Ignatian Retreat as a Correctional Treatment Method
A qualitative study about prisoners’ personal growth

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Abstract

The purpose of the thesis is to investigate whether inmates can develop positive changes and inner resources during a 30 day Ignatian monastery retreat, in a Swedish high-security prison. The participants, 23–55 year old convicted men, with sentences from four years to life. The study has a qualitative approach with semistructured interviews with participants and staff, observations and document analysis. For further in depth information an autoethnographic approach is used to investigate the experiences and processes of change during the retreat. The results showed developments of spiritual fitness, emotional competence and positive spiritual development. The participants also showed that the resources paved the way for posttraumatic growth. The conclusions of the study are that the participants received a positive attitude about the future and a re-evaluation about values and what is important in life. The experience of the retreat resulted in important lifestyle changes and resources for continuous personal development for the future.

Keywords: Emotional competence, spiritual fitness, posttraumatic growth, spirituality, process of change, retreat, prison
The methods of treatment within the correctional system primarily, today and before, focus on a pathogenic kind of way which is aiming for the elimination of negative behaviour or problems, like addiction and or criminality. For inmates, few methods of treatment deviates from this kind of structural ideology. However, the correctional system and the Swedish Christian Council (SKR) have in 2001 developed a retreat program for prisoners within the institution. In 2007 this retreat program became a part of the institutions methods of treatment, which we can interpret as a paradigmatic shift within the correctional system, in the pursuit for the inmates process of change and personal growth. The goal of the retreat program is all about inmates’ process of change and personal development, with a focus on the big existential questions. The participation is also on a voluntary basis and nothing in the retreat program concept has any aspirations or incitements to primarily treat or affect any addictive or criminal behaviour. We can refer the activities about the processes of change in the retreats to a strength oriented ideology where the positive qualities within the person is highlighted in relation to changes and personal developments (Fredrickson, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

From an occupational psychological perspective and the inmates’ personal growth, the retreat program improves the working conditions within the institution. According to Armstrong and Griffin (2004), the relationships and the attitudes at work play a crucial role in the experiences of stress. They explain that the correctional officers who experience their working situation as guard vs. guarded do not experience any positive relations in their work, which creates an increased receptivity to stress and ill-health. In the beginning of the retreat practice history the former chief advisor for the correctional penal system stated in Nerikes Allehanda (5 february, 2001), ‘I can not imagine a better way of investing money. It is a fantastic project which generates a better working environment for the staff, less conflicts among the inmates and a fantastic opportunity for people to change their lives.’ The benefits of the practice from a social perspective is enormous, the staff get better quality of their working conditions and it prevents people to relapse into criminal behaviour and addiction. The chief advisor stated the true core of what the retreat program is all about: to give inmates a fantastic opportunity to change their lives. When retreats in general can generate positive personality changes it picks up an interest in what can be achieved among incarcerated people.

BACKGROUND

Retreats

The word retreat comes from the English language and means, according to the Oxford English dictionary (2006): ‘withdraw from’, move back from difficult situations and go to a quiet or secluded place, a place where a person goes to be quiet and meditate or pray for a time. According to the definitions of a retreat, it means that a person withdraws from ordinary life to engage in strengthening and personal developing activities. In the description of what a retreat is all about, Mases and Sköndahl (2010) describes it as a search for inner peace and to become comfortable in the present circumstances in life. All retreats offer a welcoming, stimulating and supportive environment for recovery. Below, I am going to present a couple of examples of what use retreat activities can be all about. I have also categorised them according to application fields, health retreats and spirituality retreats.

Health Retreats

In today’s healthcare, the day to day care of patients and in rehabilitation, retreats are a major resource for patients and relatives who suffer from different kinds of crises or trauma. High
priority groups are patients with cancer (Arnaert, Gabos, Ballena, & Rutledge, 2010) and cardiovascular problems (Kennedy, Abbott, & Rosenberg, 2002). The retreat programs for cancer patients (Arnaert, et al., 2010) contains for example group sessions for patients as well as for relatives, where they can share narratives about their sickness and personal history, something which creates an emotional openness and social support. They describe a relief over the possibility to share their burdens, to other people who have a true understanding of their situation. Other activities which offer useful knowledge and coping skills come from seminars and lectures. Many retreats offer yoga, meditation and different kinds of relaxation and breathing exercises which are aiming for a reduction of stress, depression and anxiety, for patients as well as relatives. Kennedy, et al. (2002) describes a retreat with a so-called lifestyle program for cardiac patients and how they learn to live a healthy life. The patients are taught about exercise, nutrition, stress management techniques, communication skills and spiritual principles. Those people who responded well on the program increased their self-esteem, well-being, goals in life, spirituality and increased interest in their personal development. Increased spiritual development was also positively correlated to well-being, meaning in life, decreased anger and increased confidence in problem focused coping. All these factors reduce the risk for cardiac problems. Kennedy, Rosati, Spann, King, Neelon and Rosati (2003) presents in their study how activities like yoga, low fat diet, exercise, meditation, lectures and spirituality can create major lifestyle changes. To achieve these results, the retreat had to go on for ten days. The retreat increased well-being, meaning and purpose in life and decreased tendencies of anger.

Health retreats are historically speaking new, relative to spiritual retreats. Many of the resources in health retreats come from spiritual retreats, of whom many cases are several thousand year old methods to explore your inner self. The scientific research of the health retreats has also come to strengthen the validity of the health and soul searching good, from the spiritual retreats.

**Spiritual Retreats**

The spiritual retreats intend to explore the inner self of the human being. They focus on lifestyle changes and have aspirations to love and live in understanding with other people. The non religious spiritual retreats are often built on Buddhist meditation traditions (Dwivedi, 2006) where breathing techniques, body scanning and mind control are key aspects. Mindfulness (Åsberg, Sköld, Wahlberg & Nygren, 2006) is a combination of different meditation techniques and was developed by Kabat-Sin, which also put it to test in science. Mindfulness has proven to be effective within different practical applications in health care and positive results has been established in relation to stress related diseases, cancer, HIV and pain related illnesses (Bishop, Lau, Shapiro, Carlson, Anderson, Carmody, et al., 2004). Mindfulness is about a present awareness and the person is seeking to dissociate oneself from events and himself, so that he is not affected in any way, it is all about reaching a state of mind which has a non judgemental and accepting attitude. Vipassana is another meditation program used in retreats. Vipassana means the art of living and is based on a 2500 years old philosophy of life from India. It is about self-reflection and personal change (Ronel & Elisha, 2011) and this is achieved through meditation. Meditation in a salutogenic kind of way presents its best results in people regarding improved emotional nuance, something which seems to increase the ability to solve problems, handling the self and it promotes learning (Chesney, Darbes, Hoerster, Taylor, Chambers, & Anderson, 2005; Dwivedi, 2006; Fredricksson, & Branigan, 2005).

Retreats have a long tradition within the Roman Catholic Church (Tyers, 2010). What kind of design it will adapt among the Christian models depends on the traditions and what saint that is worshiped. A Franciscan retreat highlights emotions; as gratefulness, joy and
reconciliation. It is founded on the saint Franciscus of Assisi's principles and way of living. The retreat lasts for ten days and is divided into themes which also guide the way of meditation. Many retreats promote lifestyle changes but this kind of retreat is instead strengthening changes and paths people have already made, it is a guide and a source of strength. It demands that the person have made some existential decisions he is already living.

*Ignatian retreats* are based on the Jesuits founder, Ignatius of Loyola (1491 – 1556), spiritual exercises. The retreats go on for 30 days and the spiritual exercises is aiming for a thorough self-examination, in total silence (Heidling, 2005). The purpose of these retreats is that people will reach some vital decisions about their lives. The retreats facilitate opportunities so that people can process the big existential questions in their lives and make them prepared for freeing the soul, from every unhealthy desire1. It is through a genuine self-awareness and through crises a person really can find true spirituality and God. During the spiritual exercises the person shall pray and meditate, loud or quiet, for at least an hour at the time. Ignatius own personal investigation and process of change began in a hospital bed where he was deadly hurt from battle. The features of his former life were all about violence, glory, money and promiscuity which made the spiritual exercises a method to overcome desires and strains. Ignatius own spiritual development lasted for several years and he was struck by life threatening diseases several times and imprisonment by the inquisition at three occasions. The point of departure in the Ignatian retreats has a thematic approach which is divided in four, one for each week. 1.) Reflection and contemplation over the sins (in your own and in Jesus life). 2.) Our Lord Christ's life, to Palm Sunday (and a reflection over your own life). 3.) The suffering of our Lord Christ (and your own suffering). 4.) The resurrection and the ascension, as well as three ways of praying (make a reflection over a new life, a new way of living). In this part you meditate and reflect over your own life with Jesus's life as a good model.

The common factor among most of the retreat programs and their methods are to strengthen inner resources such as; self-knowledge, self-awareness, mental and emotional control, inner peace and a positive state of mind. Salutogenic methods in the process of change is about creating and restructuring positive resources and inner strength. Positive psychology is a part of this new approach (Dwivedi, 2006; Fredrickson, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and it deals with the development of positive personality resources and traits like hope, self-knowledge, optimism, spirituality, empathy or emotional contact, which results in positive outcomes like altruistic behaviours, cooperation and positive relations (Goleman, 1995; Rumble, Van Lange, Craig and Parks, 2010). The field of positive psychology has gathered many theories which deals with people's strengths and has a salutogenic ideology, in the same way as the philosophy of the retreats.

**Theoretical Models of Strength-Orientiation**

The meaning of a retreat from everyday life is a search for self-enhancing qualities. Retreats are aiming for an increase of well-being, increased sense of meaning, reduced stress, enhance the nuance of the emotional life, promote development and lifestyle changes. Because of the many similarities between retreats and the positive psychological approach some theories will be presented to illustrate this approach. In many ways the theoretical models share some features, but each one embraces some specificity in a way the others do not. Posttraumatic growth (PTG) describes personal developments with the starting point from crises or trauma. Sense of coherence (SOC) describes the importance that meaning in life has for people's health. Spiritual fitness (SF) describes how people can achieve an inner strength and the Emotional intelligence (EQ) highlights the importance of feelings in people's lives. The

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1 Ignatius word for all the desires or forces that can lead the person away from the true self and to deviate from the given way, the truth, discipline and the way of love. The true way is to serve Jesus.
theories are to be presented from the superior theory to the one of more specific in nature, from models about process of change down to the models of resources which promotes the process of change.

**Posttraumatic Growth (PTG)**

In the theoretical model of posttraumatic growth Tedeschi and McNally (2011) has divided the conceptualisation on the process of change as three different processes, where two of them do not have any connection to a trauma which the name implies. This can be about the person working himself through a trauma, crisis or state of stress, which promotes a personal growth, that some existential re-evaluations and decision have been made or that a psychological resistance for demands, strains or future experiences have been developed. Trauma, crisis or stress according to the first process can be about serious injury, divorce or captivity, the demands per se do not matter, it is the psychophysiological excitation that is the essential part. Cullberg (2006) explains that it is the person’s conditioned reactions and previous experiences that do not measure up adequately, to control the situation they are in. This lack of control triggers stress and different kind of mental conditions. The other process is about a positive personality development through some existential re-evaluations in life, something that can be compared to big lifestyle changes. The third process is about creating resistance through inner resources and to find some meaning in life. PTG highlights the subjective experience and the positive psychological changes (Botond, 2009; Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998 ). The characteristics for PTG is; a) a sense of personal strength, b) experiencing new possibilities, c) increased experience of close relationships, d) increased appreciation of life, e) positive spiritual changes. The most important part of the personality changes is that it is the person himself that apprehend meaningfulness in life and a successful coping.

Tedeschi and McNally (2011) has examined reports about veterans of war, from Vietnam, that did not develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but rather developed a positive personality growth which strengthened the self-confidence and from which they reported positive learning and a appreciation about what is important in life. They seemed to have made an existential inventory of their life, something that apparently has made them stronger and more self-aware. PTG is a mental and emotional development in a person’s repertoire, which change their understanding and values in life in such a way that it can not be seen as just another coping strategy (Tedeschi, et al. 1998).

**Sense of Coherence (SOC)**

SOC was developed by Aaron Antonovsky (Antonovsky, 1987; Hanson, 2007) and is conceptualised in three subdimensions about a person’s subjective experience of himself and the environment; a) Comprehensibility, receiving knowledge about why things are the way they are and a predictability about the future. In this sense we find, people’s ability to interpret and understand their own, others and the environment’s history, presence and judgements about the future. b) Manageability, how people are able to make use of their knowledge and resources and what strength the person have in that pursuit. It is also the person’s interpretation of how important it really is to make use of the knowledge and resources in that particular situation, c) Meaningfulness is a positive and motivating force in the light of visions and goals, it is an energizing and dynamic force.

Sense of coherence is an estimation of the current situation, to perceive the life-situation as an opportunity to make personal developments. The salutogenic agenda highlights the personal development of resources and the theory, Sense of coherence, are developed from Antonovsky’s studies of prisoners of war, from the German concentration camps during
the Second World War. The studies were made on former prisoners, which had gained relatively good psychological outcomes despite of the traumatic experiences. He examined what kind of qualities and strengths people had, which make them resilient in the face of demands and trauma, how they handle their difficult circumstances in life so well. He came to the conclusion that if people thrive for meaningfulness, comprehensibility about themselves and the environment and to have manageability in life circumstances, it will protect them from stress and ill-health. Sense of coherence has been proven to enhance motivation and well-being, almost regardless of situations or strains.

**Spiritual Fitness (SF)**

Pargament and Sweeney (2011) presents the SF model as part of the American army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) program. The model describe people's ambitions for self-awareness and meaning, efficiency and soul-searching, and an experience of connectedness with other people. Spiritual fitness can mislead us to believe that it is about God and a theological sense of speaking but it is in a human sense of speaking the term is coined. It is about a search for what is important in life and what resources the individual has to his disposal for his guest and self-actualization. The definition of spirituality is explained as the path people go, in the discovery of the real true self. Spiritual fitness is then the discoveries and the resources the individual receives in the search for the true inner self. This self-actualization process can be made through different kind of tools, like religion, music, studies, art, loving relationships or work.

The model consists of five subdimensions that are in use for the individual's meaning-making and direction in life, it is also a use of resources and connectedness with other people. a) In self-awareness, self-knowledge, identity, meaning making and personal authenticity comes to play. b) In a sense of agency the individual can acknowledge and accept his own shortcomings and take responsibility and control over his own life. c) Self-control is about the ability to control and understand his thoughts, feelings and behaviours and to see and foresee the consequences of the behaviours. d) Self-motivation is generated through expectations on the individual's goals. It is an intrinsic motivation which creates strength, energy and hope when faced with difficulties. e) Social-awareness describes the relational importance for the experience of support, well-being and self-agency. The social-awareness is also very important for increased empathy, respect and trust, and also important for the very foundation that people build positive relations on.

A strong spiritual fitness will promote a development of social networks, prevent posttraumatic stress disorder in the event of crisis or trauma and it will promote a development of a positive spiritual core. Many authors (Antonovsky, 1987; Ebetner, 1983; Tedeschi & McNalli, 2011) also state that true spirituality in a theological sense come from the occurrences of finding meaning in life, when the individual can see himself as a part of something bigger.

**Emotional Intelligence (EQ)**

Emotional intelligence is about, to what extent the individual is in contact with his feelings and to what extent these feelings can affect different dimensions in a person's life. Emotional intelligence is not all about chasing positive feelings, it also stresses that the negative feelings is just as important and motivating as the positive feelings. Salovey (in Goleman 1995) describes EQ as: a) having contact with his feelings, self-knowledge and to be better able to controlling ones life. b) Being able to cope with the emotions, making it easier to get rid of, or to take advantage of the negative emotions constructively and to resist impulses. c) being able to motivate himself, a motivation that comes from evocation of feelings that promote the achievement of goals. d) Understanding the feelings of other, empathy. To be able to feel
empathy is to understand and recognize the signals of others, what they want and need. Empathy is also the foundation of the ability to love another person and a big part of the capacity to interact in positive reciprocity, in interpersonal interaction. Rumble, Van Lange and Parks (2010) describes how behaviour is affected by unconscious rules which are governed by the interaction and social norms. Sometimes, in the interpersonal communication, noise hinders positive messages and generosity. The risk of failure in communications and negative relations increases with decreased empathy but helping behaviour, cooperation and positive interpretations of other people and healthy relations have positive correlations to empathy.

Retreats and the positive psychology end up with an interesting way to work with people during stress, crises or trauma.

Research Problem and Purpose
The existing information about retreat-activities in the correctional system in the world is very scarce but it is even less prevalent in Sweden. What I have found though, is that an Israeli prison has carried out ten days long Vipassana courses (Frid, 2008 i Ronel & Elisha, 2011; Nordström, 2007). The results showed positive changes in the inmates’ self-concept, behaviour, an awareness of their own personal development, inner strength and a new way of thinking. It also promoted better family relations, increased responsibility for their own life and an increased self-awareness. One goal with the retreats within the correctional system in Sweden is to promote a positive internal process of change. Expectations and future benefits with the retreat activities are to change negative cognitive patterns, which are the foundation for misbehaviour during the sentence and relapses to further imprisonment. Statistics on the retreats in Sweden, within the correctional system, is unfortunately absent why it is also missing in this study. Previous research about retreats within the correctional system is limited, but research about the psychological theories it is based on is extensive. Positive psychology (Fredrickson, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and salutogenic methods for change and development (Antonovsky, 1987; Botond, 2009; Hanson, 2007; Pargament & Sweeney, 2011; Tedeschi & McNalli, 2011) in the work with criminal behaviours has created a new research area, now called positive criminology (Ronel, & Elisha, 2011).

Retreat activities within the correctional system in Sweden is built on the Ignatian retreat model and is now a part of the institutions program of treatment. The work has proven good results during the years, but the institution has been deficient in evaluative methods like research and statistical documentation (Carlsson, 2010). The retreat-practice is offered for the prisoners with sentences of more than four years but to be able to participate in a 30 day retreat they first have to go through a short “one-week-retreat”.

Many of the institutions workforce activities is aiming for lifestyle changes and the intentions build on the idea that they are supposed go come back to the society as better people. Previously, the correctional system has had the spotlight on negative behaviour and other problem-orientations within the individual’s life. The retreats though, have a strength-oriented approach which is aiming for development of the positive qualities within the person.

The purpose of the study was to investigate positive personal changes, for individuals with traumatic or stressful living conditions, during a 30 day Ignatian monastery retreat. The research was based on theories of posttraumatic growth and on psychological, emotional and spiritual models of resources and processes of change.
METHOD

Methodological Choice
The methodological positioning is aiming for an investigation that generates a deeper understanding of the positive personality characteristics that change and develop in people, during a 30 day retreat. Because of the absence of information and research about retreats in the correctional system, according to my own investigation, it justifies the approach of a qualitative method. We cannot possibly be able to know all questions or fields of interest in advance, why it requires a high level of flexibility in the design which also legitimises an explorative structure (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) with a phenomenological (Bryman, 1997) and autoethnographic (Chang, 2008; McIlveen, Beccaria, du Preez & Patton, 2010) approach and way of work. We take a phenomenological approach when we accept that it is the individual, through mental activities, that creates the reality he or she is living in. The purpose of a phenomenological positioning is to justify the consideration of individuals own point of view and interpretations about the possible causality of behaviours. The main interest during a retreat is the person’s mental activity, inner exploration and identity-creating process, why the researcher though highlights his own meaning-making activity and exploration of people’s experiences, interpretations and driving forces (Bryman, 1997).

My own participation in an Ignatian monastery retreat a couple of years earlier, gave me the opportunity to participate as a monastery host during a 30 day retreat. The knowledge and experiences from a 30 day retreat is a necessity to participate as a host, because there has to be an understanding of the participant’s experiences, so he is able to offer support if needed. Because of my own experiences and the active role in the retreat, it became appropriate to adopt an autoethnographic approach as well (McIlveen, et al, 2010), where also my experience as a former retreat-participant, host and research leader is going to be analysed. For the most part, researchers are trying to break free from the risk of subjectivity and in the least possible way affect the study. Then, to promote a method which take the researcher’s subjective experience into consideration is because of the deep understanding we try to capture, of the participants mental work and reality. To describe the psychological experiences incarcerated people have during a retreat, can probably best be done by an individual who is a member of the same social world and has experience of a retreat himself. The kind of research that is hard to get for professionals or which is limited in information, legitimise and seeks an autoethnographic perspective.

Participants
The participants in the retreat were seven 23-55 year old men, with sentences of four years to life. Only five participants were interviewed because of limited time. It was also those five individuals who were attended for in the observations. Remaining informants in the retreat and in the material were me as the monastery host, two correctional officers and the retreat-leader/priest, two women and two men between the ages of 37 to 55.

Data Collection
The data collection has been done by semi-structured interviews, participant observations and document analysis in the form of testimonies from the inmates. The choice of methods in the data collection was made from availability and on the basis of the explorative approach. To cross-reference the different sources of information is called triangulation, which aims to make a more holistic view through the many different sources. The triangulation will increase the validity and it will generate a clearer empirical picture (Bryman, 1997; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).


**Interviews**

The interviews were conducted at two different occasions. The initial interview was conducted during the first two days and the second one after the retreat. In the opening interview, questions were asked like; Why did you apply to the monastery? What expectations did you have? What kind of difficulties where you expecting during the retreat? The second interview, in the end of the retreat were more comprehensive and follow up questions where applied more extensively. The interview was initiated with a more general open-ended question (Miller & Rollnik, 2002); Can you describe your experience of the retreat? Follow-up questions (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) were developed individually, depending on answers from the first question, information from the observations and the information from the opening interview. The next question worked out to be more specific, like; What was your most powerful experience during the retreat? Would you like to describe your experience about the silence? All the interviews lasted for 15-60 minutes and were recorded with an Mp3 player that was borrowed from the correctional institution.

Interviews with the staff lasted for 40-60 minutes and were conducted individually. The retreat leader was interviewed at three occasions, before the retreat, after a week and in the end of the retreat. The questions to the staff were more specific in nature because it was not their own experience of the retreat I was interested in, but instead their interpretation of the participants. They received questions like; What is the biggest change you have seen for the participants? What kind of difficulties do you recognise they have? What strengths and resources do they gain, according to your recognition? What differences can you identify in the participants, from before to after the retreat?

To promote a good will in answering my questions, the interviews were arranged in as a safe and relaxed environment as possible. Because of the participant’s previous negative experiences of interrogations and such, it was very important that no associations could be drawn from that towards me or the interview, something that could have created a defensive attitude. The initial interviews were carried out in the participants own rooms, which I regarded as the most secure and comfortable place at the moment. This first interview also prepared them for the second one and created less insecurity, they knew what to expect. The second interview was carried out in the conversation room where they have had their daily 30 minute discussions with the retreat leader. This environment, I presumed, was a secure and comfortable environment which promoted openness and an increased will to participate in conversations. One participant though, chose to make the second interview in his own room. The conversation room was also used for three of the staff’s interviews. The fourth one, was conducted in the staff’s office because I felt it was the most convenient place at the time.

**Participant Observation**

Participant observation, legitimises and consider the own role in the investigation, the interaction between the scientist and the participant and the objective observation of the participants. During the retreat I have been a part of the participants’ everyday life and also been a participant of the same exercises as they. Morning-, evening prayers and mass have been exercised together and the relaxation exercises were guided by me as a host.

My own participation in a similar retreat has certainly increased the understanding of the participants’ experiences and situation. At the same time, it has certainly also increased the risk of bias in favour of preconceived ideas about the experiences during a retreat. It is though, most likely that this has affected the interpretation to an increased understanding. The observations where documented in dairy form and in my pursuit to decrease bias I made some observational criterion in advance where I looked for clues in body posture, gaze, interpersonal interaction, if they were by themselves or not. Participant observation has a significant role to play in this study because the participants are in constant silence. Any
behavioural changes or violation of the silence, then turn out to be very informative. For the most part, it is about nonverbal cues in contrast to interviews, which are all about the interpretation of the spoken word.

**Document Analysis**

The documents came in the form of testaments, which is a type of conclusive experiences the present and former participants wrote down in the end of their retreat. The participants describe some kind of report or conclusions over the experiences and insights from their retreat, what they have gained. The testaments can also be discussed in terms of reliability and validity (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). When we are about to analyse the documents’ reliability in the qualitative research it is first about the testaments’ authenticity, is it the same document and information now, in the past and for the future. We have to assume this document authenticity, because all the documents were original and are usually out in the public on the monastery ward. The documents’ reliability is also high, in the way that it really is the people which have followed through a retreat that are the authors themselves. The validity is more open for discussion and this is about the content validity, the truthfulness, correctness and power in a statement, that the information in the testament really is what it states. The content will in some way represent something from an individual’s experience. Is it really what it says? With this in our mind, to maintain validity, we should not analyse the testaments by themselves, they should be a part of a validation process, like the one in triangulation (Bryman, 1997).

**Autoethnographic Data Collection**

Information from my own experiences, from a 30 day monastery retreat, has its foundation in field notes and memories. I have a lot of authentic information from the retreat because I used to write as a mean to process my experiences. To minimize the effect of glorification or other biased influences of the material, I used my field notes as a controlling mean for the memories (Chang, 2008), which also is about not to confuse the experiences from the 30 day retreat and the following shorter retreats I have participated in. My choice to only use the experiences and information from the 30 day retreat is to take the same starting position in the process of change as the participants in the study. In the autoethnographic narrative, the same questions have been used for me as for the participants in the study; Why did I apply for participation? How was my experience of the retreat, conversations, meditation, the silence and rites? Have I thought about the relations in my life? and, What have I gained from the retreat? I have also used my own testament in the process.

**Data Processing**

To validate and as a complement, the material from interviews, observations and documents have been triangulated. Triangulation is about using several different sources of information, methods or theoretical perspective to study the same questions (Bryman, 1997). Do we really measure what we think that we have discovered?

The second interview, from the end of the fourth week was the point of departure for the data processing and analysis. The starting position is the participants’ own experiences, statements and the changes they describe themselves having made. The information has further been complemented or strengthened with information from testaments, observations, the staff’s statements and my own experience of an Ignatian retreat.

The initial information processing took its point of departure from relevant theories and the material was explored with the help of themes and characteristics. The thematic process followed an inductive search for characteristics and patterns in the material. In a later search process the material was scanned for further, unknown, characteristics or patterns associated
to positive personality resources and changes. My preference of using in advanced chosen theories and themes in the analytic process and interpretation is because of my extensive knowledge about the current retreats and potential personality growth people can achieve. It was also a suitable method to achieve some structure of such an extensive material. The results from the data processing were summoned and discussed in the light of positive personality changes, where my choice of reference in the analysis and compilation was the theory of posttraumatic growth. The pre-chosen themes I first searched the material for were cognitive, emotional and spiritual in nature and were derived primarily from already existing theories. In the second inductive search of the material the pre-chosen dimensions were changed in some part because of additional subdimensions, for example by adding the subdimension of emotional receptivity to the dimension of emotional competence. Another subdimension, for the dimension of positive spiritual growth was also added to the chart. In the analysis of testaments I searched for emotional, cognitive, spiritual, behavioural or other changes that the participants described themselves experiencing.

**Ethical Considerations**

To be granted a permission, to carry out the study within the correctional institution was applied to the correctional superintendent and retreat leader at the prison in question. The participants were informed that the study was based on observations and interviews and an informed consent was given at site, from all participants. In my presentation of the study, I did not go into detail of the study content and I told them that it was about inmates experiences of a 30 day monastery retreat for people with long sentences. The permission to use their testaments in the study was asked for after they had already made them, so that no influence of the content could have been made. The consent to use former participant's testaments is implicit through their decision to make them public for all to see in the monastery. All the ethical principles about consent, confidentiality, information and the right to use the information have been taken into consideration (Vetenskapsrådet, 1990).

Before the interviews all participants, individually, was again asked about the participation and consent in the study. They were also informed that, if they felt troubled by any question, they could leave it without answering. Even though the participants expressed a laid back attitude to the issue of anonymity, they were informed that all recordings would be erased after the transcription and that nothing of what they have said can be traced back to them as a person. Regardless of the participants attitude to this, I had an idea that the trust to me as an interviewer would be enhanced if I had this under consideration, because of the fundamental mistrust inmates have to the correctional system itself and everybody in it, even if they do not say it in the open.

A discussion about interpersonal dependency is also necessary because of my role as a host as well as a research leader. The consideration is, if there are any factors that can force or direct the participants to make any consent they do not really want. Formally, there are no such influences between me as a host / research leader and the participants. Their behaviours or participation in the retreat do not in any way affect the duties for the host, which consists of practical doings like cleaning, cooking, and preparations for the retreat leader. If the participants feel the need to seek support or any other help, it is the retreat leader who is the first choice, if not the participants of their own free will seeks themselves to the host for support or help. Of course, it can become an influence on the participants to act in kindness to me as a host and research leader, but this will though be in an informal and unconscious way.
RESULTS

The participants in the retreat secluded themselves from the ordinary life in prison and the surrounding world, of their own free will, so they could engage in different kind of self-exploratory activities in silence and solitude. The participants and my own autoethnographic narrative describe how positive resources was generated and what changes we went through. The results from the material have been thematically divided into three dimensions of change; emotional competence, spiritual fitness and positive spiritual development. Resources and the dimensions of change are summarized and analysed as posttraumatic growth. First I am going to describe how the retreat itself is designed and what it is intending to achieve for people.

The Correctional Institutions Ignatian Retreat

Inmates apply to the correctional institutions Ignatian retreat, to get the opportunity to meet themselves, in silence. The participants are only allowed to talk during the common prayer when everybody is reading aloud, morning and evening and during a 30 minutes session with the retreat leader each day. The participants live in silence during six days a week, with the exception of Sunday when everybody is allowed to speak. The environment is free from all external influences; no TV, radio, newspaper, phone or other possible influences from the surrounding world. In this manner, the individual get the opportunity to go to the bottom of himself and receive insights of the inner true self, something that is not possible around friends, acquaintances or other distractions that scatter the thoughts and concentration of one’s self. The retreat’s 30 days are divided in four weekly themes where the messages also are illustrated through rites which symbolise the core messages. This makes the participants involved on a different level, instead of just reading, they are also able to experience and feel.

a) The first week begins with one’s own personal potential. An examination is made over what it is that hinders good relationships, existing cravings and what sins that have been committed. This is followed up with a force of forgiveness, reconciliation and restitution. In the end of the week a rite of forgiveness is held and a all the sins are then written down on a paper, a paper they burn during forgiveness from the priest. b) The second week they contemplate over moral, values and different choices in life, with Jesus life as a good example. c) The third week they visualize about suffering and death, in Jesus life and ones own. This is experienced through a rite of crucifixion, burial and the last supper. d) The fourth week is all about the victorious resurrection’s new possibilities and renewed hope, where they reflect upon strengths and future possibilities, how life can change to the better and what choices that have to be made.

Christianity is used as an instrument to mediate a coherent reality and a sense of coherence in a person’s life. It is not explicitly a religious conversion, instead it is an opportunity to explore one’s inner self on a deeper level, through; silence, wisdom from the Bible, rites and symbols, meditation and relaxation. The process of the spiritual exercises is meditation over a Bible text or another relevant text to the theme, they try to put themselves into each character and happening in the narrative and then trying to relate this to one’s own life. It is in this way the participants explore themselves.

Emotional Competence

The material proved emotional competence to be a collection of emotional resources, that has been thematically divided into four emotional resource dimensions; emotional receptivity, emotional contact, empathy and emotional control. According to the participants, the silence was the most important instrument in the working process with emotional competence. The following quotation comes from a participant, about how he experienced the silence, ‘It was..."
almost necessary I would say. So you do not occupy yourself with a lot off stuff. In the interviews and through observation, in relation to their emotional work, both participants and staff highlight a calm and relaxing environment as a necessary starting point for the inner working process. Other important prerequisites in the work with the emotional resources have been rites and symbolic actions, Bible texts, meditation and relaxation.

**Emotional Receptivity**

Emotional receptivity means that the individual makes himself emotionally available, to let the feelings through, allowing their existence. Very often, people make themselves emotional unavailable by different kind of emotional suppressions or runaways. This stems very often from childhood maltreatment or serious illness. In testaments and interviews several of the participants revealed experiences of traumatic maltreatment in childhood and because of this they had habits of emotional suppression or emotional unavailability. In a testament one participant express, “Here, I have again been reminded of things/feelings that I have pushed away in my life, but that I have to face in the future, for the sake of my inner personal change.” The retreat has made it possible for the participants to open up, making them receptive for their own and others feelings. One respondent expressed in an interview, on the question if this can be of any use in the future:

*I know that I'm not going to be so numb and shut down, in the future. I have always, I have almost never had any feelings, I have shut down, made them cold and put them aside. In the past, this has always made me feel like I am a second picking, when I come out from jail. How can I create a good relation to a girl when I'm totally shut down? But during meditation, when I am sitting there, suddenly I got a tear in my eye.*

What we can see is, the retreat environment and the togetherness have created a possibility to attain emotional contact, even for those people who actively suppress their feelings and usually do not dare to be in contact with them. We can suppose that the prevalence of people with emotional dissociation is higher in the correctional system than in the normal population, because of demanding living conditions and high prevalence of child maltreatment. The retreat has proven to offer an environment which promotes emotional receptivity even among highly underprivileged individuals.

**Emotional Contact**

The participants describe the emotional contact as they can feel more, reflect over where the feelings are and differentiate among them. A respondent answers, “I understand more and I feel more if I can say so, I experience some peace and quiet now. It feels good for the first time.” On the question of what has been affected most profound during the retreat, another answered:

*I think I have received a better contact with my feelings and are able to differentiate among them. I feel more in control of them and I can arrange them in different categories, I do not need to be affected by them all. The most remarkable thing is that I now know how to separate them.*

In an emotional level, it proved to be the rites that had the most profound effect. When one of the respondents describes his strongest experience he highlights the burial rite and the crucifixion:
One of the most intense (experiences) was the burial. When he was crucified. [É ] I think burials are hard to process, so that could also have contributed. But the biggest contribution I think comes from my faith. It affects me. Rites belong to the faith, more knowledge and through meditation, to be able to feel. Being so close to the soul. To be a part on another level.

The participants have allowed themselves to feel more and they have brought feelings to the surface for processing, something that has offered a richer and more nuanced emotional life. All respondents, except one, express an increased emotional contact and some of them an ability to differentiate among the feelings. They express that they in an early stage can discover and recognize the feelings for the first time. At the same time the participants show an increased optimism and hope for the future together with an increased happiness over life. To summarize, the results show that an emotional contact will be a resource for future demands, personal autonomy, psychological well-being and a positive attitude to their way of living in the future.

**Empathy**

One of the main themes during the retreat was to sensitize past experiences and to take different perspectives on this, mentally and emotionally. Because of an increased emotional power of insight, we also draw the conclusion of an increased empathetic ability. Several of the participants show an increased emotional power to insight, whereas an actual empathetic ability only can be stated through real situations and actions, therefore the conclusions of empathy can only reach a probable level. Because empathy, theoretically speaking, has correlations with the other inner resources that the participants demonstrate, I draw the conclusions that it really is empathy, also in this case. The most important instruments in developing empathy has proven to be the silence, meditation over texts and other peoples lives, rites and the relaxing non-judgemental and calming environment.

How receptive the participants really were to the environment, came to be expressed during the participants' common prayer. The first days during the retreat, everybody was reading out of tune but after a couple of days they set the pace. The same phenomenon was repeated every Monday morning, after the Sunday on which they where allowed to speak. A conclusion from these occurrences is that the attentiveness on the environment decreases when verbal expressions come into play. The silence has become a way to think differently, which promotes the empathetic ability. During the interview one respondent expresses, ŨYou think on your own situation but also on how our families are coping outside, they suffer terribly. You know, in a relationship you are each others comfort and safety. Everything becomes out of order.Û Empathy seems though to have the ability to develop in accordance with increased self-knowledge and emotional contact. The retreat leader also highlights the most distinguishable change in the beginning of the retreat, something we can correlate to empathy, ŨI believe the focus of the self evolves. They get the opportunity to think of others, they get an awareness of others. Ũ Ignatius describes how the individual shall visualise himself living the life of Jesus and really feel his suffering for humanity. After the rite, where the blindfolded participants got the opportunity to re-live the experience of the wandering and crucifixion of Jesus, one described it as ŨIt stir up a lot of thoughts and feelings in me, when I became a part of it. I have not understood how much Jesus had suffered before.Û This comes from a participant who has had a traumatic upbringing and expressed a low emotional receptivity in the beginning of the retreat. To sum it up, the results show that empathy, through an increased emotional power of insight, has strong tendencies to increase during the retreat, something several of the participants expressed.
Emotional Control

It is all about to what extent they experience they are in control over their feelings. The results present, how the participants are coping with irritation differently, increased impulse control, patience, positive feelings towards one self, family and future and a reduced suffering. Several of the participants expressed how forgiveness was a vital part in coping with negative emotions, and the feelings of forgiveness reduced the negative emotional experiences. One of the participants describe how meditation and faith can come to control the negative feelings he has had for many years, feelings derived out of shame and guilt caused by his traumatic childhood experiences.

I process through conversations with God and by writing. I meditate over it and learn to let go. I can feel his forgiveness over my doings and for what they (the parents) have done, so I can walk on my new given way. I can not do anything about my past. Why have I put so much energy in this hate toward my father and anger towards my mother, why has she abandoned me?

The processing of hate and anger during meditation occurs in a state of peace and clarity. When being in control over the feelings, he thinks in a different way. During meditation, in a state of increased control over the otherwise negative feelings that shame and guilt evoked, he gets more easily in touch with thoughts of forgiveness. They will not be able to deprive him of energy like before. Another respondent describes how he manages to control irritation and boredom, which is also confirmed by observations during the retreat. In the beginning he was out running at least twice a day in the yard, but only ones during the last week. In the end of the retreat he could sit down and relax for at least ten minutes after the evening prayer, and he could also relax during the meditation and relaxation exercises. Initially, in the beginning of the retreat he had to move something, a hand, foot, body posture, etc. During the interview he describes it as ÒNow I can sit down and process what has been said, relax. In the beginning I could not relax, no, no, no, I just wanted to get out of there. Now I can sit down and think.Ó His ability to postpone the impulses to get up and walk seems to come from increased insights over his emotional repertoire. He also says that he, Òfeel the harmony within myself. I know myself better now. I feel stronger in those areas.Ó

One of the participants had in the beginning of the retreat some performance anxiety because of his studies to come, but in the second interview he expressed, on the question if any changes had been made regarding his former goals, during the retreat?

In myself I have become stronger. I put my studies only on the level to pass, it is enough for me. I do not need any higher goals. It is not the high grade that is important for me anymore. It is a goal on my path, to get the job I desire.

The way he coped with the initial performance anxiety was to re-evaluate his goals. The primary goal on high grades is no longer important, but instead the job he was going to educate himself for.

Many of the participants carry on a lot of negative feelings like hate, anger, worries and distress. To arrive in a positive, calm, quite, relaxing and safe environment where other people exists as a support for your difficulties gives the participants a good foundation for their emotional processing and developmental changes. Very good results have been achieved in all resource dimensions for all participants. This is resources that will come to good use against future difficulties and positive personality growth. It will also decrease suffering from shame and guilt, and it will promote increased wellbeing for the future.
Spiritual Fitness

The material revealed an increased spiritual fitness, which has been thematically divided into five subdimensions; social awareness, sense of agency, self-motivation, self-control and self-awareness. Through interviews and observations different kind of instruments were highlighted in the participants soul-searching agenda; meditation over texts, deep-meditation, rites, silence, conversations, the Bible / faith, relaxation and writing about thoughts and experiences.

Self-Awareness

The exercises is about a search about who they really are, the true inner self. Several of the participants describes in interviews and in the conversations with the retreat leader that they received a renewed self-awareness expressed as an increased self-knowledge, stronger identity, increased personal authenticity and increased tendencies to reflection over values and moral issues in life. The participant who describes who he is with the most clarity, through an increased self-awareness, says:

*Just the insight I received when we worked with the text about *I* who am *I*. I received the insight that I was three different personalities. One when I was with my family and my daughter. One person when I am a criminal, an addict and has murdered another person and only done a lot of bad things, and one person that has done all this that the others have done, but who meditates, prays and thanks for each day and night. He lives and eats healthy and takes care of himself and is trying to enjoy each day and he take one day at the time.*

He has made an inventory over his identity, who he is and what values and moral principles that govern the person he knows now and intend to live as. He expresses an understanding and a distinct self-knowledge, something other participants also do in their testaments, *I* have *had the opportunity to approach my true self, a chance to ask myself, what have I done? How do I want my life to be?* Here, he expresses an approach to a more authentic self. Self-knowledge with thoughts about how to live their lives in the future is something several participants express. The retreat leader describes how a strengthened self-awareness and spiritual fitness can be expressed in a positive way. *They develop a strength that makes them more autonomous and not so much dependent on other people. You can see the changes through the body language, in the more upright body posture, positive charisma and glittering eyes.* The observations demonstrate unambiguous and similar changes on the participants after about 23 days, they had stopped looking downwards during their promenade, one had made a new look and hairstyle and walked with a straight back, while another was less gloomy and instead enthusiastic over new things, like over a book he had been reading.

Though, in this new self-awareness, their is some ambivalence towards new choices in life, something that was expressed for one participant when he describes his new goals in life, free from drugs and old friends, but in the blink of an eye, he says he is going back to his former girlfriend if she wants him, a girl who lives among his old friends. Even if the participants has come to a certain self-awareness and an increased motivation and strengths to change in some parts of their life, this shows that it is a process and that all the current decisions that have been taken are not carved in stone, because of an increased self-awareness and spiritual fitness.

Self-Control

Self-control has emerged as the participant's ability to control their thoughts, feelings and behaviour. They have also expressed changes in an understanding over the origin of emotions,
thoughts and behaviours which earlier partly were presented in the subdimension of emotional control. On the question on what they had gained from the retreat, that participant which described himself as an addict in gamble and TV said, *To see that I can gives me strength. It gives me confidence, to be free from TV and gamble and not to be in agony because of it.* This statement do not exclusively show an increased control over feelings and thoughts, but also an increased confidence and motivation in handling future demands. According to observations, the same participant withdrew from distractions and sought to more and more solitude and silence. This was a sign of an increased reflective ability over himself and that he was able to think about his inner self. During the first week he had difficulties being silent, why he later where asked about how he coped with the silence.

*Good! I try to withdraw. If I go out in the yard for a walk it is hard. That’s why I don’t go out when others are out there. I go to my room instead. The guys at the ward should never believe in it, if they heard this about me.*

He has clearly gained an increased self-control on many different levels. The participant with most difficulties finding piece and quite, expresses during the initial interview that he has a very strong need of moving his body. Later on, on the question about how he experienced the evening prayer and following contemplation, he answers; *Absolutely the best time. Then I can level out and relax. Now I can sit down and process what had been said, and relax. Now I can sit down and think.* During the relaxation the first ten days, the legs moved constantly for this participant, but later on, not at all. To sum it up, the material shows positive changes in self-control and increased understanding.

*Self-Motivation*

The motivation demonstrated, proved to be an intrinsic motivation, derived from realistic expectations of themselves. In several cases, the motivation has the characteristic of helping others and qualities like changed values and moral, a will to do good things instead of bad. Because of a stronger faith and spiritual fitness, the participants gained an increased determination in their choices and decisions. During an interview one describes his motivation as, *I have a clear and distinct knowledge of what I want, but there has always been some insecurity. That feeling does not exist any more. Increased determination. Now I have my faith and my God with me in my goals.* Because he is experiencing an increased support in his decisions from his faith, the intrinsic motivation has become stronger. He is experiencing an increased personal confidence which motivates him in his goal attainment. According to the study material a sense of agency increases in accordance with strengthened motivation and goal attainment. Earlier testaments provide support for this conclusion, *These 30 days have given me a chance to take a break and reflect over myself and my thoughts. I feel strengthened and energized to attaining new goals.* Increased motivation in goal attainment, promotes strengthened hope and positive beliefs about the future. The participants seemed strengthened and future experiences and goals were interpreted as challenges instead of insurmountable obstacles. To be able to face demands and resistance as challenges instead of stressors or potential crises increases their chances to grow as humans.

*Sense of Agency*

A sense of agency seems to be a direct cause of an intrinsic motivation and increased energy in processing tasks. What we have seen is that they have made some kind of decision that makes them feel in control over their new path in life. To be able to create a good sense of agency and responsibility of actions, they had to come clean with their shortcomings, to come to terms with their faults and flaws and to seek some sort of forgiveness in their path. To be
forgiven is a very important issue for many participants and it seems to be a necessity in their quest to go forth with changes in their lives. This is summoned in an interview with one of the participants, where he describes the rite of forgiveness:

I am not finished, absolutely not, but I am on my way. It felt like someone relieved several tons from my shoulders. And then I tapped myself on the back and said, now it is a new course taken. You have made a choice in your life.

Even the retreat leader confirms the connection between the recognition of the shortcomings and a sense of agency by the following statement:

Because the retreat intends to bring about a positive way of life, it also stresses a soul-searching agenda. The exercises and the last day in the first week are actually all about this. To be able to look forward, it demands you to get rid of "the backpack," or at least ease the load.

Further support comes from a participant’s testament, ‘I think this was the best thing I could do, because if I am going to grow as a person, I have to be able to forgive myself. This time, has made me grow as a human being.’ One of the correctional officers supports this as well and her opinion is that when they get an increased confidence and strength during the retreat, they are better able to cope with their personal difficulties. The result establishes an increased determination which has made them more in control over their lives and improved their sense of agency. Several sources confirm that to be able to get in touch with a personal intrinsic process of change, forgiveness is something that is crucial when they have experienced shame and guilt.

Social Awareness
Attention for and the importance of other people in the surrounding is summarized as social awareness. Empathy is also a subdimension in social awareness, which means to be able to be receptive of other people’s needs and wishes, something I presented earlier in emotional competence. Many of the retreat exercises include an approach where the participant uses a good role model, e.g. Jesus, in the reflection over one’s own life. A very important part in these reflections is the meaning of relations in their life, the influence it has had in their life and for the future. Several of the participants reveal experiences of suffering from destructive upbringings and bad family relations. Four out of five participants expressed these experiences. In their personal processing, positive relations was used as good examples while the destructive ones were analysed from a perspective of what consequences it generated, like alienation, addiction and stagnation of the personal development, something one participant reflected upon, ‘I have been a drug addict since I was 15 years old, and because of that the personal development comes to an end.’

In an initial exercise during the retreats second day, several participants expressed guilt and shame over bad and destructive relations, with themselves and others. Statements from old testaments indicate this as common information and nothing special for this group alone. ‘I found all the feelings I have hidden or forced away. In the future I will cherish my relations, have humble thoughts and try to use my ability in a creative fashion.’ Destructive upbringings and emotional incompetent relations stated from earlier participants, is also expressed in interviews from participants during this retreat. On the question about how they have reasoned mentally about relations during the retreat one respondent answers:
Yes, my understanding about why my relations have developed like they did have improved. I have had both healthy and unhealthy, really destructive relations in my past, with dependence and co-dependency. I have thought this through and put it in perspective.

I have earlier described a participant about his hatred and anger to his relatives for what they have put him through, which highlights the importance of the understanding about why things have happened and what effect this have had on his life. An understanding of destructive relations seems to open up for a positive personal growth. Several participants also highlight the importance of positive relations and they describe how this relations give them hope, energy and meaning for the future. If I then when I have lived there for some years and feel strong, maybe I am able to move closer to home, to my daughter and become closer to her.

From the material we can interpret, that if the individual is able to open up for change and development in his life, an understanding of the destructive and traumatising relations are necessary. Positive relations on the other hand seem to promote hope, support and energy in his goal attainment. Positive relations are also a goal in itself.

To sum it up, spiritual fitness is about the participants understanding of who they are, for good or bad. They have also gained an increased control over their thoughts, emotions and behaviour, something which have given them increased motivation and strength for their sense of agency and future. They have also received an increased understanding of the importance of relations and they are able to reflect in a wider context on the values in their own life.

Positive Spiritual Development

Spirituality proved to have different meanings for the participants. Even if the Ignatian retreat form is based on Catholicism, it did not appear to have generated any conversions to Christianity for the participants in this retreat. Spirituality came instead to be divided into two subdimensions, one religious and one non-religious spirituality, according to the material.

Religious Spirituality

The two participants that reported a Christian faith before the retreat, later demonstrated an increased and strengthened faith in God and Jesus. In the initial interviews, both expressed a desire to strengthen their contact with God and during the retreat they found their faith to be of help and support in their personal growth. One of the participants describes in the interview, on the question about his experience of the retreat, I came here to strengthen my faith and in this way the retreat has helped me. Apart from that, I have learned to meditate on a deeper level. From the respondent statement, we can interpret increased skills in meditation and that the retreat has strengthened his faith and supported his inner soul-searching process. The other participant, experienced God as a aid in his questions and in his decision making during the retreat:

I got a very good connection during the fasting. It felt like he was sitting right beside me when I was talking to him, God and Jesus. I got my answers, you can not get answers like I received in another manner, it has to be him that is inside me or nearby and who gives me the answers within, because I have never known them before.

He is experiencing a solid support through his faith and he is liberated from the previous insecurity which earlier has governed his life. He is experiencing himself as stronger, through this understanding and enlightening. Also the retreat leader expresses this connection to a positive spiritual development:
My wish is that they can discover themselves, because I believe it is by this path they can meet God. My belief is that they can become complete through the love of themselves and others. I want the participants on the retreat to be more complete human beings and being able to meet God.

The participants in this group have also expressed new understandings through increased self-knowledge and faith, in their testimonies.

Non-Religious Spirituality

The two other participants do not have Christianity as a part of their spiritual belief, for them it has been manifested differently. Their description of spirituality is instead a force in relations, with themselves, other people and positive role models. One of the respondents gives his view of spirituality in an interview:

For the most part you have to build up this connection, you and I. In meditation or with people you are comfortable with and when you do that you become a better person [É] I have had difficulty taking this to my heart, the Bible is a manipulation, a historical artefact that is not in context with the world today. But, Jesus he had this sense of you and I, he lived in this.

and for another respondent "God represents a good friend or supporting people."

Here, spirituality is the creation and process of loving relations, to themselves and others, to live with love is to live in spirituality. The Bible has been used in different extent, for both, like an instrument in the spiritual development. For one of them it has been used to find and illustrate good examples of relations, through Jesus way of living, and for the other it was used to interpret God as an important other in his life. Through observations during the retreat, I have seen an increased will to help others, during the duties in the weekend, like cleaning and cooking on Sundays. This tendency increased as time past by. This can be interpreted as a strengthening of positive attitudes toward each other and because of that, a will for helping behaviour. The participant that viewed spirituality as a force in good relations was also the one that highlighted the togetherness among them as predominantly positive.

One of the participants did not gain any spiritual development but besides of that he made a positive personal growth. Initially, he clearly expressed that he did not have any faith and this proved to be unchanged during the 30 days. On the question about any change in spirituality he says, "No. It has never existed. But I have difficulty to put it in words. I understand more and feel more if I can put it in that way." During the last week though, he had read the Bible in the form of a novel, the book of God, and he was very enthusiastic over the fact that he now finally could understand its entirety and coherence. He took in the historical message and expressed reflections around moral issues from the old and new testaments.

To sum it up, a positive spiritual development has been established among several of the participants. The experiences of spirituality is varying though, where some of them conceptualise it as a belief on Jesus and God according to Christianity and others saw it as a force that permeate relationships, with themselves and others. In both cases, the spiritual development had correlations to personal growth according to themselves and the retreat leader, they used their faith and spirituality to explore themselves. Though, it was not for everybody to create a positive spiritual development during a 30 day retreat and according to our conclusion then, it is a process that is highly individual in character.
Autoethnographic Analysis

From my own material, changes like emotional competence and spiritual fitness emerge. A positive spiritual development did evolve but after an analysis of the material it was established that this was not something that explicitly were expressed during the 30 day retreat, not from written reflections or from other notes, based on conversations with the priest. A spiritual development is rather something that has grown from subsequent retreats. In the testament, we can although catch a glimpse about spirituality:

Heaven and hell are not places, it is about how I think, act and feel, it is all about what state of mind I create. The retreat has given me the understanding about this. Here I have explored my inner self in solitude and with some guidance. This has given me knowledge and perspective on myself.

The first conclusion from this is an increased emotional competence and spiritual fitness. The emotional resources I express are an increased emotional control and emotional contact. To get an opportunity for emotional development was one of the reasons to my retreat application in the first place, and to get away from the everyday life with all its demands.

At this point of time I was under a lot of stress and strains, at the same time a close relative was a victim of a traumatic experience. I had difficulties to cope with my feelings and to separate them, which made me very irritable and dissociated from people. I came to the retreat as a stressful person burdened with anxiety and my first and main concerns where to handle all the problems I had and suppress all the negative feelings I was suffering from. My experience after the retreat was a relief and an inner piece. I could finally concentrate on my future again and not only be thinking on the here and now. I felt more in control of myself and experienced an increased self-confidence. It was not any risk to let go of my feelings for processing. It felt like I was in a bigger control of my life again, in spite of all the stressors and strains that still were in my life.

The initial and dominating experience of stress and anxiety made an emotional processing impossible, something that now are replaced with an emotional receptivity. During the retreat, a positive attitude towards the future has been developed with an increased emotional control and contact. Among the most important instruments in the emotional processing has been meditation in the meditation room and the silence. My experiences of the silence and meditation is expressed in some notes from an exercise during the last part of the retreat, where I was about to describe, for me, important learning I have gained during my 30 day.

There (in meditation) I could be in peace with my thoughts and feelings and no one interrupted. Finally, I ventured to let go and through this I realised it was not dangerous. I became more in control of my feelings which made me feel richer in a sense, more alive. Because of my improved ability to cope with feelings differently and the insight that it is not dangerous, I feel more up to the task for future demands, it does not feel like a disaster anymore. I have gained insights about my imperfections in my life and what to do about them. I think these understandings also have led to my increased appreciation for family and relatives. It has also resulted in some relational break ups in my life, with people I realised was destructive for my future development and happiness.

Through enhanced emotional contact and control an increased motivation and energy to cope with difficulties emerged. The increased appreciation towards family seemed to come from tendencies of an emotional understanding for the family situation. The emotional competence
and my choice of ending some destructive relations seemed to be connected to increased self-motivation, sense of agency and social awareness. An important instrument in the identification of my mistakes and flaws, where the rite of forgiveness where experiences and actions I regret where brought to the surface. My sins were processed further in conversation with the priest, an important support in my emotional and mental processing. My soul searching also resulted in an increased self-awareness.

To sum it up, the retreat has helped me develop several emotional and inner resources in my work with my personal process of change. It enhanced my emotional resources, like receptivity, contact, control, empathy and positive feelings toward the future. The improved resources in the form of spiritual fitness were self-control, self-confidence, self-awareness, social awareness and a sense of agency. The exercises and rites have made me aware of my faults and flaws as well as my strengths, so now I can accept them and recognise the important part they have in my life. The resources have made my determination stronger and it created a positive energy for the future.

Posttraumatic Growth

Posttraumatic growth has proven to be an umbrella term for change and development through different kind of resources. The personal growth during the retreat emerged through resources like emotional competence, spiritual fitness and positive spiritual development. The positive personal growth in the study is rather a consequence of the changing resources the participants have been working with. One way to explain this is, it can be applied to a process of influence where one dimension of influence, change and affects the outcome of others, it is a resource transmission where one changed quality also affect others. This conclusion can be discerned from the results, where everybody has gained an increased emotional competence and also spiritual fitness. For example; in the social awareness there exists an empathetic ability, and this means that when the empathetic ability changes, it also change the social awareness in the same way, which also proved to be a connected to a positive non-religious spiritual development, in some cases.

What has been revealed about the posttraumatic growth is also a temporal dimension in the concept. Further, all the participants live in highly complex and stressful environments. Some of them mention a desire to escape from the stress and forced social roles:

*Expectations on the 30 days come from a desire to be liberated from the stress. To get away from all the forced social roles and attitudes you have in prison. There is a hope to be able to reconcile, to process difficulties you are stuck in.*

Five out of six participants, me included, describe traumatic experiences or severe crises with serious stressful conditions in their past and it is because of these experiences several of the participants have applied to the retreat, ÒMy main goal is to be able to process past experiences and addiction. I have come here to find forgiveness, to my parents above all.Ó The participant that said this had experienced a childhood full of deceit and abuse. The retreat leader also expresses difficulties and suffering as a starting point for the inner work and personal change, when she answer to the question on why the inmates apply to the retreat:

*You have those with anxiety or other psychiatric disorders or the people who want to make amend with the inner demons, as they say. This can be applied to shame and guilt. Some expresses a will to pick up the pieces in their life and others are just tired of this.*
It has been demonstrated, that it is out of difficulties and suffering personality growth begins for many people. Through the transmission tendencies of resources, positive personality growth can be achieved. Several of the participants describe an increased energy and faith about the future:

A lot has happened and I can see it still, and it is positive. I wake up happy and I fall asleep happy and I am pleased with my day. I think in another way and I see a brighter future than before.

What has been established is a positive and hopeful attitude towards the future. They have an aspiration to be a part of society, to have a sense of coherence and not to be marginalized. When we value what is important in life we take our starting points through different kind of decisions. From the material we can establish that the participants have done some existential re-evaluations. Strengthened determination is another dimension which is also presented in the spiritual fitness. Before, all the participants valued drugs and criminality highly, something that ended up with imprisonment. One of the participants says during an interview:

I come out with the attitude. I know that society is a tough opponent (Because he is registered in the criminal records and because of all the prejudice), but this is not going to stop me, I will do my work. I will become a normal citizen in society.

And in a former testament a participant describes ÑWith a renewed and positive attitude, I am looking forward to direct my life free from drugs. I have been liberated from my apathy and gained efficiency. Distinct external changes, which are supposed to reflect the persons inner growth have also been noted during the observation of some participants, from day 23 and fourth; new well-dressed hair, straight body posture, self-confidence, a healthier image and a energetic attitude, was described. Several of the participants showed an increased enthusiasm over things they have read. An increased strength has emerged to meet challenges in the future, a significant change to what has been. Earlier they had a focus on the past and expressed bitterness over injustices and authorities. Observations during the first couple of weeks showed a preoccupation with the past, but through conversations and observations during the last two weeks an enthusiasm towards the future emerged.

To sum it up, a posttraumatic growth has been initiated for the participants and myself, with a beginning in traumatic or stressful life situations and developmental stagnation or emotional inaccessibility. The changes have created a positive and meaningful attitude toward the future and increased energy to handle difficulties and future challenges. Several of the participants have gained renewed values in their life and a strengthened determination, they have made an existential re-evaluation, something that have changed attitudes about what is important in life. Finally a written statement from a former participant is presented about his positive changes and his good insights about his own person and changes:

I really want to strive for a non-judgemental attitude and to avoid premature conclusions. Here I have been reminded of things and feelings I have pushed aside in my life but have to care for and face for my inner change. These 30 days has become a part of my future, if I take good care of it.

He is describing a personality growth that is in a continuous progress, as long as the resources he developed are administered well.
DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study has been to investigate if inmates can make positive personality changes, through the correctional systems retreat activity. Of their own free will, inmates within the correctional system have participated in a 30 day Ignatian monastery retreat. They have lived under more strict living conditions than they are used to and their daily routines have been; to be in silence with the exception of 30 minutes conversation with the priest each day, spiritual exercises, meditation, relaxation activities and three common moments to pray. They have also been a part of different kind of rites, which have summarized the messages related to the different themes. Through different kind of activities and spiritual exercises all participants have come into contact with themselves on an emotional, spiritual and deeper internal level. The internal soul-searching process have been expressed as an increased emotional competence consisting of emotional resources as; emotional receptivity, emotional contact, emotional control and empathy. This has ended up in a state where negative feelings like hatred, anger and bitterness no longer consumes energy and strength like before. It has also contributed to more positive evaluations of themselves, the environment and the future. Further, it has also evolved an inner strength (spiritual fitness), containing inner resources as; self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, sense of agency and social awareness. They experience themselves as being in control over their life, reflecting over what is important in life, moral considerations and an increased positive responsibility for themselves and important others. Several of the participants build up or strengthened some form of positive spiritual development, something that later was used as a resource or instrument in the processing of their own person. The spiritual development resulted in a sense of coherence for the participants, something that made them find meaningfulness and being a part of something bigger. It is also recognized that all participants had some post trauma, crisis or other stressful events in the past. From these difficulties and developments of personal resources, a positive personal growth with increased optimism toward the future, increased energy for future difficulties or goals and a stronger will and determination was evolved. The participants have had an increased self-knowledge and they are presenting tendencies to re-evaluate values and different positioning in life.

Common critique on qualitative studies is the risk for subjectivity. A possible weakness in this study can be if I have predetermined ideas because of my own participation in a similar retreat. At the same time it is these experiences that contribute to the study’s strength, because of my deep knowledge and understanding of the participants’ experiences. The understanding of their reality is more extensive for me than it is for the independent researcher, something that probably affected the data collection as well as the analysis. To live with the participants could also have made me “go native”, making me blind to my own environment which have promoted tendencies to drop aspects that otherwise would be examined. Strengths in the study are that the information comes from multiple sources, which means that it is in-depth and extensive information on the problem and questions in hand. A weakness in the study is that we can not draw any causal conclusions and therefore only assume probable conclusions, in a methodological sense. A further weakness in the study is that it only contains men. The results in similar studies for women may not present the same results. The lack of negative results can come from the fact that every participant in the study made it through. Sometimes, in earlier retreats, participants have chosen to abort and go back to their ordinary prison. No such defections occurred this time.

The causality for good results concerning positive changes in this study can be due to the high motivation the participants had from the start. The foundation of the retreat builds on a participation of ones own free will, something we can interpret as a link to increased intrinsic motivation. In other kind of treatment programs within the correctional institution,
there is always some kind of extrinsic rewards for participation, better terms for transference between prisons (from high security to low security prisons), better terms for conditional sentences, etc. We can assume that these rewards only promote changes because of the rewards they give, no long term changes of the problem at hand. Through a participation in the retreat no such rewards or hopes is given, instead the participants are forced to live under more rigorous regulations during the retreat and afterwards they are sent back to their ordinary prison. In the selection process, only the most motivated people are chosen to participate. Usually, most people are unable to go through changes in their lives despite of existing motivation and will, but in this monastery every individual are given help and support to do these changes by their own hand. This is promoted in a safe, supportive and forgiving environment where every person is allowed to make changes and develop resources deep inside, resources to build a new life upon. Even if not everybody bring the criminal behaviours to an end, the overall well-being in life are supposed to increase, through improved coping strategies in life.

The retreat aims for the promotion of personal changes for people. Ignatius (Ebneter, 1983; Heidling, 2005) designed his spiritual exercises so that people would be able to achieve an increased self-knowledge and increased spiritual and emotional control. He stated that after a 30 day retreat, it is not the same person as before, it is a person that is in control over himself and his cravings, it is an individual with a higher understanding than before. He also claims, to find true spirituality you have to have good self-knowledge and have found your true inner self. This is also findings I have made for myself but something that can be difficult to identify in people immediately after a retreat. My spiritual development came in accordance with increased self-awareness and contact with my inner self, thus during subsequent retreats, but it certainly had the starting point during the 30-day-retreat. One of the participants also expresses ambivalence after this retreat when he states his non-existing spirituality, but on the other hand he says it is difficult to express in words what it is. This person also made a total lifestyle change which demands a lot of work by the person, to find his new true self. He is now only in the beginning of his process of change and a spirituality is something that can be developed in a later stage. Spirituality has been found to have correlations to increased well-being, meaning in life, decreased anger and increased problem solving ability (Kennedy, et al, 2002). The participants changes from the retreat have been more or less extensive personality and lifestyle changes. For all the participants it is important to interpret the changes as a developmental process which is dependent on how they administer different inner resources. The process of change do not end with the retreat, the participants gain many and new changes and resources to use in their coping with challenges and for their personal growth, for a long time ahead in life.

Many people that apply to retreats have a need to change or strengthen something within their inner self (Biggs, Felton, & Hirsch, 1976; Kennedy, et al, 2002; Kennedy, et al, 2003; Ronel & Elisha, 2011). The study presents different kind of needs for change and all of the participants that had some kind of trauma in their past have developed in a positive way. Even if they where prepared for change, they were more or less receptive to it. Their previous life, like destructive childhood experiences with guilt and shame were also factors which had been the cause of addiction, bad relationships and violent behaviours, something that is an obstacle for a positive personal growth. In the sensitization of sins and through meditation an emotional receptivity was brought to the surface. Emotional incompetence (Goleman, 1995) is closely connected to the difficulties the participants had and is therefore what precedes emotional receptivity. It is in this initial stage a posttraumatic growth begins. In accordance to a development of emotional competence it also promotes further personality growth and processes of inner resources. Emotional competence can be compared to Goleman Emotional intelligence. Why I chose competence instead of intelligence is because
intelligence usually is referred to some kind of norm, something that competence do not have any characteristics of. Competence is something the individual are working with, it describes an estimation of the possibilities to cope with himself and the environment. It is not something the individual have as a static characteristic, it is something dynamic and creational. Competence is something transparent, which is also dependent upon other factors.

In the earlier described study of Tedeschi and McNally (2011), some of the former prisoners of War from the Vietnam War reported positive personality growth as a result of their captivity. That also inmates in prisons are affected positively during a retreat, presents itself through changed inner resources and positive personality growth. We can see that it is an opportunity for a positive growth and change, something they are able to value as positive by themselves, it increases their motivation and strengthen decisions about change. The intrinsic motivation for development, strengthens the will for changes already made and the ones that are in progress (Miller & Rollnik, 2002), which will increase the possibilities to reduce recidivism in crime, and increase prevalence of healthy relations. The positive credentials from the staff about the retreats fantastic results and as a contributing factor to low recidivism in crime, seems according to the interpretation of the results as highly probable, even if it is not possible to make any conclusive statements about it, because of the absent statistical proof. In the study, the participants received the type of extensive changes that is accounted for in posttraumatic growth and the reported resources can be said to promote a safer and more human society where people are able to develop and socialize together with other people.

Among the most important instruments for the individual in posttraumatic growth is the creation of a narrative and a meaningfulness or general view around the traumatic or stressful experiences and feelings connected to them (Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998; Tedeschi and McNally, 2011). According to the study, the silence promoted these changes because of the inevitable processing of everything in life. The interpretation is that the silence is a crucial instrument in the posttraumatic growth, when a life-narrative is created due to reflections over their life. During the retreat, the participants processed positive and healthy values through stories and quotations from the Bible and in spiritual exercises, something which brings up existential questions to relate to in the processing of the own life-narrative. The processing of the life-story and or difficulties in life seemed to be important in the possibility for change and positive personality growth. It has been established that the influence on interpretations and appraisals of the future, is dependent on interpretations and affect about our past. A big part in this is situated in the forgiveness and evaluations the individual make of himself. Spirituality also demonstrated an association with forgiveness and an inner strength, spiritual fitness. In people meaning-making process and well-being in life several of the participants found support and forgiveness from a God whereas others found their support and interpretation of spirituality in healthy relations and good role models. The results present how a positive personality growth and a sense of coherence produce optimistic attitudes to the future and increased energy to cope with it.

The benefits of the retreat are; the personal growth for the inmates but also the potential decreased criminal recidivism and during the time of incarceration, decreased misconduct. The knowledge from the study material and the results can further be used in the work of development and change of different kind of treatment programs and activities of influence. When the work is concentrated on their strengths and to the development of positive qualities within, when the spotlight is not on their problems or negative qualities, defence mechanisms do not activate in the face of change. During the retreat the participants express a sense of agency in which they admit and express an awareness over their own shortcomings and a personal responsibility for their change. This makes the retreat to an extremely good aid in the preventive work against addiction and criminal behaviour, indirectly.
Future Research

The study opens up for future research related to treatment and rehabilitating purposes, in a salutogenic kind of way, within the correctional system. Positive psychological change opens up for a new way to achieve lifestyle changes.

Because of the few participants in the study, I find it appropriate to accommodate further studies within the correctional institution on the positive processes of change for inmates. Because there were only men in the participant pool, it also legitimizes further studies in the same vein for incarcerated women. Further, there is no study on former inmates that have participated in retreats and that have left the correctional institution. Future research should in the light of this investigate the results for participants in a longitudinal perspective. Further, no causal relationships is established here, something that leaves the door open for this kind of research in the future.

Through the correctional institution’s monastery retreat, positive results have been presented for inmates’ process of change, in the form of posttraumatic growth. Further research in this field could be able to apply the same methods to other areas of use. Researchers and psychologists could for example try to apply this kind of retreat and retreat activities and personality growth to the increasing number of people suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder.
REFERENCES


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