reisdorf and DeCook, 2022). In keeping with Zuckerberg's statement, this implies that those who are incarcerated are cut off from society in a physical, social, and most recently, digital way. This is due to the risk of incarcerated individuals misusing social media by contacting victims or conducting new crimes (Kriminalvården, n.d.).

Dwivedi et al. (2018) present empirical evidence that supports both the positive and negative impact social media has on people. They argue that social media can provide a platform that transcends time and space barriers, allowing people the chance to connect with people no matter where they reside, which connects to Zuckerberg's quote. Furthermore, Dwivedi et al. (2018) underline that social media has been proven to have a positive impact on interpersonal connections by making building communities more efficient. Benefits such as sharing information, giving and receiving support and advice are also highlighted. Furthermore, social media has also effective self-expression and self-presentation. Those benefits are benefits incarcerated individuals are stripped of due to no social media access. Studies show that incarceration comes with anxiety and social exclusion (Grommon, Carter, and Scheer, 2018). However, the downsides of social media can be the lack of emotional detection, the constant connectedness, and using social media in harm's way are discussed by the authors (Dwivedi et al., 2018). The last point backs up The Swedish Prison

and Probation's reservations toward social media behind bars and is also the general consensus globally (Kriminalvården, n.d.).

Research aim

In this thesis, I will examine how people who have been unintentionally socially isolated are affected by the loss of social media and the strategies they employ to reclaim their social presence. In order to do this, the investigation will look at how people who have been incarcerated in the past perceive the abrupt loss of social media during their time behind bars as well as the significance and value they ascribe to social media before, during, and after their incarceration. This study will also research how identity work through media and social media is affected by an involuntary and abrupt loss of social media. Therefore, in my research, I will address the following research questions:

Research questions

- **What significance do incarcerated individuals place on social media?**
- **How do incarcerated individuals do identity work behind bars?**

Outline

This study will begin by defining the two main media types: traditional media and social media. By differentiating the types of media, the reader will get a clearer understanding of the discussions that will take place in this study. Thereafter, I will present the previous research and literature, offering the reader an in-depth demonstration of the field. Themes such as social media use, contraband in prisons, and identity work will be discussed. Then, I will introduce the theoretical framework this study builds upon. Theoretical frameworks such as Goffman's identity work, Katz's Seductions of Crime, and Copes and Hochstetler's masculinity in storytelling will be explained, and I will argue why they are connected to this study. Afterward, I will present my methodological strategies and their benefits for this study. Thereafter, I will analyze the results, discuss them in relation to the previous literature and theories and showcase how incarceration impacted my respondents' social life and how they did identity work while incarcerated. Lastly, I will conclude this study with a final discussion.

Defining social media

In order to provide a comprehensive explanation and analysis of social media and its use, it is essential to begin by defining traditional media before delving into the concept of social media. Thereafter, I will discuss the similarities and differences between the media outlets. The distinction between the two media types is crucial for this study because while it focuses primarily on social media, it also acknowledges the significance of traditional media.

According to Baran and Davis (2015), traditional media refers to the earliest forms of mass communication and dates back to the invention of print media such as newspapers, magazines, and books. To put it short, traditional media is the transmission of information from one agent to another, oftentimes done by either governments or larger corporations. The key characteristic of traditional media is that the transmitters are the governments or larger corporations while the public is the receivers. As McQuail (2010, 42) states, mass communication through traditional media can be signified by four main elements: communication, communicating at a distance, social organization, and regulation and control. Furthermore, McQuail (2010), Meraz (2011), and Carey (2009) underline that, given that most, if not all, traditional sources are owned and controlled by governments and larger corporations, they also carry a significant influence in influencing the public's opinions on current issues. Therefore, before the rise of social media, traditional media had the upper hand in influencing the public's opinions as it was the only accessible way for the public to get news (Meraz, 2011). As of now, the only media allowed in prisons is traditional media (Kriminalvården, n.d.). This is important to note when considering the type of media incarcerated individuals have access to during incarceration, especially considering how limited it has become compared to social media which I will present and discuss right below.

The media landscape shifted and was transformed with the emergence of social media platforms that occurred in the early '00s. In contrast to traditional media, Boyd and Ellison (2008) describe social media as an interactive, two-way communication, where individuals can create and produce content and connect with others on a small or larger scale. The platforms have a variety of functions, such as sharing images and videos and communicating in either private or public messages. Al-Deen and Hendricks (2013) state that social media has become essential in several parts of society: in classrooms, public relations, political campaigning, marketing, and keeping relationships active to name a few. In a survey study conducted by Elhai, Hall, and Erwin (2018) on imagined smartphone and social media loss, results show that the participants that imagined social media loss showed stronger anxious feelings about losing social media compared to the

subjects who did not use social media during the survey. These results, together with those of Al-Deen and Hendricks' (2013) study, confirm the importance individuals place on social media. As for the reasons social media is pivotal to everyday life, Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) state that the online self is tied to the offline self, which is why social media fulfills the function of self-presentation. Individuals try to recreate their real selves online and post about their offline lives on social media, therefore, social media's function becomes a tool for self-presentation. However, in some cases, social media can be employed to adapt another identity that the individual is unable to employ in real life due to, for example, social norms. This is pivotal when discussing social media, as social media has given individuals a greater chance of belonging with others. As Webb et al. (in Al-Deen and Hendricks, 2013) state, social media has allowed individuals a focused and meaningful way to communicate with individuals and provides a strong sense of belonging as individuals can seek out those who share similar interests and values. Statistics presented by Kemp (2023) show that over 5.16 billion people use the internet, which is the equivalent of 64.6 percent of the world's population in early 2023. 4.76 billion people are active social media users in those numbers. These figures demonstrate how significant social media is in the daily life of humans and how social media has reduced the barriers to social interactions by allowing over 4 billion individuals to connect and engage with each other regardless of geographical limitations.

Lastly, it is important to note that generally, social media platforms are privately owned and operated. According to Bowe and Cohen (2015), this means that rules and regulations on the platforms tend to be different from the policies that traditional media has to abide by. Traditional media is perceived as more authoritative, objective, and reliable because the content goes through several factors that are involved in content publication (Carey, 2009). Considering these rules, it becomes clear why prisons only allow traditional media, as the content in traditional media is more controlled. In contrast, social media carries a more subjective tone, as a significant amount of the content is generated and shared by civilian citizens. Note that this point mainly refers to news content, rather than social content. Connected to the points made prior is the level of control individuals have over their content. As for social media, anyone can create and publish content (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). The individual has complete control over how the content is produced, what kind of content they consume, and whom they interact with. These are the main characteristics of social media. In prisons, this can be problematic, as incarcerated individuals can gain access to content and information that can result in recidivism.

It is important to note, as Jenkins (2006) states, there exists an ongoing process and series of intersections between the different media systems, and they will coexist as both carry content that is essential for all individuals. By defining and explaining the different media types and highlighting the differences and similarities between them, the next discussion will touch upon a sociological perspective of social media and its different uses and functions of it through previous research and literature.

A sociological understanding of social media

Since the aim of my study is to present the value individuals place on social media, it is pivotal to present social media through a broad sociological perspective. While my study focuses on incarcerated individuals only, I will still employ a broad explanation of people in general in the first part of this chapter but go more into detail about incarcerated individual's social media use later on. This is done to provide a more nuanced perspective on the subject. In Brandtzæg and Heim's (2009) study on why people use social networking sites, they present several reasons: 1) easier to connect with other individuals; 2) connecting with others who share similar interests; 3) processing feelings; 4) showcasing experiences; 5) a strong sense of belonging; 6) a shared social identity; and 7) accessibility and usability. The concept of connecting with others, not only within personal networks but also with individuals who share weak ties, is the primary driving factor in their research, which is facilitated by the accessibility provided by social media. Entertainment is also a motivator, as it provides entertainment and a way to pass the time, as they prescribe (Brandtzæg and Heim, 2009). Furthermore, while personal and social identity is not mentioned as a key personal factor for using social media, recurring results of how individuals find importance in the strong feeling of belonging and shared social identity that connects to one's personal identity are highlighted. However, Brandtzæg and Heim (2009) emphasize that people's interests in connecting with others and browsing their pages can be related to how they choose to present themselves.

Correa et al. (2010) discuss social media from a gendered perspective and argue that there is a distinction between how men and women use and present themselves on social media. Women place a greater emphasis on connecting with others and creating a sense of community while men with higher levels of emotional instability are more likely to use social media to boost their self-esteem and present themselves. The same results are found in Richardson (2022), who states that men use social media to build influence and expand their network and do so in a passive way, while women use social media to engage with others actively.

The notion of self-presentation online is previously mentioned and discussed by Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) who have applied Goffman's framework of self-presentation and identity work to computer-mediated communication. Goffman's conceptualization of self-presentation and identity work will be discussed in the theoretical chapter. They argue that Goffman's framework can be applied when trying to understand online identities, presentation of self, and interactions in the virtual space as humans essentially do the same things both online and offline when presenting themselves. They claim that the online self is tied to the offline self, due to the fact that

individuals try to recreate their real selves online and post about their offline lives. The reason is that individuals want their online selves to reflect who they are and wish to be honest and direct with others. This statement can be connected to Goffman's concept of presenting a certain identity when facing others. However, the act of persona adoption and editing certain aspects of self is subtle as most individuals in Bullingham and Vasconcelos' (2013) study tried to stay true to their offline selves. Though, in some cases, a persona adoption can be perceived, and it is due to the need to 'fit in', conform or explore the advantages of anonymity. The opposite can also be applied; individuals' true self is the person they are online as their offline self is restricted due to social norms. In these cases, Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) state that people would live under a pseudo and detach themselves from their offline identity by posting and interacting in a different way than they do offline.

As previously mentioned, online communities and self-presentation are significant motivators as to why individuals use social media. That includes deviant individuals and deviant online communities. As Nix et al. (2016) put it, criminal individuals and organizations have always been up to par with technical advances and have tried to use the technology to their benefit. It is no surprise that cybercrime exists and is growing rapidly as technology develops. According to Fernández-Planells et al. (2021), the online sphere offers gang members a space they can construct their identity and present street culture digitally. Labeled 'Internet banging' or 'Cyberbanging', the presence of gangs on social media promotes gang affiliation and glorifies gang life to portray power and notoriety by either threatening others or showcasing their lifestyles. Examples of common behaviors are selling drugs or other services; harassing individuals; posting violent videos; posting rap music (Fernández-Planells et al., 2021). Furthermore, the Internet is not used to recruit members, it is instead used to present the groups and themselves as part of the group. Social media is therefore used as a way for the gang members to come together and confirm their identities with each other. These findings connect to Brandtzæg and Heim (2009), who state that social media is mainly used to enhance oneself by connecting with others in the personal network. However, crime identities online are not solely for gang members. As previously mentioned, the virtual world can be used to present your 'honest' self, even if someone lives a life of crime without gang affiliation. Examples can be flaunting robberies, posting or planning murders online, and so on (Fernández-Planells et al., 2021).

Social media use behind bars

Given that the aim of this study focuses on examining how incarcerated individuals perceive their use of social media prior to and during incarceration, it is essential to explore instances where media and prisons are intertwined. As mentioned earlier, it is crucial to emphasize that traditional media (e.g., newspapers, TV, and radio) and social media are two separate phenomena and they will be discussed separately for the purpose of this discussion. Thus, I will examine and present instances where prison-produced traditional media has been produced and use it to offer a cultural perspective on the phenomenon (Schlosser and Feldman, 2022). Similarly, I will employ a more in-depth analysis of social media prison-produced content to bring forth a cultural but also social perspective as well. The first part will present one-way communication while the second part will offer examples of two-way communication as defined by Schlosser and Feldman (2022).

Schlosser and Feldman (2022) claim that historically, prisoners' communication with the outside world has taken the form of one-way communication through media such as prison-produced podcasts, newspapers, and manifestos. They are used for political means such as activism and apolitical means, for example, entertainment. Novek (2005) underlines that prison newspapers reflect the everyday reality of incarcerated people's experiences. It is a way for incarcerated people to describe their existence behind bars; their interactions with other incarcerated individuals, guards, courts, and other staff; their thoughts and suffrage pre-incarceration, during their incarceration, and their anxieties about post-incarceration. Furthermore, it gives incarcerated individuals a chance to combat social isolation but also digital isolation. In the same way, Schlosser and Feldman (2022) also highlight the importance of prison-society communication, arguing that it is to be perceived as acts of liberation, resistance, and rehabilitation. Järveläinen and Rantanen (2020) also argue that digital technology in prisons would improve incarcerated individuals' rehabilitation as it promotes their social skills, self-esteem, and their re-integration into society. Through prison-based publications, incarcerated people can seek freedom from their isolation and present their stories in fulfilling ways (Cecil, 2020 in Schlosser and Feldman, 2022). Allowing incarcerated individuals to speak for themselves may lead to decreasing stigmatization and prejudice about them. This is crucial, as Mason (2006, s.263) argues that media representations of incarcerated individuals can be flawed, as it portrays prisons as: "full of murderers, rapists, and pedophiles". Since non-incarcerated individuals have limited, or non-existent access to incarcerated people, they may be led to believe that that is the reality of the way incarcerated live, instead of the truth that Mason (2006) states is a world full of health issues, suicide, and a flawed penal system.

Although the examples mentioned may not fall under the category of two-way communication and social media-produced content, they do offer a historical perspective on how incarcerated individuals have utilized traditional media to share their lives based on the narratives they have power and control over. Since the content mentioned prior is only one-way communication, it does not offer the incarcerated individual dialogue or interactions with the outside world. Despite the illegality of accessing unauthorized two-way communication in prison, incarcerated individuals have found ways to do so and have expanded their ability to produce and publish content and communicate with others beyond bars. This is, for example, through contraband phones. Although there are no official statistics on how many incarnated individuals use contraband phones and, in that order, social media at the time of writing, it is evident that convicts still use and access social media (Grommon, Carter, and Scheer, 2018). As mentioned earlier, there lies a significant demand for cell phones, considering the extensive amount of time individuals spend using them in their daily lives. Online identities and online communities have become an integral part of modern society, which explains their entrance into prisons.

While cell phones are items that are commonly permitted elsewhere, they are prohibited in correctional facilities due to the potential for misuse. Contrabands are unauthorized materials or items such as cellular phones, weapons, and drugs (Peterson et al., 2021). According to Grommon, Carter, and Scheer (2018), cellular phones are the most challenging form of contraband because the statistics only show confiscated phones and not the ones that are yet to be identified. To offer a Swedish context, around 430 electrical devices were smuggled into Swedish prisons in 2021, a rise from 380 devices from the year prior (Alshawish and Törngren, 2022). In Grommon, Carter, and Scheer's (2018) research, they map out the use of cell phones inside a U.S. prison with 3395 incarcerated individuals over the span of two months. The results show that 1819 unique phones were identified and 201,748 voice and text transmissions were detected (Grommon, Carter, and Scheer, 2018). Moreover, they state that the incarcerated individuals that used contraband phones mostly contacted the same numbers, meaning that the phones were mostly used to contact loved ones and for social reasons. Furthermore, their research show that the phones were used continuously, and multiple times a day. While most of the use was calls and text transmissions, Grommon, Carter, and Scheer (2018) underline that some of the data collected were of the incarcerated individuals entering social media platforms.

In terms of how incarcerated individuals use social media, there are several studies done where the phenomenon is examined. According to Schlosser and Feldman (2022), the same themes appear in the social media content incarcerated individuals produce. As Novek (2005) presents, prison-produced media include daily lives behind bars; interactions with those around them; thoughts, and anxieties surrounding incarceration, and following the trends on social media. As stated by Schlosser and Feldman (2022), TikTok is the latest platform for incarcerated individuals to gain big contact and two-way communication with strangers online. The content they produce ranges from media-oriented to individual-oriented, consisting of tutorials on how to cook ramen noodles behind bars to emotionally driven content about the struggles behind bars. The authors conceptualize this phenomenon as 'social reclamation'. Defined and expanded on by Schlosser and Feldman (2022) social reclamation is a concept that describes the different forms of communication incarcerated individuals use to reclaim the narrative of themselves and their place in the social world. This is done as a way to fight back against the isolation that follows incarceration. Schlosser and Feldman (2022) argue that social reclamation is "the reassertion of imprisoned people's right to communication."

There are instances where prison-produced content has been located and shut down. According to Alshawish and Törngren (2022), the Swedish Prison and Probation Service (Kriminalvården) has discovered the existence of chat channels being operated through contraband phones within high-risk prisons. This phenomenon has been attributed largely to the longer sentences being imposed on gang members. Joakim Righammar, a cheif in the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, states that incarcerated individuals do this to establish their own communication channels outside of the authority's control (in Alshawish and Törngren, 2022). The channels have however been detected. A similar situation occurred in the U.S. F Mass (2015) states that Facebook has had an arrangement in which prison officials would link profiles that belong to inmates to the organization whereby Facebook would suspend the profiles. Maas (2015) highlights that the profile would be suspended even if they are not violating any policies. In Facebook's updated terms and conditions, it is specified however that it is prohibited to run a Facebook account and use the platform if prohibited by law (Facebook, 2023). Interestingly, this goes against the quote presented in the introduction by Zuckerberg (2016) who advocates for connection instead of divination.

Results of a study done by Lawson and Segrin (1996) show how important prison-society communication is for incarcerated individuals as their study underlines that the less external communication incarcerated individuals have, the more powerless they feel in their situation and

would thus raise their prisonization even further. They state that having a higher level of prisonization leads to a negative effect on incarcerated well-being and quality of life as it would, for example, lead to deterioration in social functioning with loved ones. Furthermore, Lawson and Segrin (1996) underline that incarceration influences the amount of internal and external communication incarcerated individuals have. Many individuals would not have the same number of social interactions in their day-to-day life during their time incarcerated and this would thus result in lesser assimilation would the rest of society. As discussed previously, this is an issue as it would make rehabilitation more difficult for the incarcerated individuals as they are being pulled away from the society they wish to reenter. Furthermore, according to Bullingham and Vasconcelos' (2013) analysis of online identities, detachment from the online identity may result in an identity crisis. Another issue with the lack of technology inside prisons is that prisons fail to prepare incarcerated individuals for release into the modern digital society (Järveläinen and Rantanen, 2020). Although incarcerated individuals are permitted to have contact with individuals beyond prison walls to some extent (e.g., prison visits and observed phone calls), Schlosser and Feldman (2022) argue that incarcerated individuals still seek ways in which they can broadcast self-narratives and maintain their social lives. Therefore, they see the act of using cellular phones to reclaim their social identity as an agential and subversive act, to prohibit a "social death" that happens by being incarcerated.

The dilemma surrounding incarcerated people on social media

While my research questions study the significance incarcerated individuals place on social media, it is crucial to point out the potential risks of them accessing it. The limitations and prohibitions are there for a reason, which will be discussed more in-depth later in the chapter. Although research shows that allowing incarcerated people to have access to media may help with rehabilitation (Schlosser and Feldman, 2022; Novek, 2005; Järveläinen and Rantanen, 2020), a dilemma surrounding whether incarcerated people should have access to social media exists. Incarcerated individuals' presence on social media comes with the risk of inmates using the internet to access prohibited content such as pornography or contact with victims. According to Reisdorf and DeCook (2022), this is a fear prison staff and managers' harbor. Incarcerated individuals are banned from owning any cellular devices because while seemingly innocent products, they increase the risk of incarcerated individuals continuing their criminal lifestyle by smuggling drugs and weapons into the facility, organizing attempts to escape, and/or ordering crimes to be committed inside and outside the facility (Peterson et al., 2021). Furthermore, social media can be used to taunt victims and intimidate witnesses. Lastly, incarcerated individuals can engage in real-time with

those outside through direct messages, comments, and video sharing which raises a challenge for authorities, as two-way communication through social media makes it difficult for prison staff to regulate the behavior (Schlosser and Feldman, 2022). This serves as an issue on several scopes, rehabilitation notwithstanding. If incarcerated individuals, especially those involved in gang criminality have unauthorized access to their criminal business, there lies a big risk of them opting out of rehabilitating techniques. Although I mentioned that most of the prison-produced content that has been analyzed has been of an acceptable nature, that does not mean that ill-meaning content cannot be produced. That is a major risk that correctional facilities have to consider, which raises the question of whether or not unfiltered access to social media for incarcerated individuals is worth it.

In the next chapter, I will dive deeper into the relationship between social media, identity, and self-presentation by using theoretical frameworks such as Goffman's self-presentation, Katz's Seductions of Crime and Copes and Hochstetler's masculinity through storytelling. By using these theoretical tools, the reader will get a clearer understanding of the dynamics between these phenomena and how different aspects impact the use and attachment to social media.

Theoretical discussion

Erving Goffman and identity work and self-presentation

As my research analyzes identities and online identities before, during, and after incarceration, it is beneficial to examine identities from a broader perspective to understand how online identities can be examined and perceived. I have already discussed online identities in a previous chapter through Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013), thus, in this chapter, I will mainly focus on Erving Goffman's framework. According to Goffman (1956, 13), the world is a theater in which humans are constantly performing in order to project a desired image of themselves. He divides people's identities into frontstage and backstage behavior, where frontstage behavior is the identity one wears when they are aware that others are watching them and act in accordance with social norms and rules, while backstage behavior is how people behave in private (Goffman 1956, 77-78). Furthermore, Goffman (1956, 1-7) states that individuals can produce two different impressions; impressions they *give* and impressions they *give off*. The impressions humans give are communicated or consciously acted upon, while impressions humans give off are not intended but are still portrayed and later picked up by others. This performance is labeled as 'self-presentation' by Brown (1998), and he argues that it provides a way for humans to form new identities and enhance the image of themselves, whether it is an illusion or not.

In Goffman's (1956, 73) conceptualization of identity construction, he uses the metaphor *mask* when describing how individuals can shift their personality during face-to-face interactions and deceive whom they are conversing with. Important to know that the individuals do not do this to 'become' someone else but rather shift their identity at the moment in time. The underlying theme of the metaphor of the mask as well as self-presentation is how individuals have the power over their own image, and how they control how others perceive them. However, the mask cannot always be used as Goffman (1956, 70) sees differences between face-to-face interactions and technological interactions, stating that they were an inferior way of interacting due to the lack of visible cues. For example, if two individuals talk on the phone, the impression they give off suffers as the other actor will fail to notice unspoken things. However, as previously stated, Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) have applied Goffman's framework to computer-mediated communication and they argue that the same performance can be observed, with the Internet being the theater.

Jack Katz and The Seductions of Crime

In his book, *Seductions of Crime*, sociologist Jack Katz (1988) discusses the different ways in which doing criminal acts can be perceived as a sensual action. He argues that criminals are not necessarily motivated by material gain, but oftentimes engage in criminal activities because of the excitement, risk, and power that transpire with committing an illegal act. For this thesis, the seduction of crime is relevant when observing the use of contraband phones and how incarcerated individuals challenge the authorities by having illegal communication and attempting to regain control over the presentation of self. Katz suggests that intense emotions can become addictive to individuals, leading them to commit more risky and dangerous acts. This type of thrill-seeking act is connected to identity creation, reclamation, and perseverance. For instance, Katz (1988, 52) conceptualizes the term "sneaky thrills" which according to him is criminal behavior, often involving deception or evasion of authority figures. Through committing a successful sneaky thrill, the individual can become addicted to the passionate state they experience during and after the thrill and therefore continue pushing the boundaries by committing increasingly risky behavior to maintain the excitement and adrenaline rush. In this case, Katz (1988) argues that individuals can curate a deviant identity through the rush of doing sneaky thrills.

In another section of *Seductions of Crime,* Katz (1988, 80-85) examines how deviant individuals maintain and present their deviant personalities. Since this thesis examines incarcerated individuals that have been involved in criminality (in some cases by being involved in gangs), it is important to present a backstage perspective that can explain their incarceration. By presenting this viewpoint, it will become clearer to understand the incarcerated individuals' identities and attachments to social media. Katz argues that being bad or a 'badass' can be regarded as a good thing. Some individuals wear the personality trait of being a badass as a badge of honor and stick to it by performing deviant actions. This is another case of curating one's identity towards an ideal one wishes to portray, similar to Goffman's self-presentation. The individual puts on some kind of performance by, for example, behaving, dressing, or talking in a certain way. Image is very vital for the badass and is constantly shaped and reshaped around what is perceived as being a badass. Furthermore, this topic connects once again to Goffman (1956) because, in this scenario, the idea of controlling one's own image and the image of the group emerges. By acting in a certain way, the group members gain power over the presentation of themselves. Katz (1988, 114-117) touches on this in his discussion of 'street elites'; individuals who through social connections have gained a certain identity. The term is used mainly for gang members and mobs. In this case, individuals perform and present themselves with a certain deviant identity to fit in with the rest of the gang.

For instance, behavior such as bragging about material possessions, illegal drug and weapon use and sale, and a portrayal of a general toughness. Katz (1988, 115) argues that the feeling of pride is important for this kind of identity work: loyalty and pride over the gang and the individual's involvement with the gang. Therefore, it is no surprise that flaunting said behavior is evident in such groups.

Katz (1988, 198) states that criminals are to be labeled as professionals when they do their criminal work due to the extensive effort put into their businesses. However, Katz (1988, 199) also touches upon the fact that this kind of life full of action can be chaotic and tiring for those involved. According to Katz (1988, 199-200), not everyone is equally as into the action as others, and some are involved in the action episodically. In between those episodes of action, the individuals switch between identities, going from the 'criminal' to someone else. This is a case in which the individuals shift from identity and perhaps either curate a new one or fall back onto 'who they are' when they are not a criminal who does criminal acts.

Storytelling and masculinity

Given that this study focuses on retellings of experiences and reflections of being incarcerated which include the illegal accusation of contraband phones, it is crucial to bring forth a theoretical framework that can set the ground for factors that can act as motivators for why incarcerated individuals obtain contraband. In Copes and Hochstetler's (2003) study about the construction of masculinity among male thieves, they demonstrate how offenders perceive masculine influences and how they can impact their actions in a limited context. Copes and Hochstetler (2003, 299) underline the eagerness and willingness the offenders show to break the law and do so by creating different forms of masculinity based on their cultural, social, and organizational positions. These conceptions of what it means to be a man influence how they behave when engaging in illegal activities. Furthermore, Copes and Hochstetler (2003, 299) stress that offenders look for opportunities to demonstrate autonomy and actions by getting inspiration from the usual gender metaphors that they are aware of and shape their criminal life from that. They differentiate between older and younger men and their course of action, claiming that older men do not rely on impulsiveness and action to frame their identities, and those themes do not threaten the experienced offenders anymore (Copes and Hochstetler 2003, 290, 295). This is not the case for younger offenders, that rely on those emotions and actions to go through with their criminal activities. Lastly, the data in their study also demonstrates that environments influence the scripts that offenders use to decide which crimes to commit. Some crimes are more likely to occur in

specific settings than others, and the locations are characterized by motivated offenders and suitable targets or objects. Copes and Hochstetler's (2003, 300-301) data suggests that motivated offenders build a frame of interpretation within the confines of the setting and in that frame, they act upon their expectations. This is where masculinity is stressed because it is through the understood and constructed gendered lifestyles that the interaction of the offenders, audience, and environment are shaped which then affect the choice to offend.

In this chapter, I have presented the frameworks that the analysis will build upon. In the upcoming chapter, I will describe the techniques I use to investigate the relationship between social media, identity, and self-presentation.

Methodological discussion

In studies done on social media use in prisons, researchers have focused on the platform people use and the content they post rather than taking a backstage approach to their analysis. That was my original plan for this thesis as well. However, as I began to collect data on incarcerated individuals' social media use, I recognized a lack of backstage perspective in the existing research. Drawing from Goffman (1956), the existing research brings thus a frontstage perspective and focuses on the impression the individuals give off rather than the impression they attempt to give. Hence why I took the decision to enter the field with a different approach. As previously stated, my interests in this thesis lie in researching people and their thoughts toward their personal use of social media, as well as how being incarcerated affected that. Although studies that analyze the actual content produced can yield many valuable results, I believe that interviewing previously incarcerated individuals about this topic will add a new layer and more depth to the field. Therefore, the methods I will use in this thesis are interviews with currently and previously incarcerated individuals, thematically analyzing the findings, and presenting them in relation to the previous research and theories.

Sampling and Access

The idea of conducting interviews came to me from an acquaintance who had previously been incarcerated and offered to tell me about their experiences. When we first spoke, I was still on the idea of analyzing TikTok videos and casually mentioned my research, which sparked an interesting conversation that made me want to dig deeper into the backstage perspective of the phenomena. When I made the official decision to change my methods, I reached out to the acquaintances again and asked them if they were willing to formally participate in an interview with me on the subject. They offered consent and recommended another person that had heard about my research and found it interesting. My journey with sampling and interviewing then began. My sampling strategy became thus a 'chain referral' sampling strategy, which Dragan & Isaic-Maniu (2013) defines as a sample strategy that relies on the participants to recommend other potential participants for the researcher. The sampling technique most recommended to use when dealing with a sample with individuals whose characteristics are rare and oftentimes hard to locate. Penrod, Cain, and Starks (2003, 100) state that a chain referral sampling method can be used when the populations for research purposes are difficult to access and label the populations as special populations. They define special populations as "small subgroups of the population that are considered rare and are not commonly visible [...] who may be involved in activities that are not socially acceptable and

who fear stigmatization and incrimination if exposed" (Penrod, Cain, and Starks 2003, 100). This is also backed up by Bagheri and Saadati (2015) who argue that chain referral sampling is effective when studying hard-to-reach and hidden populations or researching subjects that some individuals may not want to discuss publicly. When it comes to my thesis, I investigate incarcerated individuals or previously incarcerated individuals and their experiences with social media. The sample for this thesis constitutes a special population since the sample contains a small subgroup that is or has been involved in activities that are not socially acceptable. Because the population that fits into my study is special based on the discussion just discussed, I had to rely on the chain referral strategy. Although Dargan & Isaic-Maniu (2013) state that the chain referral strategy does not originally begin with being a chain referral strategy but transforms into one, in the case of my study, that was not the circumstance. As mentioned previously, I began my study with another method in mind, which evolved into an interview method once I had reached contact with two respondents.

Following that, before the official interview session, I asked my respondents if they know anyone who might be interested in participating in the study. I was able to come in contact with eight willing participants ranging in age from 23 to 53 through my respondents. My respondents have spent varying amounts of time incarcerated and levels of security in correctional facilities. Due to the diversity of participants in this sample, I believe that I was able to obtain nuanced and thorough perspectives that will benefit the analysis of this thesis. Furthermore, the respondents are of mixed gender, with three of them identifying as female and five of them identifying as male. Although statistics show that 94% of incarcerated individuals are men and 6% are women (Kriminalvården, 2021), I find it important to analyze women's experiences with the loss of social media during incarceration as well since as mentioned in the previous research, men and women use social media in different ways (Correa, 2010; Richardson, 2022). As I study the loss of social media, how it affects incarcerated people's lives, and how they deal with it, this information is crucial to the aim of my thesis. Since I think it's crucial to evaluate the differences in social media use across genders and age groups, having a mixed-gendered sample gives me the chance to look into how my participants different in their use of social media and how they reflect upon it. By having a sample with variety, I am able to do so through the qualitative material they offer me through the interviews I conduct with them.

By presenting the methodological strategies I used with the chain referral strategy, I will also set forth the disadvantages of this sampling method presented by Hannerz and Tutenges (2021). According to Hannerz and Tutenges (2021), a chain referral design may hinder insight into the

diversity that might exist within groups since the researcher has to rely on the respondents' social network to gain participants. This can be problematic because of the risk of incorrect generalization or assumption within a group. When researching special populations or subcultural groups, the author has to be wary of extending outdated presumptions about the groups. When relying on a chain referral design, the researcher may therefore have a limited scope as they only research individuals who are already connected through social networks. During the sampling process, I noted down these limitations and understand that my choice of sampling may result in a limited scope. However, in this particular study, as mentioned previously, my respondents vary in various ways, which is why I feel confident in my sample and believe I got a wide scope despite using a chain referral sampling strategy. While my sample is small and cannot be used to generalize, it is a sample with individuals whose situations have little in common, which lowers the risk of only offering a narrow or biased perspective to some extent.

Designing and conducting interviews

After collecting the majority of my sample, I proceeded to design my interview guide. Given the focus of my study lies in the personal experiences of my respondents, I chose to employ a semi-structured interview guide to lead me through the interviews but also give my respondents the space to add to the interview with stories and reflections they find fitting for the study (Leech, 2002). This is done to provide a backstage insight into identity which builds upon Goffman's (1956) framework of frontstage and backstage behaviors. During this stage of my research, I had yet to finalize my definitive research questions, however, I had a clear research aim surrounding a few main topics. These topics include 1) incarcerated individuals' social media experiences before, during, and after incarceration, 2) their emotions toward losing social media, and 3) their coping mechanisms in response to the absence of social media. These topics are inspired by Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) and Schlosser and Feldman (2022) that underline the importance of self-presentation online in today's world and I study this by using these topics as a parameter when designing my interview guide.

By following Leech's (2002) guidelines on how to design interviews, I structured my interviews in a semi-structured manner. I began with easier and broader questions to create a comfortable atmosphere for the respondents, then gradually moved to more thought-provoking questions later in the interview. This sequence is done to ease the respondents into the interview, but also to set the mood, as emphasized by Leech (2002, 665). Furthermore, by having a semi-structured interview guide, the interviewees are provided with the flexibility to contribute additional questions

and answers they deem fitting. When writing the questions, I tried to present them in a non-presuming way, as Leech (2002, 666) argues can be problematic when conducting social science research. I did not want to impose on my respondents by making them believe that they had to answer a certain way or put words into their mouths, hence why I kept the questions open and allowed them to opt out of answering any question. Through that, I believe the respondents feel comfortable offering different viewpoints.

Another subject I kept in mind during the design of my interview guide is the use of examples. In some of the questions, I ask my respondents about their knowledge or thoughts on certain topics even if they do not have personal experiences in those areas (e.g., contraband). I did so for them to bring examples that could be used in the study rather than closing those topics down. Furthermore, considering the aim of this study, it is interesting to me to investigate how the respondents would use contraband phones to present themselves (Goffman, 1956) and their thoughts about them, and their attitudes towards them (Katz, 1988). Leech (2002, 667) calls this motion use of example questions and argues that these types of questions are a perfect way of making respondents talk and list the information that they would otherwise not consider as "hypothetical" questions that are easier to answer than direct questions. This leads to what Leech (2002, 667-668) refers to as prompts, because while example questions are rather personal and the first things the respondents can easily answer, prompt questions are oftentimes hypothetical and not scripted into the interview guide per se. Prompt questions are valuable tools for interviewers to get the respondents to think about the situation or for the researcher to lean on. An example of a place where I allowed a prompt to be used in my interviews was in the final part of my interview when I ask if it would be a good idea to allow the use of social media for all incarcerated individuals, and the prompt is then in what ways they would access it. Since my interviewing strategy is semi-structured, I followed the guide but had several other questions in the actual interviews as a response to what my respondents shared that are not written down. The interview guide will be presented in the appendix.

Gathering data

When conducting my research interviews, I employed three different types of interview formats: face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, and email interviews. The selection of these interview formats is due to the availability and the location of my respondents. Some stated that they felt more comfortable doing online interviews rather than meeting with me physically, and I respected their preferences and agreed to conduct the interviews online. Furthermore, one of my

respondents was incarcerated during the interview, and the only viable means of communication was through a phone call. As highlighted by James and Busher (2006), online interviews, particularly email interviews, offer several advantages. For instance, the interviewer can send a number of questions at a time, which then allows the respondent to consider and compose their responses at their own pace. This is beneficial, as it allows for a thoughtful conversation as it gives the respondent more time to think through their answers before responding (James and Busher, 2006). This setup also allows the respondent to revise and refine their answers before submitting them, allowing them to feel more secure in their answers. Additionally, the use of online interviews eliminates the need for transcription, as the interview respondents are already available for the researcher to use. This reduces the potential for inaccuracy or loss of information during the transcription process. Moreover, online interviews offer flexibility and convenience for both the interviewer and the respondents as the interviews are done in different locations, and both participants do not have to go out of their way to schedule an interview. As some of my respondents either live in different cities or are not in the country, it felt like the most convenient choice to have email interviews with them.

While convenient, online interviews can also come with some limitations. For instance, not being in a physical room with them can take away emotions and expressions that can be useful for the researcher to analyze the answer the respondent is giving (De Villiers et al, 2022). This is something Goffman (1956) has touched upon as well when he stated that telephones can be a hindrance when doing the act of self-presentation, which I resonated with during my interviewing process. I found myself wishing that I could listen to my respondents' answers during the E-mail interviews to understand which parts of their answers they put parentheses on or if they answered a question with a certain emotion with sarcasm being an example. With face-to-face and phone interviews, I could sense emotions more easily and continue down a certain road I felt the respondent wanted to discuss through observing their mannerism. Having verbal and physical views is important for interpreting how the respondent feels and thinks. Another challenge I want to point out is that with online interviews, due to their lengthy process, spontaneous thoughts can get lost in the progress. For instance, in some cases, I could remember something I wanted to mention to my respondents but since they hadn't responded to my last message, I had to wait for them to respond and could run into the risk of forgetting what I was originally going to mention. Therefore, the risk of missed or incomplete information exists in online interviews. Lastly, technical difficulties are always a risk one has to consider when conducting online research. Poor internet connection, audio and video problems, and other malfunctions can not only frustrate both parties during the

interview but can also lead to difficulties when gathering information (De Villiers et al., 2022). While most of my respondents were technologically efficient, some factors impacted the efficiency of their responses such as bad WIFI. Meaning that it took longer for them to respond to E-mails, thus prolonging the time spent on the interviews. However, since the answers are already transcribed for me, I argue that the time it took for the online interviews to conclude was feasible as I didn't have to transcribe them.

The email interviews were structured in a sequential manner, where I sent the respondents a set of questions, got a response, answered their questions with additional questions if needed, and sent the next batch of questions, and so on. This approach worked efficiently, with the responses arriving one or two days after sending them. All the email interviews were done in around a week. Regarding the phone interview, as previously mentioned, it was done with an incarcerated individual. He got in contact with me through the prison phone and we spoke for around half an hour uninterrupted. Although it was initially nerve-wracking to conduct an interview in such a special circumstance, it also gave me a personal insight into how the respondents speak with their loved ones during prison phone calls. After I got his verbal consent, and the interview started, the process proceeded smoothly. I believe that this particular experience brought me much closer to my data and was a turning point as I have never experienced a prison phone call before this situation. As for the face-to-face interviews, I gave my respondents the choice to pick the location they felt most comfortable having the interview. Examples of locations were a car, a library, and a café. All the interviews were recorded, with each session lasting between thirty and fifty minutes. All the interviews, both online and offline, were conducted in Swedish. Lastly, I transcribed the interviews in Swedish and then translated the specific quotes that will be utilized for the analysis into English.

Coding and Analyzing

After the collection of data and transcribing the interviews, I began to thematically analyze the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as the method in which the researcher systematically identified, organizes, and presents themes across a data set. A thematic analysis focuses on the shared meanings and experiences across the collected data. Therefore, a thematic analysis identifies and tries to make sense of commonalities but through those commonalities, also finds what breaks from the pattern. Given that I already had preliminary knowledge of the different themes I wanted to explore, I already had some direction when I officially began to sort through my data. Thus, a thematic analysis proved to be the most suitable method for this study. In this

study, I adopted a deductive approach to coding, which Braun and Clarke (2006) state is the utilization of pre-existing concepts, ideas, and topics to code and interpret the data. Drawing upon the previous research, the theoretical framework and the research aim, I came up with seven thematic categories: "Losing a part of yourself", "Watching over your shoulders", "Frustrations with the wrong kind of media", "A peaceful and quiet world", "Staying connected", "Storytelling behind bars", and "The price to pay for fucking up". These categories touch upon several parts of the previous research and the theoretical framework such as media, social media, self-presentation online and offline, and contraband use. I came up with these categories by first dividing the data based on the three major topics listed in the introduction to the chapter 'Designing and Conducting Interviews'. Thus, while still addressing the same general topics, I arranged the responses according to their similarities or differences. This preliminary sorting helped me find commonalities and differences in the data which then laid the groundwork for the subsequent categorization processes and landed me with the seven categories presented above. Thereafter, I applied relevant quotes to the categories in two ways: if several respondents say comparable things or if the respondents touch upon the topic but say something distinctive.

Researcher's standpoint

Leech (2002) mentions in the introduction of her article that when researchers do interviews for the sake of research, they oftentimes walk into the interview with a lot of knowledge about the subject matter, and the only 'goal' is to count how many individuals correspond with the original hypothesis. However, as Leech (2002) discloses in the same paragraph, that same approach can backfire due to the close-ended nature of such a mindset. The researcher will either ask the wrong questions, ask questions in the wrong way, or ignore angles that could be of use to the research. I tried to find a middle ground for not only designing my interviews but also for my interactions with my respondents. Denscombe (2010) mentions that the researcher's values and identity will be present in their study, which highlights the importance of continuous self-reflection. So, I owe it to myself as a researcher but also to my respondents to present an objective yet representative study of their experiences. I am aware that while I have theoretical and academic knowledge, I do not have personal experience in this field. I have never been incarcerated myself nor experienced an imposed loss of social media. Therefore, what I cannot build with my knowledge in my research, I build through the help of my respondents. In my interactions with my respondents, I tried to make them understand that no matter what they provided me with, it is information that is of use to my research. Most of my respondents are not highly educated and showed insecurities in the way they answered questions, and I tried my best to show appreciation and contentment with the

data I gathered. Leech (2002, 665) discusses the art of putting the respondents at ease by stating: "The interviewer should seem professional and generally knowledgeable, but less knowledgeable than the respondent on the particular topic of the interview." I believe in this statement and try to follow it as much as possible when conducting my interviews. As I previously mentioned, I am desperate for the knowledge my respondents possess and need to treat them as my equals during the interviews even if I have knowledge in other aspects of this topic. As Li (2021) states, when conducting interviews, the researcher must be aware of the power dynamics that are present at the time. In the physical interviews, I made sure that the respondents were in a place they were comfortable with, such as their car or their favorite café. Being in a setting that puts them at ease can result in a more relaxed discussion rather than being in a setting they are not familiar with (Li, 2021). In the E-mail interviews, I told my respondents that they had time to think and answer back once they felt comfortable doing so. I believe that it is important for researchers to make sure that their respondents feel safe and protected when entering the interview. To underline this, I also wrote a consent paper and sent it out to all my respondents before the interviews where I stated their rights and contact information. When all the interviews were finished, I informed my respondents that they were welcome to contact me or my supervisor if there were any questions or if they had any worries. They had the contact information on the consent slip they signed before their interview was conducted.

Furthermore, I was clear to explain the entire process to them by describing my thesis, my aim, and what my thesis was trying to accomplish. Some of the respondents were hesitant in answering certain questions that could get them into trouble, so I made sure to point out that they would be anonymized, and nobody would have access to the raw data and their names aside from me. I felt that after being clear about the situation, all of them were more relaxed in their interactions with me. One of them asked me what my thesis was trying to conclude, and while at the time I did not fully know, I answered with: "I hope I can help incarcerated individuals access the outside world they hope to reenter." In retrospect, while my point still stands, I also understand that while my research will not change the way the laws are, I wish to give the world an in-depth view of incarcerated individuals' experiences of losing a big social part of their life.

Ethical considerations

I have strictly followed The Swedish Research Council's (2017) ethics guidelines when conducting this study and interviewing my respondents. They highlight the importance of research and the regulations that each researcher has to consider when conducting a study. The researcher is

obligated to show compassion to the individuals that participate in their study. This goes both for those directly involved but also those that can indirectly be impacted by their study (Swedish Research Council, 2017). The researcher should follow a set number of rules, such as transparency about the research, honesty about the results, and keeping the integrity and anonymity of the respondents. Thus, I will discuss some examples of the considerations I concerned myself with during the study. While the general questions asked in my interviews were risk-free, some branched into illegal activities which come with ethical issues. As previously mentioned, many of my respondents felt somewhat nervous about exposing their behavior during the interviews and portrayed a big discomfort towards authority, society, and the justice system. I was the "image" of what they loathed, and I tried to break that image by presenting myself as a student that was not involved in the justice system and only wanted to interview them for research purposes. I have already discussed the dynamics between me as a researcher and my respondents in the previous chapter, so in this chapter, I will discuss the ethical considerations I took while presenting my respondents.

The main topic is my study is incarceration and the loss of social media and I tried to stay focused on this aim. Therefore, I found it unrelatable to discuss the crimes my respondents committed prior to their incarceration as well as their criminal lifestyle after their incarceration. Some of my respondents were very clear about wanting to be completely anonymous, and to ensure that they remain anonymous I have removed any information that could be used for identification such as names, location, and the crime they committed. I present my respondents with fabricated names I've gotten from a random name generator. However, the quotes and descriptions might give the reader an idea about the age and gender of the respondent, but that is all there is to describe them. Furthermore, I mention the security level they were incarcerated in to give a clearer understanding to the reader about the restrictions they lived with during their incarceration.

Another ethical consideration I reflected upon while conducting my interviews is that I am acquainted with two of my respondents. I remained objective and unbiased during the interviews and the coding process to ensure that I did not accidentally favor those two individuals. Instead, I let the methodology and theoretical frameworks drive the coding. Additionally, since I already had some prior knowledge about my acquaintances' thoughts on the matter, I tried to avoid leading questions to get them to answer questions 'to my liking'. I do acknowledge that because I had already a trusting relationship with those specific respondents, I did not have to gain their trust and thus I believe the interviewing process went smoother than with the rest of the respondents.

Analysis

My analysis is divided into three sections. In the first section, I will present the emotional aspects of losing social media while being incarcerated and the hardships the incarcerated individuals experience socially and culturally. Drawing upon relevant theories, previous research, and my findings, this section examines the frustrations and anxieties expressed by respondents regarding the loss of a significant part of their identities; their online identity, and how the drastic change in media consumption enhanced those feelings. The second section aims to highlight the differences between the theoretical frameworks, previous research, and my findings by presenting how incarcerated individuals strive to make the best of their situation despite their scenario by for example learning new hobbies or enjoying their solitude. The final section delves into the respondent's reservations and moral dilemmas surrounding social media use behind bars. Through these three sections, the analysis aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how the absence of social media can impact people.

Losing a part of yourself

Upon asking my respondents about their feelings regarding the loss of social media while incarcerated, a recurring response emerged, focusing primarily on feeling disoriented over their identity. As Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) argue, online identities are tied to the offline self, and it goes without saying that if there is a loss in the online self, subsequently, the offline self will also suffer as they together create the "whole" identity of an individual. My respondents all had a social media presence prior to being incarcerated and everyone showcased attachments to their online identities in various ways. For instance, two of my respondents exhibited signs of anxiety due to their reliance on social media for self-presentation and the display of their lifestyle.

> My identity is online. I post shit to let others know what I do. Who I am. Even when I'm not in Sweden, I let people know what I am making and doing. It's important.
>
> *Björn*

> It felt disastrous, I swear [laughs], there was no life without it. I use social media to post pictures and shit, without it how would people know what I'm up to [laughs].
>
> *David*

In these two examples, it is clear to see that the respondents place a high value on social media and their online identity. The loss of social media comes with an existential crisis, as both respondents' identities are heavily linked to their self-presentation online. They state that their offline identity is closely tied to their online identity as they use various social media platforms to present the lifestyle they live offline. When I inquired about which platforms they use and what type of content they produced, both respondents replied that they use photo-centric platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. They both circulate pictures and videos of their money, cars, and expensive jewelry to show others the lavish parts of their lifestyle, much like how Katz (1988), Copes and Hochstetler (2003), and Fernández-Planells et al. (2021) describe gangs members' identities, online presence and internet banging. Their social media presence was not tied to social factors such as connecting with others, but rather to show others an image of the life they live. Björn claimed that he did not care about interactions because he knew people would be watching his content, while David stated that he enjoyed watching and commenting on his friends' equally as boastful content because it showed others that his friend group had succeeded in making money. Their train of thought connects to Brandtzæg and Heim's (2009) study that states that keeping tabs on others is one of the main motivators why people use social media. This argument applies both ways in this scenario: the respondents use social media to keep tabs on others and let others keep tabs on them.

As Katz (1988) presents, criminal organizations rely heavily on self-image and presentation because this is how individuals show belonging and pride toward their group. Thus, when they lost the opportunity to update others on their lives due to their incarceration, both respondents felt as if the image they have curated online was struggling or gone. In this case, the act of self-presentation online gets put on hold as they have no outlet to present themselves with (Goffman, 1956; Brown, 1998). Hence, as is evident in the quotes above, the main stage for performance of the social identity is social media, and without that stage, the actors cannot perform, and following Goffman's framework, they cannot give off the impression they wish. Thereafter, they also lose the power of what others think of them at the moment as they lost control over their self-presentation in the online sphere. Therefore, incarcerated individuals lose something the rest of the world has, which is a chance to express themselves digitally. Nowadays, the action of presenting and expressing oneself digitally is essential and a mundane thing to do for the majority of individuals (Al-Deen & Hendricks, 2013; Brandtzæg and Heim, 2009).

In a similar sense, one of my respondents, Nellie, said she felt anxious about losing social media because it is where she promotes her services as a nail technician. She regards her professional life highly as it was her way out of her previous criminal lifestyle, and it was the first time she felt like she "finally had power over her own life and who she is". Through her own words, she indirectly states that it was when she got out of her criminal lifestyle and became a working citizen that she had the power to curate her identity in a way that fits her and to give off the impression of whom she believes she is rather than being perceived as a criminal. However, when she was incarcerated, she feared that she would lose the progress she had made in constructing her new, non-criminal identity.

> I post everything on social media. I use Instagram and Facebook to promote my services and my brand. […] I work as a nail technician. So, when I sat, I couldn't promote myself. I was very stressed and nervous about that. I kept thinking 'What if people forget me, what will I do then?'.
>
> *Nellie*

This quote is similar to the excerpts above in the sense that all of them feel hopelessness over the lack of control over their online image. However, the distinction lies in the way the first two respondents used social media to enhance who they are while Nellie used social media to show who she is not anymore. As Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) state, social media can be used as a way to present oneself in a way that is different than what the online self is perceived. Nellie stated multiple times throughout the interview that she did not identify with her younger self anymore and felt as if her recent incarceration took her back to the identity she tried to escape from. She used her online platform to reinvent herself into a person she felt strongly attached to and by losing that, she spent her time in incarceration wondering if people forgot her, she may have lost a part of herself as well. Therefore, Nellie did not only fear losing her occupation, but she also feared losing her social status. This is challenging, as stressed by Järveläinen and Rantanen (2020) who argue that digital technology in prisons would benefit incarcerated individuals' rehabilitation and their reintegration into society. Hence, in Nellie's case, having no access to social media where she promotes her services during her incarceration made her reintegration into society suffer as the risk of losing her clients exists.

Two additional instances of this sense of hopelessness were expressed by two respondents who felt that because social media has such a prominent existence in their lives, once it was absent, they

struggled with their identity. They had never contemplated their identity before their incarceration, further aggravating their struggles with incarceration.

> You run into a wall [without social media]. You lie there at night thinking I want to clean their walls [laughs]. There's nothing to do, you sit there alone. You start looking at the window thinking how about how I can break it open with a plastic knife, thinking 'how can I come out with this plastic knife [Laugh].
>
> *Lovisa*

> I use social media a lot. Scroll TikTok, use Facebook, and chat likewise. Most of my days that's all I do. When I was locked up, I had so much time that I realized how important it is for me, and how much time it takes from my daily life. I missed it a lot.
>
> *Julia*

In both cases, the unease over losing social media was connected to the fact that both respondents spent so much time online that they did not know what to do with themselves when they did not have social media. This highly connects to Goffman (1956), Brown (1998), Brandtzæg and Heim, (2009), and Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013), wherein the two examples, the respondents relied on their social media presence and consumption so extensively that it was the most prominent way to express and present themselves. For them, it was through the digital sphere that the act of self-presentation existed, and when that became limited with their incarceration, they faced anxious feelings as they had to curate a new identity. They both had been so used to the overconsumption of social media that the sudden loss of it came with worry but also a realization that social media was an important part of their daily lives. In the first quote, while it is a dramatization, respondent Lovisa states she would go as far as breaking out of jail because of how lost she felt without social media and the excess time she found herself with. Indirectly stated by Lovisa, the lack of social media made her so anxious that she considered conducting illegal activities just to gain back her comfort place which is social media.

While different, this desperation is also seen in the research of Grommon, Carter, and Scheer (2018), Schlosser and Feldman (2022) as well as Mass (2015). In their research, the incarcerated individuals have been so desperate for social media use that they have resorted to illegal activities by accessing contraband phones and entering the social media sphere. These two respondents have stated that they have not used contraband cellular phones, but Lovisa confessed that she would not be against it if given the chance. When I asked her to elaborate, she said that she would use

the phone to "go on TikTok and YouTube", because she already had contact with her lawyer and family legally and did not feel the need to use a contraband phone for social reasons.

In all the excerpts presented, a nuanced perspective of the reasons why different individuals of different ages, genders, and lifestyles grieve the loss of social media during their incarceration. The respondents' offline identities are tied to their online identities and felt loss, confusion, and anxiety over losing one major part of their identity, confirming Bullingham and Vasconcelos' (2013) argument that the online self is tied to the offline self. This loss impacted their mental health throughout their incarceration, as they felt like they had no way of expressing themselves during their incarceration. Although incarcerated individuals have methods to contact others and use media, their options are limited. In the next two chapters, I will present the problems my respondents had with the legal ways of using said techniques.

Watching over your shoulders

In this chapter, I will delve into the reflections of my respondents regarding the surveillance of their interactions with the outside world and the emotional impact this had on them. A common theme that emerged from my interviews is that the respondents felt like they were constantly watching over their shoulders when communicating with the outside world. Their dialogues with their loved ones became restricted due to the fear of discussing topics that are prohibited or giving away too much information to the authorities. The reason for the persistent surveillance is, as presented by Jewkes & Reisdoft (2016), Peterson et al. (2021), and Schlosser and Feldman (2022), due to the fear of incarcerated individuals misusing the freedom of communication. The risk of incarcerated individuals contacting victims, continuing their criminal lifestyle, or operating a smuggling business behind bars leads correctional faculties to take cautious prohibitions. However, incarcerated individuals are still able to contact their loved ones through permitted phone calls and visits. Still, my respondents felt that despite the permitted means of contact, they still felt as if they did not have any freedom in expressing themselves when conversating with others.

> [I felt] frustrated of course. I feel like we could never speak normally when uh someone hm watched over what we said and did all the time. It was basic answers like 'Yeah, I'm fine' and then moving on. […] There were things we couldn't talk about like the case and other things. [Small laugh] My family was curious about those things in the beginning, but I couldn't get into it. Sometimes you just want to talk shit, but you can't because someone is listening. [Small silence] Also, we had to speak Swedish the whole time. My mother was

not comfortable doing that the whole time. Basically, it's shit. But that's what you get, I suppose.

<div align="right">Julia</div>

Everything is regulated. Even if you don't do anything you still feel like you are because of the regulations. You can't relax in a situation like that. A normal phone call with your children becomes so tense.

<div align="right">Måns</div>

In the quotes above, the respondents both shares how difficult it was for them to express themselves freely and feel relaxed during their conversations with their loved ones. Even if they wanted to speak about usual topics such as their lives or their feelings, they felt as if they had to think about what they proclaimed beforehand. When asked to elaborate, Måns aforesaid that his conversations with his children were his only comfort during his time incarcerated, however, it was stripped away from him when he learned that he was still under surveillance during those private conversations. Thereafter, the conversations became stressful because he continuously had to be cautious of what he and his children said and alluded to. Therefore, Måns had to regulate his behavior and the way he expressed himself when conversating with his social circle, which means he had to curate an entirely new identity during his incarceration. Måns claims that the conversations between him and his family become 'tense', highlighting the fact that their bond became strained due to the act he had to put on (Goffman, 1956; Brown, 1998). Goffman (1956) underlines that telephone calls can become a hindrance during interactions, which is an obvious case in this scenario, as Måns' family had nothing to rely on than his words. Therefore, Måns had to curate a different identity for that scenario in order to communicate with his family in a way that makes them understand him. This is another scenario in which the loss of control over one's narrative is prevalent, as Måns lost the opportunity to express himself due to surveillance.

Comparably, another respondent suffered through the same anxieties when talking to his family and tried to find loopholes during those conversations. The constant surveillance has led respondent Hugo to speak in code during conversations with his loved ones. He states:

There is always someone present during visits and during phone calls. You can't say whatever you want. They think you'll discuss the case or something. We speak in code to talk about certain topics. For instance, we would talk about a movie when really, it's about reality.

Interestingly enough their distaste for surveillance is thought-provoking when because all individuals are under surveillance on social media as there exist rules, moderators, and staff that handle misconduct on social media platforms. An example that can be linked to this is Mass' (2015) research where he states that Facebook bans users that do not follow their rules, for example, incarcerated individuals that use Facebook despite their rules prohibiting them from such. However, since the surveillance incarcerated individuals experience is direct rather than indirect through rules and regulations online, they separate or do not think about surveillance online to essentially be the same thing. The respondents did not mention internet surveillance once, although big tech companies such as Google, Facebook, and Apple track access to users' private information (Lynch, 2022). Furthermore, the conversation about online surveillance is arising, and some even claim that is it dystopic (Lynch, 2022), yet the respondents did not reflect on that. For instance, similar to the laws and rules of no social media access due to the risk of harassing victims or running illegal operations that exist in prisons, the same exists on all social media platforms. Users can be banned or put on time-out if they act against the rules. Harassment and illegal activities are banned on all social media platforms and the users are monitored by staff to ensure that those activities do not occur, therefore, users can be banned there too if they misbehave—similar to the real-life justice system.

This section connects to the first chapter of the analysis, in which the respondents all show grief over losing an essential part of their daily lives, social media, and how the regulations around their social interactions put a strain on their mental health and their bonds with their loved ones. From a rehabilitation scope, this is arguably controversial, seeing as rather than being trained to reintegrate back into society (Järveläinen and Rantanen, 2020), they instead get separated from it and feel suffering due to the limited access; both mentally and socially.

Frustrations with the wrong kind of media

Another recurring frustration that emerged from the interviews was dissatisfaction with outdated forms of media or the wrong type of media. Several respondents expressed their discontent with the lack of technological advancements inside correctional facilities. They touch upon the fact that social media has become the predominant and relevant media platform and that the justice systems need to get accustomed to that by implementing newer media inside correctional facilities. Accessing the content of personal liking has become much easier with social media, which explains

why the respondents felt frustrated with traditional media (Carey, 2009). As stated in my methodological discussion, the time my respondents spent incarcerated varies from person to person, as well as the security level of the jails and prisons they have been incarcerated in. There is a distinction between being in jail [häktet] and prison [fängelse] where the jail is where incarcerated individuals sit while awaiting their trial and verdict while in prison incarcerated individuals serve out their sentence. As described by my respondents, the media supply in jail is far more restrictive than in prison, especially if the incarcerated individual has restrictions. These restrictions can for example mean no media consumption or contact with other incarcerated individuals. I will discuss the latter part of these restrictions in a later chapter, but for the time being, I will discuss how the respondents reflect on the media they got access to during their time incarcerated.

> I had newspapers from the time Danny [Saucedo] and Molly [Sandén] were still dating. It was fun to get a flashback to that, but it was old. [Small silence] It made me annoyed sometimes. Uh, and the books I got were like old classics. I'm barely a reader, I can't read those. The TV was nice though.
>
> *Nellie*

> There were newspapers from the time they were going to pick Crown Princess Victoria and Madeline's dresses for their weddings. [Laughs] There were old books too. Most of the newspapers weren't about news, Sweden, or science. They were just old. And nothing else.
>
> *Lovisa*

Through Goffman (1956) and Brown's (1998) conceptualization of identity work, we can analyze these two excerpts by noting that Nellie and Lovisa's identities suffered due to the fact that the media they got access to did not fit their identities. They were not interested in the media they got and could therefore not practice the identity work they usually do. Nellie and Lovisa are two respondents that spent time incarcerated in jail, rather than prison. They did not spend a long period incarcerated and have only been incarcerated once in their lives. As demonstrated by the excerpts above, both individuals reacted strongly to the lack of current media. The traditional media they got access to did not simulate them during their incarceration, as it was not up to the times, and they could not relate to it. This is where a massive distinction between their lives before incarceration and their lives during incarceration lies, as they previously had access to all the media they wished for but lost that freedom during incarceration. The issue they have is not the media

itself, but rather that it is the wrong media, the wrong form of media, and the wrong content in the media. In the first quote, Nellie claims that she does not read books and appreciated the TV that was provided to her. However, she got access to the TV later on in her incarceration, so she had spent some time already feeling frustrated due to the lack of stimulation in her daily life. Furthermore, she stated that the TV only had a set number of channels, and she only cared for one channel, which negatively impacted her state of mind during her incarceration, even with the TV access. Lovisa did not gain access to TV or any other media aside from newspapers, tabloid papers, and books. However, as she emphasizes, she was detached from the media she was permitted to use as they did not connect with her wishes, which can also be seen in Nellie's response. The lack of current and relevant news left them feeling detached from the outside world, as it made them feel stuck in the past.

This connects to Schlosser and Feldman's (2022) conceptualization of social reclamation, and how the respondents felt as if their social identity was not intact due to the fact that they had no media they felt connected with during their incarceration. In Schlosser and Feldman's (2022) study, the incarcerated individuals used contraband phones and TikTok to reclaim their social identity. In this scenario, Nellie and Lovisa could not reclaim their social identity as they lacked the tools to do so. As previously shown in the first chapter of the analysis, Lovisa is very attached to social media and has gotten used to rapid media and news updates, so the slow or nonexistent updates during her incarceration left her feeling anxious and out of reach with the outside world. Therefore, their identity, and in turn, their social identity suffered.

In some circumstances, incarcerated individuals are given access to the media of their choice. In one instance, respondent Oskar's request for music access was fulfilled. However, he had to follow certain guidelines if his request was to be approved.

> We could ask for a music player and listen to music, but the CDs could not be burned CDs. They have to be original ones that they examine. Most new music is not on CDs these days, and since I couldn't get burned CDs by family I had to listen to old music only. Swedish rap that I like does not have CDs. You know?
>
> *Oskar*

In this example, Oskar points out irritation towards the fact that although he was granted music, he could not listen to the music of his own choice and had to settle for music that was not to his liking. Because it is the wrong type of media, Oskar could not consume it. As Katz (1988) and

Copes and Hochstetler (2003) argue, in gang organizations, especially with male members, it is important to practice actions that can confirm the identity. For example, behaving a certain way or talking in a certain way. This is an act of gaining control over one's identity and performing identity work. For Oskar, it was through listening to gang rap, however in prison, he could not do so since he did not have access to it. Therefore, Oskar experienced a loss of control over his self-presentation as he did not have the toll to do so. This case is similar to the earlier excerpt where Nellie says she had to settle with watching TV channels she did not particularly enjoy. These scenarios also relate to the first chapter, where the tools (social media) for self-presentation became unobtainable. It appears as if they are continuously put in discomfort despite being granted their wishes by the prison staff. On one hand, they are given the illusion that they have a wider range of entertainment and news while being granted different media outlets. On the other hand, the outlets are restrictive to the point where the incarcerated individuals do not get full use of the outlets as they either do not achieve what the incarcerated individuals wish of them, or they are so restrictive to the point where the incarcerated individuals do not get any use of them.

Identity is an important part of being involved in criminal organizations, which Oskar is. Oskar stated that he only had access to a handful of CDs, and after a while stopped listening to them because he stopped enjoying them. As Jenkins (2006) states, the outside world is continuously going through a process where media is evolving and shaping around individuals' satisfaction yet in contrast, this process gets terminated behind bars for incarcerated individuals as they are controlled of consuming the media of their liking. This is due to the lack of progression in the technological aspects inside jails and prisons. Two other respondents discuss this by stating:

> You're so used to your phone. Then you don't have it and it feels weird. Even though I've lived in a world without them, these last years they are all we use. I think they should change it up. Not everyone has the patience for books or TV anymore.
>
> *Björn*

> We already got a TV; some ask for a radio and games. Why not cellular phones too? I believe [prisons] need to get more digital because the whole world is different now.
>
> *David*

In the quotes above, the respondents both argue that correctional facilities fail to meet the demands of incarcerated individuals. The underlining of their reasonings is that cell phone access and social media have become a necessity for the daily lives of human beings. At the current times, it is social media that is the primary entertainment and news source for many individuals as

presented continuously throughout my study, and although media access does exist inside correctional facilities, it is outdated and impracticable. Additionally, since correctional facilities have 'newer' traditional media such as TV, they should progress to social media as well just as the rest of the world did. As Al-Deen and Hendricks (2013) reason, social media has become essential in several parts of society and adds meaning to the majority of individuals in society today by giving them a sense of belonging and an efficient way to communicate. This is seen in the results of this study, as the respondents have showcased signs of anxiety, isolation, and detachment because of the lack of efficient communication with the outside world and entertainment during their incarceration. The control over expressing themselves and keeping their identity attached struggles due to the restrictions. In Carey's (2009) book, he argues why social media is essential to individuals in this age, and that is mostly to the control the individuals have over the content they both produce and consume. In correctional facilities, this power is revoked.

A peaceful and quiet world

Nevertheless, and contrary to the findings above, some respondents considered their time being incarcerated and the lack of interruptions to be valuable. One respondent in particular stated that he did not feel anxious without his phone and social media. This goes against the previous research that has shown the overwhelming demand for more progressive technology inside correctional facilities (Grommon, Carter, and Scheer, 2018; Schlosser and Feldman, 2022; Novek, 2005; Mass, 2015; Järveläinen and Rantanen, 2020). However, similar results are seen in Elhai et al.'s (2018) study where they suggest that the anticipation of losing social media can elicit heightened anxiety, rather than actually experiencing the loss. The respondent claims he was "too busy focusing on other happenings in his life such as the case he is put on trial for" to focus on miscellaneous things such as social media. He believes that being without social media was comfortable.

> Nah, it's not really something I thought about. I have other things in mind. I don't miss social media]. It was peaceful and quiet. It's comfortable not having [social media].
>
> *Hugo*

The idea of incarceration being peaceful and serene appears in other examples as well. However, in those examples, the time they spent incarcerated was appreciated because they got an escape from the outside world. In those interviews, Lovisa and Oskar, discuss how busy their daily lives are, with family for instance, and how being incarcerated meant that they could disconnect from their original life.

This disconnect from a life full of action aligns with Katz (1988) where he discusses the notion of seeking action and how it can be satisfying to individuals, but the lack of action can also be meaningful because it can give individuals a chance to switch between identities that can be chaotic for them. This applies especially to those who are not as equally into the action as others, per Katz's (1988) discussion. Lovisa is unwillingly involved in a life of action and therefore finds peace in the times when she does not have to be involved in that lifestyle. For Oskar's sake, he is a lifestyle criminal and is persistently involved in a gang, even in his personal life. Being incarcerated for him meant earning a moment of peace, which is something he values. The calm between the extremes of their lives is observed as valuable.

> I was only there for a short time, so it was a bit nice. I just slept [laughs]. Without my phone, without anyone bothering me. Without anything. I just slept during the duration [of my incarceration]. When I think back, since it was a short time, I'd do it again [laughs].
>
> *Lovisa*

> I have never been alone. Ever in my life. Grew up in a big family and was constantly around my people [gang] ever since I was a child. In there, I found quiet. I didn't have to think about anyone or anything, completely disconnected from life in general. No phones ringing or whatever. Just me.
>
> *Oskar*

In these two cases, it is apparent that the lack of social media and outside communication was appreciated to some extent which connects to Katz's (1988) discussion of a life of action. Although Lovisa has stated previously that she did miss the entertaining part of social media, she did not miss the social aspect as she did not have to be dialed up at all times. Similarly, Oskar has also shown a positive attitude toward the lack of contact with his family and gang members. He elaborated his statement by saying that although it was stressful to be in a "silent" environment for the first time in his life, he fathomed that the lack of communication with those around him had a positive impact on his mental state. It was while being incarcerated that Oskar realized how his surroundings impacted his behavior and way of thinking. Copes and Hochstetler (2003) claim that male offenders are influenced by their surroundings. In a rehabilitation scope, this is a positive aspect of incarceration. This is also discussed in studies done on gang life where they argue that being physically and socially removed from the gang can positively result in rehabilitation (BRÅ, 2016). The same statement is also backed up by Lovisa, that continues by saying that some people consciously want to be incarcerated:

I've heard many people say that they deliberately get themselves arrested over the weekend for some peace and quiet.

Lovisa

Through Lovisa's statement, as well as Oskar and Hugo's contemplations, it becomes evident that the disconnect from social media is not to be seen as negative in all cases, as it allows individuals, especially gang members, an escape from their action-filled lives (Katz, 1988). As Katz (1988) presents, for some gang members, the act of episodically being involved in gang activities is their way of de-stressing and creating an identity outside of their gang-affiliated one. Interestingly, Julia points out that incarceration had a positive impact on her as it allowed her to "get to know herself".

This stance connects to the first chapter of this analysis and identity construction, but rather than feeling that Julia lost something without social media, she states that she gained more knowledge about whom she is while incarcerated. It was during incarceration that Julia had the time to explore and construct her identity, outside of the one she had lived with, in her words, forcefully throughout her life. Furthermore, Julia does not associate herself with a gang membership but was forcefully involved in gang activities. One could argue that the identity she has lived with prior to incarceration is not the identity she resonates with, but rather an identity she presents herself with to avoid sticking out from the masses (Goffman, 1956; Brown, 1998).

You get to know yourself there. At first, you miss all the entertainment outside. Then you have to keep yourself busy. Learn new hobbies. It becomes peaceful then. You only have yourself and your thoughts. I think some people need that.

Julia

In this quote, Julia proclaims that while missing easy access to social media and traditional media, it was when losing it that she explored other activities. Through Julia's words, it becomes apparent that the loss of social media resulted in her regaining power over her own identity and identity curation because social media made her perform as someone she does not resonate with. This argument is backed up by Goffman (1956) and the motion of the performance, where Julia had to mask herself with a certain identity to fit in with the rest of her social life, although beneath the mask she identifies as someone separate from the mask. Furthermore, she perceives the experience positively, as she learned new hobbies and found it peaceful to creatively explore her identity.

I will return to the aspect of creativity in a later chapter, but as for now, the reason why this excerpt is particularly fitting to this part of the analysis is that Julia encourages others to experience incarceration, claiming that people "need it". Her statement is not directed to gang members only but to all people, which backs up Katz's (1988) argument over how some individuals need a break from their action-filled lives to shift between identities. She argues that it can be a positive experience to have limited access to the media one is used to because it leaves room for other activities one has not considered, thus encouraging the curation of identity work. Aside from creativity, Julia also argues that the solitude that follows incarceration can be beneficial psychologically, similarly to the examples above, as she spent time with her thoughts and got to process the happenings in her life. This is another example of the discussion Katz (1988) brings forth when discussing how individuals with action-filled life appreciate the eras where the action in their lives takes a halt.

Staying connected

Although the seclusion described was in some cases appreciated, it also came with loneliness. In this part of the analysis, I will discuss and present cases where my respondents discuss the techniques, they used to combat loneliness and how they stayed connected—with their loved ones on the outside or with other incarcerated individuals. I will do so by using Goffman (1956) and Brown (1998) to discuss identity work and Katz (1988) and Copes and Hochstetler (2003) descriptions of gang organizations and the attachments amongst them. When discussing the techniques used to stay connected, the respondents showed pride in the methods used to contact others, especially the illegal or creative ways used which will be discussed later on.

In terms of prohibited ways, the respondents used second-hand sources to stay connected with the news or happenings. This is a clear example of how social reclamation is used (Schlosser and Feldman, 2022), which is once again an example of regaining control over media consumption. An example of this in this study as presented by previous research is prison-produced content such as TikTok videos and newspapers. This is done in order to regain control over their identity and how they are represented. However, in this part, my focus will be on how the respondents include asking their loved ones to recap the news and happenings they are interested in, both on a personal level and a largescale level. Although they have access to news through newspapers, radio, and TV, they state that the individuals on the outside have a wider range of news outlets. Occasionally, even news that perhaps touches on niche areas that may not be reported on larger daily news channels. As Carey (2009) argues, accessing the content of personal liking has become

much easier with social media as individuals can seek out information that fits their wishes, rather than relying on traditional news outlets that have a set amount of news reports. This includes both personal happenings but also largescale news:

> I'd ask my sister to recap everything that happened over time [laughs]. First family and friends' gossip, then celebrity gossip. I love knowing drama, I needed to know. And she'd tell me.
>
> *Julia*

> I love football and when I was locked up, I couldn't really get a lot of news the way I could before. I had to ask my friend to tell me what was going on and stuff. You know like which player is bought or sold.
>
> *Hugo*

In the first quote, Julia touches upon the fact that her sister acts as a secondhand source for her to get news and happenings that are of interest to her since the media she had access to was the wrong type of media. Aside from social reclamation as presented by Schlosser and Feldman (2022), these quotes are also connected to identity work, as both Julia and Hugo discuss how important they find their interests and sought out ways to preserve this part of their identity, even if it was through secondhand sources (Goffman, 1956). This is another case that displays that while traditional media is appreciated, it is the necessity of choice that incarcerated individuals miss (Baran and Davis, 2015). There are issues with such a design, for instance, the spread of false information and the lack of research to confirm or deny the information acquired. On the other hand, it gives incarcerated individuals a bonding experience with those on the outside, as they have things to discuss. Julia underlines this by stating that it was during her time imprisoned that she strengthened her bond with her sister, and it was due to the connection they constructed during those phone calls. This is also seen in the second quote, in which Hugo discusses how his bond strengthened with his friend and it gave them time to "hang out" without worrying about outside factors.

These results are not shocking, as Grommon, Carter, and Scheer's (2018) study shows that incarcerated individuals mainly use contraband cellular phones to stay connected with their loved ones and to maintain their bonds with them. Another respondent talks about this as well.

> I made friends in there, but you still miss those at home. [Silent] The people in there know as much as you. People outside are more uh, aware, I could say? They know new things.
>
> *Nellie*

In this example, Nellie recognizes that while she created meaningful bonds during incarceration, she feels more devoted to her bonds with her loved ones on the outside. However, she does not reflect on their emotional relationship in this quote but rather states that she felt so attached to them during incarceration because they are more knowledgeable about relevant happenings and news. She was dependent on others on the outside to give her information to reclaim her social identity, which aligns with Schlosser and Feldman's (2022) concept. Those around her during her time incarcerated knew as much, or as 'little', as she did which made her dependent on those on the outside to provide her with relevant news. This is not surprising, considering how the prison system only allows traditional media, which Baran and Davis (2015) present as controlled and restrictive. Nellie depended on her loved ones for information, which in turn strengthened her bonds with her loved ones. However, as previously mentioned, it is not so simple to connect with those on the outside. The connection with those on the outside can become unattainable due to regulations, limitations, and surveillance.

This is where the discussion about contraband cellular phones becomes interesting. As Grommon, Carter, and Scheer (2018) present, contraband cellular phones are smuggled phones that authorities do not know of. When I asked my respondents about their knowledge of contraband cellular phones, all of them stated that they either have heard of, seen, or used contraband cellular phones. While some were hesitant towards discussing this topic, others discussed the process of acquiring and using cellular phones in great detail. Schlosser and Feldman's (2022) discuss how incarcerated individuals use creative means to reclaim their social identity and their place in the social world by using TikTok. I will present several examples of how incarcerated individuals have used other means to do so. For starters, David gives insight into how widely used contraband phones are behind bars:

> Smuggled phones are a business inside prisons. People sell favors or things to use someone's phone to call home or something. Even if you have contact with them, sometimes you just want to say stuff nobody needs to know about. A lot of people I know use smuggled phones. [SA: Have you used one?] No snitching, but who hasn't? But yeah, I do. [SA: Can you explain what you used it for?] Texting my family. I went online to read what others talk about on Flashback; you know what that is? [SA: Yes.] Yeah, people talk a lot of shit there. I wanted to know; I was curious.

There are several topics to dissect from this quote. The first topic is how contraband phones run as a business behind bars. Incarcerated individuals use favors amongst other things (such as cigarettes and snus) to acquire a phone. In most cases, phones are used for cellular transmissions such as calls and text messages, which is also supported by Grommon, Carter, and Scheer (2018) and Peterson et al. (2021). Intriguingly, David is also a part of his scheme and even states that it is wildly used amongst incarcerated individuals. In fact, David says nonchalantly 'Who hasn't?', meaning that the use of contraband phones is normalized behind bars. However, while David used a contraband cell phone to contact his loved ones, he also used a smartphone to access the Internet. He went online to access a forum he would not have access to otherwise because his curiosity drove him to do it. In this case, David went onto Flashback to read the discussion surrounding his case and those that were involved in the situation, confirming the Swedish Prison and Probation Service fears as presented in the introduction. This statement connects to Fernández-Planells et al. (2021) as well who underline the importance of self-presentation in the digital sphere. David needed to access Flashback to know of others presented him in the way he sees himself, and through that could reclaim his social identity despite not physically joining the act of presenting himself online. This is another scenario in which the incarcerated individuals regain control over their self-presentation, even though it is one-sided, and takes a personal rather than a social role. David needed to read what was said on Flashback for his own identity, to know what was said about him, and to confirm that the identity he resonates with was still attached.

Katz (1988) discusses the importance of presenting and behaving a certain way when being involved with gang activities and Schlosser and Feldman (2022) build upon this by stating that incarcerated individuals are willing to push the boundaries to reclaim their social identity. In this scenario, gaining back control over how they are perceived by obtaining contraband phones and entering the digital sphere. David claims that he stopped going on Flashback once he realized that the particular thread had stopped being updated, meaning that once he got the confirmation he needed and did not get more, he found Flashback useless to him. Furthermore, he states that cellular phones are cheaper than smartphones, which is why he opted out of using them. However, he still used contraband cellular phones to contact his family. Therefore, the function of the phones he accessed switched from being used as a method to reclaim his social and public identity to then preserve his identity through those that know him.

When I asked about the payment methods David used to access the phones, he stated that he paid with the money he had worked for. In another interview, a respondent discusses the payment for contraband cellular phones as well and states that some incarcerated individuals exploit the cellular phone business. He says:

> Everything is a currency in there. You work with what you have. Some people have money, others have telephone cards. You exchange those and everyone is happy. I know a guy that made bank through telephone cards and lived off desperate people's shit. They'd pay him 10 kronor just for a phone call. That's a lot of money in there.
>
> *Björn*

In this scenario, Björn explains how one particular individual exploits the urgency of the other inmates. In the quote, he claims that the individual "made bank", meaning that he made a large amount of money inside the prison through others' payments by selling his phone cards. The phone cards are cards used to make phone calls inside prisons legally. According to the inmates, they get 13 kronor per hour as a wage for working, studying, or doing other activities, meaning that one phone card costs almost an hour's amount of work. Due to the high costs, many turn to using contraband cellular phones instead, either by obtaining one for themselves or sharing it with other inmates. Björn states that he shared one phone with three of his friends. Another friend on the outside filled the phone card with money so they could contact each other. Important to note that this proves the Swedish Prison and Probation agency's (n.d.) point about the risks of social media behind bars, as Björn confesses that he continued being involved in his criminal organization behind bars and used the contraband cellular phones to do so. As they discuss, one of the main reasons why phones are forbidden inside prisons is due to the risk of continuous criminal actions. Björn states that he feels no remorse in doing so because he could not just 'abandon' his job. By saying this, Björn indirectly places his status as a gang member as a priority and reclaims his identity by continuing the involvement with his criminal organization. As Katz (1988) states and as previously mentioned, gang members regard their involvement with the gang on high standards, and losing status in the gang would not only impact them socially but also mentally as their identity image would suffer with it as well. Furthermore, this statement can also be analyzed through the idea of Björn taking back control from the authorities; he is incarcerated to stop his involvement in the criminal organization, but he fights back against that by still being involved, despite his incarceration. Therefore, he does not risk losing his status in the gang and may even gain more cred due to the loyalty he portrays. This is however problematic, as the prison staff could not regulate the behavior (Schlosser and Feldman, 2022).

When I asked Björn if he ever got caught, he declared that he did not. This made him want to continue using the phone because it was thrilling to him.

> It was thrilling at first. 'Will they catch us or not?'. They never did so, we just continued doing it. It is almost like a game, and it shows that the security there is horrible.
>
> *Björn*

In this quote, the contraband cellphone fulfills a different function, which is that it is used as a thrilling game. I have mentioned in prior paragraphs that contraband phones have either been used for social purposes, identity reclamation, and preservation purposes and now I will discuss how they are used as a sneaky thrill with the inspiration of Katz (1988). As Katz (1988) conceptualizes, sneaky thrills are risky criminal action an individual does that is thrilling to them, oftentimes to deceit authorities. In this scenario, the sneaky thrill for Björn is using contraband phones and seeing how far he can use them without getting caught. As previously mentioned, Björn did not get caught, thus throughout his incarceration, he performed a successful sneaky thrill. Björn reflects on this when he declares that the security inside the prison was 'horrible', which he got confirmation of when he evaded the security and authorities. Additionally, Björn saw this sneaky thrill as a game with the authorities, and since he never got caught, he got the upper hand, meaning that Björn was secretly the one who had control over his communication and social life, even though he was incarcerated and put under the watchful eye.

Aside from using contraband phones to contact the outside world, incarcerated individuals have used other creative methods to communicate and gain control over their communication. One of my older respondents mentioned a few methods to contact the outside world but also others inside the prison:

> Other people used to smuggle in handwritten notes with things. Like inside shaving machines. […] This was before phones were popular.
>
> *Måns*

While these methods have been used for many years, they are still usable in this day and age, according to Måns. Incarcerated individuals have the right to ask for objects while being incarcerated depending on what the individual is incarcerated for, the security level of the prison, and the individual's behavior. Several respondents have mentioned objects that have been asked

for during incarceration and I have mentioned them in passing throughout the analysis, for instance, radio and music players. To go back to the point, Måns claims that smuggling handwritten notes through objects was the easiest way to pass a message back in the day. This is another case in which powerplay and sneaky thrills (Katz, 1988) are evident. While the prison staff believes they have control over the incarcerated individuals' communication, the incarcerated individuals have found ways to regain power over their communication, albeit secretly. In this case through handwritten notes.

As for in-prison communication, incarcerated individuals are allowed to communicate with each other depending on the security level. However, for incarcerated individuals that are in arrest, there is zero contact with anyone aside from their lawyers in most cases. Björn reflects on this and mentions the creative methods he and his sons have implemented if they have been locked up together.

> We used to use mugs to empty toilet seats. Then, we would speak through the drain. Since it echoes, people around the jail would be able to hear you speak as well if they drained their water too. We did this mostly during the arrest when we couldn't meet other people. I used to speak to my sons that way.
>
> *Måns*

What the quotes in this chapter highlight are how communication and bonds between the incarcerated individuals and their loved ones but also with those incarcerated with them are something the incarcerated individuals reflect heavily upon. They have to go out of their way to make sure that the communication goes according to their wishes, even though they have to obtain it illegally. This is due to the restrictions and limitations placed upon them and while the restrictions and limitations are valid in their own right, the government overlooks the social aspects of the incarcerated individuals' lives and how much it suffers. The examples above have a similar underlining theme as their study, as I argue that in both the intra-prison and prison-society communication is vital to the incarcerated individuals' identity and well-being. When the respondents felt as if they lost a part of their social identity, they became desperate to cling to it or reclaim it by the methods previously mentioned.

In the next chapter, I will discuss how my respondents sought out creativity in other ways to cope with their situations; both in social aspects and also through hobbies. Aside from relating to Katz (1988) as I have done in the previous paragraph, Copes and Hochstetler (2003) can also be applied

to this notion. As presented, it was only male respondents that stated that they used contraband cellphones and according to Copes and Hochstetler, male offenders are willing to break the law and how they can be influenced by their environments and other male influences. In this case, Björn and Måns both give a detailed insight into how widely contraband phones are used and their different functions. Furthermore, how normalized this notion has become. An interesting difference is how Måns, who is older than Björn, describes creative and old-school techniques that rely on heavy planning, which builds upon Copes and Hochstetler's (2003) argument in older offenders are more stable in their actions, while Björn described impulsive and risky courses of actions through contraband access and use.

Storytelling behind bars

I have throughout this study showcased different levels of attachments to social media and the entertainment that comes with social media. The use of social media varies as it goes from social connections to entertainment. There are several examples in this study where my respondents reflect on how they felt when losing social media. One particular discussion was how they tried to fill the excess time they had with other activities. Several of my respondents have either worked or studied during their time incarcerated and they state that it was a treasured change of pace. However, there are still many hours in which they were just 'sitting around' as they explain in their own words. Hence why most of them created new hobbies. Since the identity, especially the online identity, they have outside of prison could not be presented inside of prison, they had to find different ways to either curate or enhance their identity. As Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) explain, the presentation of self can suffer if one lacks the digital means to do so, since the online self is tied to the offline self and vice versa. If individuals are tied to their online identities and the self-presentation they do online, then chances are, they will suffer when losing access to that. In one example, a respondent discusses how he had to shift the way he consumes entertainment by producing entertainment by sharing stories with other incarcerated individuals. This has another layer to it, which connects back to the previous chapter of how incarcerated individuals continuously work on building or remaining social connections with other people. Through storytelling, David got both entertainment but also social bonds:

> I hated the stuff on the TV, to be honest, some typical white people shit. [Laughs] I made some friends there, so we just shared stories. […] [SA: What did you tell stories about?] Our lives, funny stories but also really fucked up stuff. Most of us related to the stories, you know? It's all the same.

This particular paragraph relates to the chapter "Staying connected", as it's clear to see that David not only uses storytelling to entertain himself, but he also uses it to bond with the other incarcerated individuals. Furthermore, David also states that he sought out this type of entertainment because he could not relate to the content shown on the TV which also relates to the third chapter of this analysis. As David states, the content on the TV was 'typical white people shit' and since he is not ethnically white, he felt as if he could not relate to the content and even felt repelled by it. Another interesting aspect of this excerpt is the fact that David as well as his friends use storytelling to present their identities and to confirm each other's identities (Goffman, 1956; Brown, 1998). To connect back to the earlier discussion, while David did not mention the ethnicities of the other incarcerated individuals, he mentioned in passing that they had a lot in common culturally wise, which I conclude means that they share similarities in ethnicity, and he could therefore connect to their stories more than the content on the TV. This is interesting because in some way, they process their lives and situation, and this can act as a healing method which David also claims that it was. He claims that he could never talk with professionals about his emotional being because "they could not understand him and saw him as a villain", but it was easier with other incarcerated individuals because they shared a similar mindset and lifestyle.

This discussion connects to Copes and Hochstetler (2003) and how males create masculinity by being influenced by other males and their cultural, social, and organizational positions. In this case, David and the other incarcerated individuals could present their emotions much easier because the space, restrictions, and trust between them encouraged that. Their masculinity was not threatened by sharing emotions, in fact, it was encouraged as the spaces allowed them to do so. When I asked David about how the storytelling sessions were set up, he said that they were informal sessions where they used to talk during dinner time or in the afternoon when they had free time. Storytelling has been prevalent in the results of this study, as other respondents have mentioned that they picked up storytelling to entertain themselves but also to cope with their situation:

> I wrote. [..] I wrote about everything. Not stories like books [laughs] but just wrote. I also tried to read, and watch TV a lot more. [SA: Did you think it benefited you? Did [writing] help your situation?] It did. As I said, you're first bored because it feels like there's nothing to do. Then you realize there are a lot of new things to do.
>
> *Julia*

> Hahahaha, I started writing rap songs. I was younger then and thought maybe I could write some cool shit. It never went anywhere but for a while, it was what I did. [SA: How often did you write?] I wrote when I felt like I wanted to. I hid it from the others, so it was only in my cell. [SA: Can you share what you wrote about?] The streets and my life.
>
> *Oskar*

While writing is used as an entertainment mechanism, in these two examples as well as David's quote, it is also used in a therapeutic sense. It is also used as a means to regain control over social identity. Much like previous research states, incarcerated individuals often feel out of power over their narratives and seek ways to reclaim their own narrative and social status (Schlosser and Feldman, 2022; Novek, 2005; Mason, 2006).

Previous research shows several examples where this is accomplished, through for example prison-produced newspapers, podcasts, and TikTok videos, and in the case of this study, writing music or self-biographies. Reclamation of social identity is pivotal for incarcerated individuals, even if it is done privately. It becomes an act of liberation and rehabilitation to creatively write about their lives, even if it does not get shared with other individuals (Schlosser and Feldman, 2022). The indication of this discussion goes back to the act of self-presentation of one's identity, and how actions are heavily connected with an individual's self-identification (Goffman, 1956; Brown, 1998). Previous research underlines the importance of incarcerated individuals having an outlet to express themselves as it endorses their social skills, self-esteem, rehabilitation, and their reintegration into society (Järveläinen and Rantanen, 2020). This is also shown through the theoretical framework in for example Katz (1988) and Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) who assert that self-presentation is connected to identity curation and preservation. Similar to Bullingham and Vasconcelos who argue that online self-presentation is important for identity creation, also push for digital technology use inside prisons, and in this case, it would be beneficial if the incarcerated could open up blogs, record their music, or other technological tools to present their narratives. However, providing more digital technology inside prisons is a challenge that I will discuss in depth in the next and final chapter of this analysis.

The price to pay for fucking up

In the conclusive part of my interviews, I asked my respondents if they think it is a good idea to allow the use of social media inside prisons. Surprisingly, a majority of my respondents distinguish between their wishes for social media and the actual reality. Many show hesitance toward a

hypothetical world where digital technology would be allowed inside prisons. There are two different arguments presented in my results; one being the price incarcerated individuals have to pay for their crimes and the other being that the probability of misusing the technology is too high to risk it. This is not surprising, because there are laws and guidelines that support this argument. The same arguments exist in the previous research; however, the previous research also brings up the point of the normalization of incarcerated individuals online (Caldwell, 2020). While it is not directly mentioned by my respondents, it is hinted at by Julia. She argues:

> I don't want phones in prisons. […] Because people would misuse it. Maybe with new technology or maybe only some people and not others. Some fuckers don't deserve phones there at all. Imagine what they would do. […] Uh, like text victims, mess up some more. Run shit from the inside. I was so mad at my ex when I was in there for the shit he did, at some point, I could've messaged him some shitty things. And I'm not a bad person so imagine others. […] And nobody would be able to do anything about it because it would be normal. I think people would like it too, like their friends and stuff. They wouldn't think about the consequences.
>
> *Julia*

In this quote, Julia takes accountability for her actions and behavior and states that from her point of view, she would not want to have social media during incarceration because she would have misused it by contacting her ex. She explained that her ex had a role in why she was incarcerated, and she felt so frustrated over the fact that he had lured her into a criminal lifestyle that she wanted to express her anger. However, because she had no contact with him during the incarceration and entered a rehabilitation program, she did not act upon that anger. However, if she had access to social media and could contact her ex, the risk of her continuing her criminal lifestyle is acknowledged by herself. In this scenario, it is evident that because Julia had to drastically shift her identity and could not reclaim the identity she had grown used to due to the restrictive measures she was placed under, she had to curate a new identity.

From Goffman (1956) and Brown's (1998) standpoint, this is a clear example of how individuals shift between identities to fit into the scenario they are placed under. Julia curated a new identity because she realized the problematic aspects of her identity before incarceration. Furthermore, she enhanced the positive aspects of her identity, which links to Goffman and Brown, by stating that she restricted herself from reaching out to her ex and followed the laws and regulations. This is an example of controlling oneself, rather than controlling the situation or trying to find loopholes to

control the authorities, as presented in the earlier chapters. She makes a distinction between herself and others, claiming that although she perceives herself as a good person, she was willing to do bad things, and thus questions what others that may not be as good intended as her would do. In the prior chapter, Julia's statement gets confirmed by for example Björn who continued running his criminal organization from behind bars. Moreover, she argues that if phones were allowed inside prisons and became normalized, nobody would consider the dangers of it because people would focus on the positives such as being able to keep in touch with their loved ones. The same accountability is presented in other interviews, for instance, with Måns who states that being physically and digitally removed from the social sphere is a consequence that has to be a part of incarceration because incarcerated individuals are not to be trusted.

> Nobody trusts us. [The government] does not trust us with other people. Before it meant just locking someone up behind bars. Take them away from society. Now with phones and everything it's harder. You need to digitally remove them too. That's what we have to pay for fucking up.
>
> *Måns*

Here, Måns underlines that incarcerated individuals have to be separated from the rest of society because the government does not trust them. This contrasts his earlier stories, wherein he used several creative methods to contact those behind bars or smuggle in notes forbiddingly. Although they were not digital means, the action still has the same core value: forbidden communication. Måns argues that it was easier before the world was as technically advanced as the government has to ensure that they do not enter the digital social sphere either. Måns is against a more digital prison system because it is a price that incarcerated individuals have to pay for "fucking up"· When I asked him to elaborate, he stated that similar to Julia's quote, many incarcerated individuals are not to be trusted with phones because they would not be properly reformed. Additionally, it would be easier for them to continue conducting criminal actions because they would not have to risk their lives. Many individuals he knows including himself do not live in Sweden anymore but still run criminal operations in Sweden and according to Måns, social media inside prisons would be the equivalent of that.

While this paragraph does not only apply to incarcerated gang members but incarcerated individuals in general, Måns' interview builds on incarcerated gang members mainly as he himself stated. Therefore, this builds on not only Goffman and Brown's discussion of identity as previously mentioned but also Fernández-Planells et al. (2021), Katz (1988), and Copes and Hochstetler

(2003) who are present gang memberships and how gang members' identities build upon each other and heavily impact the behaviors of those individuals in question. Måns has been involved in gang activity and believes that digital access would be problematic, as he through his own perspective does not trust other incarcerated gang members. Hugo builds on Måns argument by stating that phones should not be seen as a necessity, but rather a luxury, and should not be inside prisons because the incarcerated individuals do not deserve it.

> We're locked up for a reason. [Silence] We can wish for so much but at the end of the day, we are here for a reason. We are incarcerated because we uh, you know did something not good. Why should we have [phones and social media]? [SA: Do you see phones as a luxury?] For sure, we can do everything with those. Do we deserve that? No.
>
> *Hugo*

What binds all the quotes presented in this chapter is the understanding of the situation at hand. All three respondents consider in some way or another that phones and social media as indulgences. They perceive being incarcerated as punishment for their crimes that should be devoid of things they enjoy, in this case, phones and social media. They have broken the trust of society and therefore do not deserve phones and social media and should pay the price with incarceration. This discussion is rather moral, because while incarcerated individuals should be held accountable for their actions, and as previously mentioned, they do, on the other hand, the lack of contact with the rest of the world may result in a more difficult time reintegrating into society. This is underlined in Järveläinen and Rantanen (2020) as well, who push for a more digitally advanced prison system to reintegrate incarcerated individuals back into society. One respondent discusses this morality by retelling how she felt during the night she became incarcerated and how she reflected on the detachment from the rest of society.

> I remember the day I walked into my cell in prison. That night I stared at the walls thinking this is it. For messing up I have to pay with this. It felt like I lost everything and couldn't even make myself heard. It upset me. [SA: In what way did you want to make yourself heard?] Just tell the people the truth of my story. I couldn't tell everyone because I couldn't reach them.
>
> *Nellie*

Here, Nellie touches upon the fact that while she takes accountability for her actions, she also felt anxious while incarcerated because she could not express her truth and reality. In previous research, such as Schlosser and Feldman (2022) and Novek (2005), it is prevalent that incarcerated

individuals use media outlets to express their emotions. More specifically, anxieties and worries during incarceration. In the previous chapter, this is also presented by Julia, Oskar, and David. However, in this scenario, Nellie wants to express herself because of social reasons rather than rehabilitation reasons. Due to the limitations, Nellie could not reach out to her community to conversate with them and felt detached from the community because she had been incarcerated, which is frowned upon. In her words, she could not defend herself and lost a big part of her identity as it was heavily connected with her community. Therefore, Nellie states that she wished she could access social media or some other large-scale communication technique to contact her community and tell them her side of the story. Mason (2006) describes this scenario by stating that media representations of incarcerated individuals can be flawed as it portrays them incorrectly. The community could only rely on stories of her presented in media rather than hearing her narrative. Nellie's situation relates to Goffman (1956) and Brown's (1998) identity work as well because Nellie would not salvage the impression her community got of her, nor could she regain the power to self-present as she had no outlet to do so. This refers back to previous research, where several instances have shown how incarcerated individuals use contraband phones to regain power over their communication and self-presentation when they face the loss of control that follows the loss of social media (Schlosser and Feldman, 2022; Novek, 2005; Grommon, Carter and Scheer, 2018; Alshawish and Törngren, 2022; Maas, 2015). This is proven by the progress of accessing contraband phones to use social media platforms and posting desired content. Only then do the incarcerated individuals regain power over their self-presentation, as it is not regulated by the authorities. In Schlosser and Feldman (2022) the type of content posted on TikTok by incarcerated individuals has a mundane tone, containing mostly cultural trends such as dance challenges, which goes against the media's portrayal of incarcerated individuals which Mason (2006) demonstrates carries a violent and negative tone. Therefore, there lies a difference between the media's portrayal of incarcerated individuals and incarcerated individuals' presentation of themselves which can influence the discourse surrounding incarcerated individuals' social media use as it is reliant on the media's portrayal. The respondents' perspective on the discourses is as presented one-sided, as they share similar views as the media's portrayal.

Conclusions

In this thesis, I have examined the impact of losing access to social media during incarceration, explored how incarcerated individuals reflect on the sudden absence of social media, and studied how incarceration affected their identities. I have done so by analyzing the emotional aspects that follow social media access during incarceration, highlighting the techniques incarcerated individuals use to preserve, regain and curate their identity within the given circumstance and the moral dilemmas surrounding social media use behind bars. This study is based on interviews with eight previously incarcerated individuals, who have shared their experiences from the time they spent in incarceration. I have discussed the ethical considerations taken during the interviewing process and the power dynamics between my respondents and me. Furthermore, several measures have been made to ensure the anonymity and safety of my interviewees throughout the research process. By combining the theoretical framework of Goffman's identity work and self-presentation and Jack Katz's seductions of crime with Copes and Hochstetler's masculinity in storytelling with previous research conducted on social media, an analysis of their retellings is presented. The main focus of the analysis has been placed on identity work and the different factors that impacted identity work behind bars, most specifically how the absence of their online identity has impacted their offline identity. I created seven subchapters that showcase different themes; "Losing a part of yourself", "Watching over your shoulders", "Frustrations with the wrong media", "A peaceful and quiet world", "Staying connected", "Storytelling behind bars", and "The price to pay for fucking up". In the subsequent sections, I will provide a concise overview of the key findings from the subchapters.

In the first chapter, the respondents discuss their emotions surrounding the deprivation of social media during their time incarcerated and those emotions are mainly pessimistic. These emotions are due to the disoriented feeling they felt toward their own identity. The offline identity of the individuals is closely connected to their online identity, and the loss of the latter directly impacted their offline identity. The identities are intertwined, as presented by Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013), therefore, the absence of social media impacted the respondents negatively which resulted in an existential crisis. These results were mainly presented in respondents who are gang affiliated and who use social media as a way to present their identity as gang members. Katz (1988) indicates that criminal organizations are built on presentation because that is how the members showcase belonging and pride. In the case of gang members' use of social media, Fernández-Planells et al. (2021) argue that the predominant content is boastful, which is also seen in the data of this study. When social media became unobtainable, the respondents had no power over the impression they

needed to give off to confirm their identity (Goffman, 1956). The use of social media to confirm an identity is also used in an opposite way, where social media was used to confirm who the individual is not anymore. By having the power over self-presentations, respondents could shift people's perception of them, resulting in a stronger attachment to the new identity. However, with the loss of social media, that attachment became disrupted as that identity relied heavily on other individuals' online perceptions of them. Further, some respondents explain that social media had such a significant role in their lives, that once they were incarcerated, they had difficulties handling the emptiness it left them with. Social media relied on their social media presence and consumption, and it was the most prominent way for them to express and present themselves. Therefore, the absence of social media resulted in a weakened outlet for incarcerated individuals to express themselves and self-present.

In the chapters "Watching over your shoulders" and "Frustrations with the wrong media", the respondents discuss their irritations with the media access behind bars. The constant surveillance of their interactions with the outside world resulted in discomfort as they felt like they could not properly express themselves. While surveillance is placed due to the risks that follow with two-way communication between incarcerated individuals and society, the surveillance impacted normal conversations too. The surveillance created a rift between the respondents in some cases and a powerless feeling. The same powerless feeling presents itself when they are permitted media access. As the respondents have grown used to social media and easy access to media of their liking, the limited media scope inside prisons resulted in frustrations. This is another scenario in which the absence of social media results in an identity crisis as the media did not align with their wishes and they could not access media that is connected to their identities.

In the chapters "A peaceful and quiet world" and "Storytelling behind bars" the respondents discuss how they found their time being incarcerated without social media as valuable rather than restless. The absence of social media and the interruptions it brought were perceived as positive aspects of incarceration by some of the respondents, as it provided them with the time and space to do identity work. The removal of social media allowed them a chance to curate a new identity through, for example, finding new hobbies or disconnecting from their old identity that was filled with action. These findings are supported by Katz (1988) who states that taking a break from a life of action can be meaningful for individuals as it gives them time to step back. By for example storytelling, the respondents could not only process their situation but also connect with other

incarcerated individuals who have gone through similar experiences. Therefore, creating meaningful bonds.

The notion of creating meaningful bonds is also discussed in the chapter "Staying connected". According to the respondents, while seclusion during incarceration was appreciated to some extent, it also brought feelings of loneliness. The physical and social isolation led to the incarcerated individuals using several techniques to stay connected: both to other beings and also to their own identity. The legal techniques were by bonding with loved ones through permitted means of contact through visits or prison calls. Using secondhand information of media and the information they wanted, the incarcerated individuals could reclaim their identity while not having access to the actual media. As for the illegal techniques, the respondents obtained contraband phones to regain control over their communication and consumption, and in turn, regain power over their own identity and self-presentation. The use of contraband phones is normalized behind bars, with some incarcerated individuals using the demand for them as a business strategy. The function of contraband phones varies. On one hand, it is used as a means of communication (Grommon, Carter, and Scheer, 2018). On the other hand, it is used to reclaim social identity (Schlosser and Feldman, 2022). Lastly, it is used as a sneaky thrill because it is thrilling to challenge the authorities (Katz, 1988).

Lastly, in the chapter "The price to pay for fucking up", I present the incarcerated individuals' viewpoints about social media behind bars that align with the existing laws and guidelines that support the notion of limited digital access in prisons. The respondents perceive incarceration as a "price to pay", and having access to social media would defeat the purpose of incarceration. They take accountability, with some stating that they would have misused social media had they had access to it during incarceration, which therefore aligns with reasons why social media is prohibited inside prisons. While these are some positive aspects of the limited access to social media, as previously mentioned, this also comes with the incarcerated individuals being restricted in expressing themselves. In hindsight, because of the limited access to communication due to the lack of social media, the respondents could not present themselves and felt therefore powerless in their situation. These results connect to the results in the first chapter, where the same hopelessness is discussed. The power over self-presentation is stripped away from them, which explains why some incarcerated individuals refer to illegal means of contact through contraband phones.

Future research on this subject should provide a backstage perspective to incarcerated individuals who have used contraband phones to access social media and have published content that has reached a broader audience in order to get a deeper understanding of the meaning it has for their identity. Furthermore, studies on identity-making in a broader sense inside prisons in the digital age should be conducted to understand how liminal spaces can impact identity. Gender should be taken into consideration as studies have proven that genders use social media differently.

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Appendix

Q1: How do you use social media? Can you describe your primary use of it and with what devices and roughly how long per day?

Q2: How long were you detained?

Q3: Describe the ways you contacted your loved ones while you were detained.

Q4: Describe all types of media you had access to while you were detained.
    SUBQ: How do you reflect on that?

C15: Can you describe your social life during your incarceration?

Q6: How *did* you feel about the loss of social media during the time you were detained?
    Older people SUBQ: Since you have experienced a world without social media and cell phones, do you think it was easier for you to get used to the restrictions?

Q7: What did you miss about social media?

Q8: If you had access to social media, how would you have used it?

Q9: In retrospect, how *do* you reflect on the loss of social media during the time you were incarcerated now?

C10: Did your use of social media change after your time in prison? If yes, in what way?

Q11: Can you describe your thoughts regarding smuggled mobile phones?
    SUBQ: Have you used a smuggled phone or know someone who has? Exemplify.

Q12: Do you think it would have been a good idea to allow the use of social media for all incarcerated individuals?
    SUBQ: If so, in what ways would they access it?

Q13: Do you have anything to add?