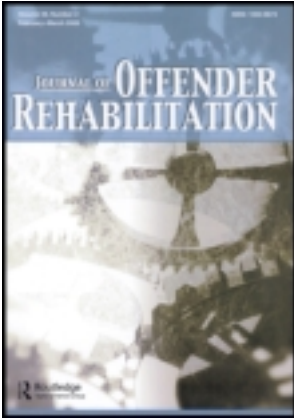


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## Journal of Offender Rehabilitation

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wjor20>

### “I Used to Be an Offender—Now I'm a Defender” : Positive Psychology Approaches in the Facilitation of Posttraumatic Growth in Offenders

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Version of record first published: 23 Aug 2012

To cite this article: Ann Mapham & Kate Hefferon (2012): “I Used to Be an Offender—Now I'm a Defender” : Positive Psychology Approaches in the Facilitation of Posttraumatic Growth in Offenders, *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 51:6, 389-413

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2012.683239>

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## **“I Used to Be an Offender—Now I’m a Defender”: Positive Psychology Approaches in the Facilitation of Posttraumatic Growth in Offenders**

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*This study identifies positive psychology concepts and interventions in an offender rehabilitation program in South Africa. The concepts and interventions are cross-referenced to the literature and are found to conform to the principles of the good lives–desistance model (Laws & Ward, 2011). The study uses inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to assess the impact of the program on fourteen ex-offenders and proposes an answer to the question, “What does desistance look like?” (Maruna, 2001). In this study it appears that desistance may be related to posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi, 2011), and this raises the possibility that rehabilitation programs that encourage posttraumatic growth could be effective in facilitating desistance. Further research is recommended into programs that use positive psychology interventions and posttraumatic growth methods due to the fact that existing valid programs may be at risk of being rejected by authorities who use the “what works” and risks need responsivity model (Bonta & Andrews, 2007) as a benchmark.*

**KEYWORDS** *desistance, positive psychology interventions, posttraumatic growth, offender rehabilitation*

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## INTRODUCTION

After the horrors of the Second World War, the field of psychology focused on relieving the suffering that resulted from conflict. Until a decade ago, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) was the psychologist's bible, which fixated on diagnosing disorders, maladaptive behaviors, and psychosocial deficits in clients (Seligman, 2005).

The field of offender rehabilitation has similarly focused on all that was wrong with the offender both psychologically and socially (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). The risk need responsivity (RNR) model of rehabilitation is currently accepted as the benchmark against which rehabilitation programs should be measured and tested (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). Its focus is firstly on reducing and managing risk to the community and secondly on studying the process of relapse or reoffending (Ward & Mann, 2004). Despite the collective acknowledgement that the RNR model is currently the premier model in the field of rehabilitation, many researchers have challenged the basic assumptions of the RNR model (Brayford, Cowe, & Deering, 2010; Burnett & Maruna, 2004; Maruna, 2010; Patterson & Joseph, 2007; Ward & Marshall, 2007).

Criticisms of the RNR model include that it fails to take into account the fact that there are certain conditions that increase people's level of well-being and reduce their chances of inflicting or experiencing harm (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Emmons, 1999). The focus on the prevention of harm to the community neglects the question of what motivates offenders and provides insufficient attention to the individual as a whole; it fails to recognize personal strivings or agency and self-narratives which have the most potential for change over the course of a life (McAdams, 1994, 2006); and it tends to isolate the offender because of his perceived risk to society whereas integration and relatedness are crucial in encouraging desistance (Brayford et al., 2010; Laws & Ward, 2011). However, the expanded RNR model (Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2011) is responsive to the criticisms of the RNR model and now advocates taking account of the offenders' personal strengths and motivations and integrating them into the rehabilitation efforts.

Nevertheless, the RNR model explicitly underplays the contextual nature of human behavior (Ward & Maruna, 2007). Gilligan (2000) addressed the significance of the impact of the offender's social context offering a compelling argument for a more compassionate approach than is implicit in the RNR model. He suggested that the universal cause of violent behavior stems from being overwhelmed by feelings of shame and humiliation, as well as being insulted, disrespected, ridiculed or rejected by others, or treated as inferior or unimportant.

Positive psychology may be described as the science of human flourishing (Seligman, 2011). Just over a decade ago a group of psychologists prompted a seismic shift in the field of psychology when they asked, "What does flourishing look like?" (Seligman, 2011). The question gave birth to the positive psychology movement and the impact of the resultant substantial body of literature and research is being felt in the area of offender rehabilitation (Brayford et al., 2010). Thus, this new focus on flourishing is likely to yield fresh answers in the field of offender rehabilitation. The trend to develop ever more sophisticated assessment tools which claimed to predict offender future behavior (Bonta & Andrews, 2007) is shifting and answers are being sought to a more positive question, "What does desistance look like?"<sup>1</sup> (Laws & Ward, 2011; Maruna, 2001).

In support of this shift, Saleebey (2006) suggested that a focus on strengths and resilience might be more effective than a deficit approach in the area of the rehabilitation of offenders. Preoccupation with problems and pathologies may produce an impressive amount of technical and theoretical writing but may be less valuable at actually helping clients change their direction. Traditionally, the therapeutic relationship in offender rehabilitation has been somewhat patronizing and based on the assumption that the therapist has the empirically grounded answers.

The resilience literature challenges the assumption that only the experts know what is best for their clients and that curing, healing, or transformation comes exclusively from outside sources. Self-regeneration is an intrinsic life support system (Werner & Smith, 1992). Darwin believed that man is wired to be kind and that sympathy and compassion are man's strongest emotions (as cited in Keltner, 2009). This evolutionary tendency to be compassionate can be compromised by trauma, environmental toxins, and, not least, by some professional rehabilitation practices (Saleebey, 2006). Thus, the therapeutic alliance is key and healing occurs when the healer or the individual makes an alliance with, or instigates the power of, the organism to restore itself (Brayford et al., 2010; Pelletier, 2000).

### An Alternative Approach: The Good Lives Model (GLM and GLM-D)

The good lives model (GLM) is a positive psychology, strengths-based model based on three principles aligned with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). It was developed as an alternative to the RNR model (Laws & Ward, 2011; Ward & Mann, 2004). Firstly, the GLM assumes that offenders are involved in the pursuit of "primary human goods," which are sought for their own sake (e.g., relationships, mastery experiences, a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose, and autonomy). The offender may seek to satisfy these needs in antisocial ways because of a lack of internal skills and external

conditions. The GLM also speaks of “secondary goods,” which provide the concrete means of supplying primary goods. For example, joining a sports team or church or Khulisa support group might satisfy the “primary good” of belonging to a community.

Secondly, the GLM holds that therapeutic actions that promote approach goals will also help secure avoidance goals. In other words, if offenders experience well-being (or flourish) they will behave in a prosocial way and move away from crime.

Thirdly, it is easier to motivate individuals to change their offense-related characteristics by focusing on the perceived benefits (primary goods) they enjoy as a result of offending and exploring more appropriate ways to achieve what is of value to them.

In a recent development, the GLM has widened its focus to take account of desistance research, hence the good lives-desistance model (GLM-D; Brayford et al., 2010; Laws & Ward, 2011; Maruna, 2001). The GLM-D approach focuses on developing offenders’ well-being and search for meaning and fulfillment, which has been found to be consistent with desistance. This aligns with the most recent definition of flourishing as a state that is characterized by positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (Seligman, 2011).

Traditionally, positive psychology has neglected working with and/or studying deviant members of society, such as offenders. This study aims to assess the impact of positive psychology concepts and interventions offered within a South African (and now U.K.-based) offender rehabilitation program, Silence the Violence (STV). STV was developed by a nongovernment organization, Khulisa.

## METHOD

### Design

The study aimed to explore the impact of Khulisa’s STV program on 14 graduates. STV is a 4-day program designed to achieve desistance from crime. It may also be delivered as an intervention of 21 contact hours over 7 weeks. It is delivered by Khulisa-trained facilitators in prison or in Khulisa offices to a group of offenders who attend voluntarily. It involves an understanding of the cycle of violence. Participants draw a mask of their violent self and tell the group what it means and how they came to adopt it. They then symbolically destroy the mask and recognize that they have a “true self” behind the violent mask. They experience relief when they disclose to the group hitherto closely guarded secrets. Finally, they recap the journey they went on in the STV course and reflect on their purpose going forward.

Thematic analysis was chosen because it is a research tool that can produce rich, detailed, and yet complex data if a six-phase approach is

observed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis seeks to inductively analyze the reported experiences and perspectives of the participants themselves (Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999). The participants' perspective was sought in order to gain a realistic sense of what the program had achieved rather than what the facilitators might hope it would achieve. However, the method acknowledges that the researcher is active in the research process and themes do not just "emerge."

## Participants

A sample of 20 convicted offenders, who had done STV in the past 2 to 5 years either in prison or shortly after their release from prison, were called by the Khulisa office and invited to assist a foreign researcher who was interested in their experience of the STV program. It was presented as an opportunity to "give back" to Khulisa. They would be reimbursed for their transportation costs and would receive a modest packed lunch. No incentives to participate were offered. There were 11 men and three women whose ages ranged from 22 to 36 years. All had been convicted of serious crimes including: bank fraud, armed house breaking, hijacking, robbery, and murder. Their sentences ranged from 2 to 18 years. Some were repeat offenders who had been in and out of jail a number of times. At the time of the interview, they had been out of jail for between 2 and 5 years.

## Procedure

Participation in the research was voluntary. Participants understood that the study sought to explore their experience of the STV program and to know whether they would recommend the program for others. Interviews were semi structured and centered around two questions: "What do you remember of the STV program?" and "What was the impact of the program on you?"

## Analysis

Thematic analysis of the interviews was used to identify, analyze, and report on repeated patterns of meaning or themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher used several systematic steps in order to produce an insightful analysis of the research question. First, the researcher transcribed the data and read over the manuscripts several times in order to become familiar with it. Continuous revision and feedback was sought from an expert researcher in regular one-on-one meetings and also by fellow peers as recommended by Elliott et al. (1999). From this, clear title and delimitative themes were generated producing a theme report (see Table 1). The interpretation of the themes is based on positive psychology concepts gained

**TABLE 1** Main and Sub Themes

Theme	Sub theme	Definition	Sub theme score	Theme total
Relationship	Praise for Khulisa	Expressions of praise and indebtedness to Khulisa—for the STV program, for the facilitators, for the ongoing support Khulisa offers—Khulisa is like family. Also expressions of desire that others benefit from Khulisa's programs. Working collaboratively with clients results in stronger therapeutic alliance—displays of empathy, warmth, encouragement, and reward for progress facilitate the change process.	14	50
	Relationships	New appreciation and sense of responsibility for family members; evidence of social competence; moving towards new friendships, romantic relationships and new connections with the community (church); and moving away from deviant peer associations. Achievement of approach social goals.	14	
	Giving back	The concern for and commitment to promoting the next generation, manifested through parenting, teaching, mentoring, and generating products and outcomes that aim to benefit youth and foster the development and wellbeing of individuals and communities that will outlive the self (McAdams and De St. Austin, 1998); Described as Generativity by Maruna (2001).	14	
	Church	New membership of church satisfies need to belong, regular church attendance and participation in religious education programs offered by churches.	8	
Emotional intelligence	Empathy	The intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another (e.g. development of compassion and understanding of victim impact; family pain resulting from their criminal activity; compassion for members of the group as they tell their stories).	13	43
	Anger management	Self-regulation in regard to provocation to anger; remarkable in the light of research that suggests that enhancing self regulation in later life is rare (Gottredson & Hirschi, 1995).	12	
	Self-disclosure	High (and low) disclosure of their deepest secrets and/or traumatic experiences to the group; takes place in nonjudgmental, safe space where confidentiality ensured. Results in benefits akin to private writing disclosure described by Pennebaker, 1997. Benefits enhanced by group setting (Hefferon et al., 2008).	6	
	Responsibility for crime	New insight into the impact of their crime on others and acceptance of the justice of their punishment, without resentment.	5	
	Sensitivity to violence	New awareness of and sensitivity to verbal, emotional, and physical violence in themselves and in others, which results in more robust capacity to resist pressures to engage in violence.	7	

New identity	New identity	Internal and external conditions are put in place and the individual's sense of who he fundamentally is begins to change (Ward & Maruna, 2007, p. 164).	14	41
	Mask versus true self	Awareness of the discrepancy between their violent mask and their true self; provides a self narrative which explains their criminal pasts and also provides them with an understanding/explanation as to why they are not like that anymore (Maruna, 2001, p. 7).	10	
	New sense of right versus wrong	Development of awareness of their own behaviour being damaging to others, and resultant refusal to respond to provocation.	7	
	Self-awareness	Element of Emotional Intelligence; increases capacity for choice; resilience is empowering.	10	
Agency	Agency	Four aspects identified by Maruna (2001, p. 173): self mastery; Status/victory (status among peers); achievement/responsibility; empowerment. Feeling strong and finding hidden abilities and strengths as in post traumatic growth. Empowered by awareness that only they can take charge of their lives, their rehabilitation (has the element of autonomy as in self determination theory).	10	20
	Optimism	Sense of optimism and self-efficacy which is useful for sustaining desistance (Maruna, 2001 p. 105). Sometimes it is an unrealistic optimism which is a massive defence against reality. Optimists more likely to benefit from trauma than pessimists (Haidt, 2006, p. 146).	10	



**TABLE 2** Positive Psychology Interventions and Concepts in Silence the Violence

Positive psychology concepts & interventions	Researcher	Where found in STV program
Flow: Eight conditions necessary: goals are clear; feedback immediate; balance between skill and challenge; concentration deepens; the present is what matters; control is no problem; the sense of time is altered; loss of ego.	Csikszentmihalyi (2002)	All eight conditions for flow met by the program
Positive emotions: Broaden awareness and build psychological resources—joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, love, amusement, inspiration, and awe.	Fredrickson (2009); Folkman & Moskowitz (2000)	All 10 positive emotions mentioned by participants; many appreciation opportunities; icebreakers, which are fun
Disclosure	Pennebaker (1997)	Secrets shared in circle; masks described in circle
Creative interventions: Mask; art therapy Music; facilitates PE	Malchiodi (2010) MAPP lectures by Thomson (2011)	Mask making, hat-making sessions Evocative music and lyrics throughout program
Film	Niemiec & Wedding (2008); Bandura (1989)	Films like <i>Slum Dog Millionaire</i> or <i>Tosti</i> watched & discussed
Poetry, myths, stories Drama therapy	Trounstine & Waxler (2005) Jones (2007)	Poems & myths read & discussed Dramas created & performed to illustrate levels of violence and cycles of violence
Group dynamic: Circles of support	Hefferon et al. (2008); Bates (2005); Baldwin (1998)	Group throughout creates sense of belonging; support; camaraderie; develops emotional intelligence; enhances disclosure

Self Determination theory; Autonomy, mastery, relatedness. Engagement and meaning are at the heart of self-determination theory (SDT), another major approach to well-being. For well-researched reasons, SDT argues that human beings thrive when basic needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are being fulfilled. Narrative therapy	Deci & Ryan (2000)	The conditions for SDT have been met. Participation is invited and voluntary throughout.
Emotional intelligence	McAdams (2004); Maruna (2001)	Mask- and hat-making facilitate development of new redemptive narrative
Seven aspects of resilience: emotional regulation; impulse control; optimism; causal analysis; empathy; self-efficacy; reaching out.	Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso (2004); Goleman (1996)	Developed through combination of all interventions; group disclosure; engagement in the stories of their peers. All 7 aspects of resilience developed through group discussions & disclosures
PERMA Positive emotions, Engagement; Relationships; Meaning; Achievement or mastery	Reivich & Shatte (2002)	
Posttraumatic Growth	Seligman (2001)	All seven aspects of PERMA achieved, e.g. mastery in psychological growth
Strong Therapeutic Alliance	Hefferon et al. (2008); Tedeschi (2011)	All elements of Tedeschi's program for PTG present in STV program Relationship is warm, respectful, and collaborative
Growth mindset	Brayford et al. (2010); Martin, Garske & Davis, (2000) Dweck (2000)	Flow is consistent with valuing process and effort. Many transfer this and adopt growth mindset going forward.
Strengths-based approach	Lindley (2008); Peterson & Seligman (2004)	Emphasis on importance of true self, which is virtuous and comprised of strengths
Man is born to be good	Keltner (2009)	Assumption that true self is virtuous and is consistent with Darwin's assertion that man is wired to be compassionate and kind

from the literature (Tedeschi, 2011; Laws & Ward, 2011; Maruna, 2001; Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2005; Seligman, 2011).

## RESULTS<sup>2</sup>

The researcher identified four main themes in the participants' response to the STV program. These included: relationships, emotional intelligence, new identity, and agency. Table 1 presents the definitions and frequency<sup>3</sup> of each theme and sub theme recounting 14 perpetrators' experience of the STV program.

Table 2 demonstrates several positive psychology elements identified by the authors in the STV program.

The next section will review the identified positive psychological theories within the program before highlighting the overarching theme, posttraumatic growth (PTG), and presenting the four main themes in relation to PTG. PTG is defined as using a traumatic experience as a springboard to achieve a higher level of functioning than existed before the trauma (Linley & Joseph, 2009). To the best of our knowledge PTG has never before been looked at within this population.

Overall, the entire STV program facilitated a state of flow, which, through the balance of skill and challenge, the individual's sense of self is strengthened and the person feels that they become much more than he or she was before. Flow is valuable in therapy in that it enables the individuals to identify activities that they enjoy and learn how to invest their attention in these activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). STV also engaged the ten forms of positivity (e.g., love, gratitude, hope), which are known to broaden people's attention, thinking, and behavioral repertoires and build psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2009). Repeated studies have shown that experiencing positive emotions in the midst of trauma is associated with an increase in the likelihood of finding positive meaning in the future (a measure of PTG; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003; Moskowitz, 2001).

STV employs a wide selection of creative art, drama, film, and music interventions that have been shown to be therapeutic and to positively affect behavior (Bandura, 1989; Brayford et al., 2010; Jones, 2007; Malchiodi, 2010; Tedeschi, 2011). STV also employs a variation of the rehabilitation program "Changing Lives Through Literature," which claims an 80% desistance rate (Trounstine & Waxler, 2005). In addition, STV appreciates different learning styles and develops different intelligences especially linguistics, musical, kinaesthetic and inter personal and intra personal (Gardner, 2011).

The STV program also serendipitously employed interventions akin to the five employed in the program to facilitate PTG in traumatized soldiers in the U.S. army (Tedeschi, 2011). These include: understanding the seismic

nature of the trauma; enhancing emotional regulation; constructive self-disclosure; a strong therapeutic alliance; creating a trauma narrative with PTG domains; and developing life principles that enhance resilience. Overall, each of the participants ( $n = 14$ ) displayed evidence of experiencing some level of posttraumatic growth. They saw new possibilities for themselves, saying that they were "born again," on a "new path," and that the course was "life-changing." For example, Lawrence had a new sense of being in control of his life, saying:

You feel so very strong, ma'am, to take that action to practice whatever that I was learning. I must took it into practice to my own life ... little by little you gonna see a improving ... little by little in your life. One day you gonna be complete.

Many expressed a zest for life that contrasted with the way they had "wasted" their lives before; some explicitly said to be alive mattered more than having material things. For example, Steven says he feels happy:

When I wake up in the morning feeling that I'm still alive. Seeing the people I love, their life ... every day I am happy. Every day! Everyday I grow bigger!

Their relationships with their families had changed for the better. They wanted to take care of parents and children whereas they had neglected them in the past. For example, Osmand says:

I didn't realize before that my family were so caring to me. They needed me. And they didn't see that (receive that from me) because ... drugs, those wrong doings, housebreaking.

Furthermore, more than half had developed a spiritual aspect to their lives in becoming members of a church. In response to being asked, "What gives you strength?", Donna said:

What I can say is it's God. I am busy with Bible school at the moment. So that is also helping me.

The results may be seen as reflecting all five possible domains of post-traumatic growth identified in the literature (Tedeschi, 2011). Posttraumatic growth is characterized by the emergence of new priorities and the recognition of new possibilities, improved personal relationships, a greater sense of personal strength, spiritual development, and a new appreciation of life. The next section will delve deeper into the main themes and their relationship with PTG.

## Main Themes

All participants experienced an improvement in relationships; evidence of the development of emotional intelligence; they spoke of a new identity often described as their “real self” and all developed agency or a sense of being in control of their lives. The four main themes identified in the participants were found to be closely related to desistance as described by Maruna (2001). Desisting offenders are distinguishable from persistent offenders in three ways:

- They develop a new redemptive narrative (a new identity);
- they express a desire to make amends and give back to their families or communities; and
- they experience “agency”—feel empowered and in control of their lives.

## RELATIONSHIPS

*Praise for Khulisa.* A strong therapeutic alliance<sup>4</sup> was evident through the huge praise for the STV program and the perceived difference it had made to their lives. Maruna argued that the best evidence of a project’s effectiveness is whether participants feel some allegiance to it (S. Maruna, personal communication, August 9, 2011). The comments that follow may be regarded as expressive of what was generally experienced. For example, Lawrence expressed his passion and commitment to the new way of life when he said, “I live, I live, I live STV ma’am.”

Steven talked of the transformational impact of the program on him, and said:

I never wanted changes in my life. Up until Khulisa. It really did give me Light. It really give me a Light ... OK. What I can say is that Khulisa made me Somebody out of Nobody.”

John described the therapeutic alliance in glowing terms:

Khulisa ... has faith in you, you see. Khulisa gives you a second chance in life, you see. Yes. And Khulisa help you to change your ways to ... It’s a new start, with a new beginning ... you see. Yes. You must leave all the past things, past bad things. You must now ... it teaches you to have faith in yourself. Have self-esteem you see.

Thandi is appreciative of the altruistic motivation behind Khulisa program and the benefit she and others have derived and she says, “The person who do [created] that program [STV], you make us feel free.”

Lawrie is empowered by the sense that he belongs to a good and strong organization and says, “It [STV] teach me a lot of things, ma’am. I am proud of STV ma’am. So very proud.”

The therapeutic alliance is key in the journey towards desistance and PTG (Laws & Ward, 2011; Tedeschi, 2011). STV is an instrumental approach, where connections with family, church, and community are encouraged. Offenders need communities and relationships to which they have responsibilities and within which they can learn to add value to a wider society, as well as learning to become active social agents determining their own lives (Brayford et al., 2010).

*Interrelationships/Intrarelationsips.* All of the participants reported an improvement in the quality of their relationships with their families. They were also grateful for the relationships that developed in the group. They had a desire to relate to their communities in a positive way (e.g., mentoring youth, joining churches) as well as taking advantage of the social and learning opportunities offered. Many said that they had moved away from old friends who were still involved in crime but said they still loved them and wanted them to see the "light" as they had. One spoke touchingly of the development of a relationship that he hoped would lead to marriage. Lawrie had met up with a girl who has known him since he was at school and who knew he had been involved with crime since he was 10 years old. He was able to connect with her and share his deepest thoughts and feelings:

We are sharing the things of life. Whatever I'm learning I'm summarizing to her whatever I'm learning here. Yes, ma'am. She was the one, that make me to to believe in myself more than before. I did put some *lobola* by her parents [payment by suitor to parents of bride, a Zulu tradition].

Steven speaks of the bond that developed between him and others in the group and how this experience taught him to trust people again:

Actually when I meet with the guys whom I was with at the [Khulisa] class I guess I'm fulfilled [laughs]. They were supporting. Even now they are supporting. Those guys are like my brothers. Those guys are like my father ... That is the thing that I've learned in life, you must learn to trust people.

Many of the participants spoke of a new responsible attitude and relationship with their communities. Many appreciated that their communities could see that they had changed. Osmand wants his community to be peaceful and is being proactive in this regard. He says:

They have been fighting there by my street but I managed to separate them ... I just say, "Now guys, don't be like this. It's not done like this" ... and they listen to me.

Ephraim has repaired his relationship with his victim through a restorative justice program and says:

OK. It's like the one I violated, we like greet another ... and we talk almost always when we meet ... because he has forgiven me and every time, because I have offered my apology. For that is what we did on the course.

The participants were empowered and enthused with new optimism and relief at being reconnected with their communities. This relates to the African idea of *Ubuntu*, which says "I am a person because of other people."

*Giving Back.* Participants showed a desire to give back to their families and communities, sometimes termed *generativity* (Maruna, 2001). Positive relationships, especially with family, serve as a deterrent to involvement in crime (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Laws & Ward, 2011). Furthermore, playing a positive role in the community is also indicative of the change in priorities and philosophy, which is characteristic of PTG (Linley & Joseph, 2009).

From a desistance point of view, rehabilitation is as much about promoting social integration and a sense of meaning as it is about risk containment. The GLM-D model holds that programs that help offenders acquire the social, psychological, and cultural resources necessary to participate meaningfully in the life of the community will automatically result in reduced reoffending rates. All human beings require help from other people in order to flourish thus it makes sense to get help in the process of desisting from crime (Laws & Ward, 2011; McNeill, 2004; Porporino, 2008).

According to Maruna (2001), the redemption script begins by establishing the goodness and conventionality of the offender and he now seeks to "give something back" to society. The mask intervention used in STV facilitated the creation of a redemptive script. It is also consistent with desisting offenders who typically move from being a model of degeneracy and vice to being a generative role model. Ephraim laughed and said, "I used to be an offender, now I am a defender!"

#### EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EI)

Participants were seen to develop EI as they became sensitive to the experiences, feelings, thoughts and attitudes of others. They felt the pain of the others in the group when they listened to their secrets and when they heard the stories that lay behind the masks that their fellow group members had created.

*Empathy.* The participants recounted developing compassion for their victims and for their family's pain caused by their criminal activity. For example, Isaiah felt the pain of his fellow participant when he says:

She lost her job! She'll never get it back. They will see the [criminal] record there ... I felt sorry for the other people [in the group] ... including mine [myself]. Yes, including my [me].

*Anger Management.* Mastery in the area of anger management, an aspect of self-regulation, was strongly represented in the data. Donna has matured and developed a capacity to take responsibility for her actions, which she expresses by saying:

Before I was angry with the world. And now I understand you know, why I have to go through what I'm going through because of my own deeds. I can't blame the next person for what I did.

Osmand has learned to use and manage his own emotions and the emotions of others, so he said, "I did manage to accept each and every language and behavior; to cool down people who is high in emotion. Even to sooth the one who is in pain."

Fortunate has had a paradigm shift in regard to his victims. He is aware of the victim as a person and has a new sense of responsibility and compassion towards them. He says:

When you rob people? You must be aggressive. And you don't think that how did you affect that person after you have done it. But after you have done this program you will know that you are ... actually you are killing that person. He must attend some counselings [sic] because you are pointing guns you see! This thing is frightening.

Richard developed self-awareness and realized that being an armed hijacker was enormously stressful and traumatic. He realized that his basic needs were not being met by his criminal behavior and this is an important trigger for desistance (Brayford et al., 2010), "People say, 'Ja, in a minute you are getting 100,000' [money]. OK, that may be ... but you know ... it drains you, it drains you a lot."

The second principle of the GML (Laws & Ward, 2011) says that by increasing positive relationships you automatically reduce the chance of antisocial behavior. The data showed an increase in well-being and positive relationships. As Fortunate says, "You can't smile when you rob someone or they won't give it to you."

The development of EI improves an individual's social effectiveness as a person high in EI is less likely to engage in problem behaviors and avoid self-destructive negative behaviors like excessive drinking, drug abuse, and violent behavior (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). The development of self-regulation, which is an element of resilience, was strongly represented in the data especially with regards to anger management, although some research has suggested that enhancing self-regulation in later life is rare (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1995).

*Self-disclosure.* The participants had all experienced social isolation due to experiencing early childhood traumatic events that they kept secret. There is robust evidence to show that social support networks provide comfort and relief and may suggest fresh options for the construction of new post trauma schemas



(Linley & Joseph, 2009). STV created the opportunity for self-disclosure and this encouraged the participants to rebuild social connections (Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2005). The group setting can allow participants to share a common experience and feel “normal” (Hefferon, Greal, & Mutrie, 2008). The STV participants were also the agents of change for the others in the group in that they helped their peers by offering their support (Brayford et al., 2010).

#### NEW IDENTITY

The development of a greater sense of personal strength and resultant new identity or self-concept emerged as a distinct domain in the graduates of the STV program. They spoke passionately about the fact that they had been given a second chance, “it made me a changed somebody.” Fortunate felt that he could discard his old criminal self and adopt a new “core self”; (Maruna, 2001), “This is the real Fortunate, not the one before.”

Ephraim gained insight into how he became caught up in crime and how he was energized by the opportunity to create a new narrative and to “make good”:

STV. What I like is it only deals with awareness. Because like it says, mmm we've got two side. Yes, the Dark side and the True side. So the dark side it is when you act in front of people to fit in that scheme. That is the dark side. It is not the “true you”. You are just trying to fit there. That is what I did I tried to fit with my friend and that is why I went to prison. So in the “True side” you, the true side is when you are really you now. Say, “No!” This is what I am ... Yeh. And in the True side I like it. I like it because when you come to yourself it is when you are creative.

Meshack's tone of voice speaks of horror at the deeds associated with his violent mask and he welcomes his new separation from his “old self”:

Yes! I destroyed that mask. I am born again now. I am coming to this side. I am no more at that stage of that mask.

When a long term offender says he is a new person or born again, he is talking about an enormous transformation and he needs a coherent narrative to explain and justify this turnaround to himself as well as to others (Lofland, 1969). The desisting person's self-story has to make desistance a logical necessity (Maruna, 2001).

*Mask Versus True Self.* Personal strivings and self-narratives (McAdams, 1994) have been identified as the domains where change can be facilitated most easily. The mask versus true-self intervention in STV provided the framework for building a compelling new “redemptive narrative” (Maruna, 2011). Participants became aware of the discrepancy between their violent mask and their true self and this cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) provided the motivation to reconcile the two. The idea that the violent

mask hid their true self provides the strategy for building a new self-narrative, which explains their criminal past and also provides them with an explanation as to why they are not like that anymore. The desistance literature refers to desisting exoffenders reaching back to re-establish with an "old me" and of reverting to an innocent "unspoiled identity" (Maruna, 2001).

The narrative of the desisting offender has been consistently found to have three elements: A "true self" with a set of core beliefs; an optimistic sense of having personal control over their destiny; and a desire to be productive and give something back to society (Burnett, 1992; Maruna, 2001; Shover, 1996). These elements of the desisting offenders overlap with the three categories of PTG, which are a new self-concept with the discovery of hidden strengths and abilities; strengthened relationships, and new priorities (Hanson, 2011; Tedeschi, 2011).

In addition to the mask intervention and the circle activities, the participants' identity changes in a subtle way when he becomes simultaneously someone worth listening to and someone worth confiding in; someone to be trusted with the deep, closely held secrets of their peers. Giving offenders the opportunity to help others and at the same time to produce something constructive for themselves appears to be a particularly useful way to engage offenders in the process of creating new nonoffending identities for themselves (Brayford et al., 2010).

#### AGENCY

There was a general expression of optimism, self-efficacy, and enthusiasm about their future that was touching even though it seemed sometimes unrealistic to the researchers. All participants experienced a new sense of having control over their lives. Some found that they could now control their anger, giving them a sense of mastery. Some felt liberated by having opened up and expressed themselves in the group. Many of the participants spoke of how they had suffered from low self-esteem and how the STV program had given them high self-esteem. For example, Richard referred to the momentum that compels him to keep on his new path of desistance in spite of the dangers and challenges it involves:

Buffaloes, you know when the season change, because if it be dry they have to move in another area where they'll be hotter ... Irrespective they know that there will be lions you know ... waiting ... but for the fact that they need the change.

Steven was optimistic, inspired, and motivated by the hope of becoming a worthwhile person:

It [Khulisa] really did give me Light. It really give me a Light. That light show me that there is still tomorrow. There is still tomorrow. And behind

my act, behind whatever I did, I can be Somebody ... STV helped you know who you are.

Ephraim was aware that he could choose desistance and that he was no longer a helpless victim, "So you either choose the Dark side or you choose the True side. And every time you choose the True side you yourself, you know where you are going."

John also talked about the inner strength he has developed and the sense that he had the power to make autonomous decisions, "It teaches you to have faith in yourself. Have self-esteem you see. Yes. To believe in yourself, not relying on other people."

Maruna (2001) described desisting offenders' sense of control over their lives as "agency," which has four elements: (a) self-mastery (e.g., Donna has learned anger management); (b) status or recognition (e.g., Isaiah is now a defender instead of an offender); (c) achievement or responsibility (e.g., Richard assisted in a restorative justice program that he says was the "most highlight of my life"); and (d) empowerment (e.g., the participants all felt part of something bigger and stronger than themselves, such as Khulisa or their church).

Feeling strong and finding hidden abilities and personal strengths is characteristic of PTG. The participants were empowered by the new awareness that only they can take charge of their lives and their rehabilitation. Agency is essential for both desistance and PTG. People, including offenders, must have a robust sense of personal efficacy to sustain the perseverant effort needed to succeed (Bandura, 1989).

Thus the criminogenic factors in these high-risk offenders—violence, aggression, lack of self-control—were moderated by the STV program when they came to understand their violent selves and were able to separate their violent side from their authentic side. The participants presented here became aware of the impact on their victims, considered how to make amends and plan a positive road ahead, which is in line with the GLM-D.

## CONCLUSION

A previously conducted rigorous assessment of STV (Graham-Kevan, 2009), although appreciative of some aspects of the program, reported that it lacked theoretical underpinning. This study, however, found that the positive psychological interventions (Table 2) in the STV program were aligned with the GLM-D model. In addition, the study found that elements in the STV program corresponded to the features of Tedeschi's PTG program (Tedeschi, 2011), which were found to be effective in encouraging PTG in traumatized war veterans.

The data showed that these 14 offenders responded positively to the STV intervention; however, generalization of the findings is difficult due to

the fact that this was an exploratory qualitative research design (Hefferon et al., 2008). Despite this, the consistent response from the heterogeneous group of participants makes the results noteworthy. Overall, STV has a significant and positive impact on attendees, which is supported by the 80% desistance rate statistics from the South African branch (Khulisa Social Solutions, 2011).

The study showed that Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) were effective for these 14 offenders and led to PTG. Although counterintuitive, this is consistent with the growing body of evidence that indicates that PPIs are just as affective for disadvantaged individuals as for persons in the "free world" (Akhtar & Boniwell, 2010; Brayford et al, 2010; Saleebey, 2006).

Ultimately, the study challenges the stereotypical profile of the offender by suggesting that in some ways they themselves are traumatized individuals. The participants in the study experienced PTG although they were perpetrators of crime rather than victims. They were poorly educated and, except for one, unemployed, living with relatives. Historically, research has shown inconsistent association between PTG and sociodemographic variables like gender, age, education and income (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). The interviews with the participants suggested to the researcher that their PTG arose from support in dealing with traumas from childhood as much as from the traumatic experience of incarceration. The remarkable thing appeared to be that the agency, new priorities, new zest for life, and new positive identity—the hallmarks of PTG had stood the test of time. The participants had done the STV program 2 to 5 years previously and still regarded it as a turning point in their lives.

PTG was thus found to be the overarching theme of the results. This was not surprising considering that the STV program serendipitously employs interventions akin to the five employed in the program to facilitate PTG in traumatized soldiers in the U.S. Army (Tedeschi, 2011). These interventions include: (a) understanding the seismic nature of the trauma; (b) enhancing emotional regulation; (c) constructive self-disclosure; (d) a strong therapeutic alliance; (e) creating a trauma narrative with PTG domains, and (f) developing life principles that enhance resilience.

The overlap between STV and the program to enhance PTG (Tedeschi, 2011) can be seen as follows:

1. *Understanding the seismic nature of a trauma*, which shatters beliefs about ones' self, others and the future and is a necessary precursor to PTG (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Tedeschi, 2011). Gilligan's (2000) theory of violence is presented to the participants in the STV program and they learn that, like all perpetrators of violence, they were once victims first.
2. *Emotional regulation enhancement* was facilitated within STV by teaching skills such as anger management, forgiveness, how to apologize,

nonviolent communication, and understanding there are three levels of violence—emotional, verbal, and physical.

3. *Constructive self-disclosure* was present in the STV program during the session where the participants shared personal secrets. Research on secrecy suggests that having a secret encourages obsessive rumination on the subject, causing the keeper of the secret to be preoccupied. The person can become guarded and those around them are unaware of what they are thinking and feeling. As a result, they become isolated and less socially integrated (Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2005). Disclosure to a compassionate audience in the STV program meant that participants experienced improved social integration, a sense of belonging, confidence and security with others, improved relationships, and they even laughed more (Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2005; Pennebaker, 1997).

Furthermore, research has shown that group therapy can facilitate PTG (Letcher, Antoni, & Sakowski, cited in Hefferon et al., 2008). In STV, there was “expert tuition” from the facilitator in a warm accepting environment, which allowed the disclosure of anxieties in a nonjudgmental environment. This has been found to be a powerful factor in developing PTG (Hefferon et al., 2008). Many STV sessions provided the opportunity to have fun and enjoy doing creative activities together. There are studies that report that laughing and experiencing positive emotions in a safe environment has been linked with an increase in benefit finding after a traumatic event (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003; Linley & Joseph, 2004).

4. *Creating a trauma narrative* with PTG domains was facilitated in STV by what Meshack described as the “nice strategy of the mask.” Participants drew their violent mask and then described to the group what it represented. Afterwards, they acted out the burning of the violent mask, which symbolized the destruction of their violent self. This enables their true self (who has been hidden behind the mask) to come into its own (Malchiodi, 2010). Poignantly, facilitators of STV say that participants can always remember the first time that they had put on a protective violent mask.

Tedeschi (2011) advocates encouraging an appreciation for the paradoxical in the process of developing PTG. Isaiah gives us an example in sharing that his dream is to be a policeman. Osmand gives us another example in being troublemaker turned peacemaker. Both are examples of the wounded healer (Nouwen, 1972) and echo the paradox in Gilligan’s (2000) theory of violence, which holds that perpetrators of violence have always been victims first. The drama triangle (Emerald, 2010) similarly explores the intimate connection between persecutor, rescuer and victim.

5. *Developing life principles* that enhance resilience is a recurring STV theme. Throughout the program the participants are developing emotional

intelligence, which contributes to resilience, well-being, and growth (Goleman, 1996; Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

6. *A strong therapeutic alliance* is crucial in helping individuals move towards PTG. This alliance would be characterized by openness on the part of the therapist, a facilitator who is a humble learner and frequent expressions of appreciation (Tedeschi, 2011). All these components are evident in the STV program as experienced by the participants in this study.

This study suggests that at least for these 14 participants, a better way forward with regards to their rehabilitation was by exploiting the PTG wounded-healer effect. This suggests that rehabilitation programs that encourage PTG and flourishing might be effective in facilitating desistance. A possible reason why the programs that conform to the RNR model have only a 17% to 35% desistance rate (Bonta & Andrews, 2007) may be because programs that focus on risk management in effect bar themselves from incorporating the powerful interventions that are described in the positive psychology literature (Laws & Ward, 2011).

### Limitations, Implications, and Suggestions for Future Research

It is possible that in this study language and cultural differences bias the results; however, high levels of success have been recorded in response to the STV program in both South Africa and the U.K. Additionally, it would be reasonable to expect the same response from offenders in other countries and cultures conditional on the participants being open to change and the availability of a strong therapeutic alliance. Furthermore, the small sample of offenders cannot be called statistically representative of the whole population and additional quantitative study is recommended. For example, it would also be worth identifying their prerisk and postrisk profiles. It is not clear whether the participants' PTG arose from support in dealing with a childhood trauma or the trauma of incarceration or a combination; thus, this distinction may be a topic for future research. Researchers might also consider including a control group to explore whether PTG was experienced by offenders who did not experience the STV program.

Future research into programs that claim higher rates of desistance than the 17% to 35% of the RNR, including Changing Tunes (Maruna, 2010), Changing Lives Through Literature (Trounstine & Waxler, 2005), and Freedom Writer's (Gruwell, 1999) is also suggested. The authors suggest programs be analyzed to see to what extent they contain positive psychology interventions and PTG elements. It is possible that programs that use positive psychology interventions and PTG methods have been rejected by the RNR benchmark when in fact, as shown here, they have a legitimate place in offender rehabilitation.

## NOTES

1. Subsequently characterized by (a) a redemptive narrative, (b) agency, and (c) the desire to give back to society (Maruna, 2001).
2. The results will be presented according to their frequency within Table 1; however, due to word count limitations, we will not be able to recount all themes in equal segments.
3. The authors put frequency at over 50% of the population; however, they included subthemes with less percentage due to their saliency in the experience of those individuals.
4. The therapeutic alliance is the quality of the relationship between offender and practitioner.

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